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Modifications post-traductionnelles de l'albumine comme biomarqueurs d'atteinte hépatique

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Liste des abréviations

ACB : Albumin Cobalt Binding
ADH : Alcool DésHydrogénase
ADN : Acide DésoxyriboNucléique
AG : Acides Gras
AIF : Apoptosis-Inducing Factor (ou Facteur Induisant l'Apoptose)
ALDH : ALdéhyde DésHydrogénase
ALAT : ALanine aminoTransférase
Apaf-1 : Apoptotic peptidase activating factor 1 (ou facteur 1 d'activation de l'apoptose)
APAP : Paracétamol
ARN : Acide RiboNucléique
ASK1 : Protéine kinase 1 régulatrice du signal d'apoptose
ASAT : Aspartate aminotransférase
ATP : Adénosine triphosphate
Au : Or
BAX : Bcl2-Associatied X protein
BSA : Bovine Serum Albumin (ou albumine sérique bovine)
CAT : CATalase
CCl₃[•] : Radical trichlorométhyle
CCl₃O₂[•] : Radical peroxyde de trichlorométhyle
CCl₄ : Tétrachlorure de carbone
Cd : Cadmium
CEI : Chromatographie par Echange d'Ions
CHC : Carcinome HépatoCellulaire
CIVD : Coagulation IntraVasculaire Disséminée
CO₂ : Dioxyde de carbone
CoCl₂ : Chlorure de cobalt(II)
CSP : Cholangite Sclérosante Primitive
CTP : Child-Turcotte-Pugh
Cu : Cuivre
CYP : Cytochrome
Cys : Cystéine
DAMP : Damage-Associated Molecular Patterns
DDA : Data Dependant Acquisition
DHA : Déhydroalanine
DILI : Drug-Induced Liver Injury
EC : Electrophorèse Capillaire
ELF : Enhanced Liver Fibrosis
ENPP1 : EctoNucléotide Pyrophosphate/Phosphodiesterase 1
ESI : ElectroSpay Ionization (ou Ionisation par ElectroSpray)
EtG : Ethylglucuronide
EtOH : Ethanol
EtS : Sulfate d'Ethyle (ou Ethyl Sulfate)
FABP1 : Fatty Acid Binding Protein 1
FAEE : Ester Ethylique d'Acide Gras
GLDH : GLutamate DésHydrogénase
Glyc : Glycation
GPx : Glutathione Peroxidase
GSH : Glutathion réduit
GSK-3 β : Protéine glycogène synthase kinase 3 β
GST : Glutathion S-Transférase
H₂O : Eau
H₂O₂ : Peroxyde d'hydrogène

HAI : Hépatite Auto-Immune
HMA : Mercaptoalbumine
HMGB1 : High Mobility Group Box-1
HNA1 : Non mercaptoalbumine 1
HNA2 : Non mercaptoalbumine 2
HSA : Human Serum Albumin (ou albumine sérique humaine)
HSP : Heat Shock Proteins
ICP-MS : Spectrométrie de masse à plasma à couplage inductif
IL-1 β : Interleukine 1 β
IL-6 : Interleukine 6
IMA : Ischemia-Modified Albumin (ou albumine modifiée par ischémie)
IRCT : Insuffisance Rénale Chronique Terminale
JNK : Jun N-terminal Kinase
K18 : Kératine 18
LC-MS : Chromatographie liquide couplée à la spectrométrie de masse
LC-MS/MS : Chromatographie liquide couplée à la spectrométrie de masse en tandem
LT4 : Tétra-iodo-thyronine thyroxine
MALDI-TOF : Matrix Assisted Laser Desorption Ionization - Time Of Flight
MBS-A : Multi-Metal Binding site A (ou site de liaison multimétallique A)
MBS-B : Multi-Metal Binding site B (ou site de liaison multimétallique B)
MEC : Matrice ExtraCellulaire
MELD : Model for End-stage Liver Disease
MKK4 : protéine kinase kinase 4 activée par un mitogène
MLK3 : protéine kinase 3 activée par un mitogène
MnSOD : Manganèse SuperOxyde Dismutase
MPO : Myélopéroxydase
MPT : *Microchondrial Permeability Transition pore* ou perméabilité membranaire mitochondriale
MS : Mass spectrometry (ou spectrométrie de masse)
NAFLD : Non-Alcoholic Fatty Liver Disease (ou stéatose hépatique non alcoolique)
NAPQI : *N*-Acétyl-*p*-Benzquinone Imine
NASH : Non-Alcoholic SteatoHepatitis (ou stéatose hépatique non alcoolique)
NO : Monoxyde d'azote ou oxyde nitrique
NOS : Nitric Oxide Synthase
NTA. : Acide nitrilotriacétique
NTS : N-terminal site
OPN : Ostéopontine
P-JNK : Protéine kinase c-jun N-terminale
PAL : Phosphatases alcalines
PBC : Cirrhose Biliaire Primitive
PBH : Ponction Biopsie Hépatique
PCA-DA : analyse en composantes principales-analyses discriminantes
PEth : PhosphatidylEthanol
PKC : Protéine kinase C
PLD : Phospholipase D
PM : Poids Moléculaire
PTMs : Modifications post-traductionnelles
Q-TOF : Quadrupole Time-of-Flight (ou <https://www.bruker.com/fr/products-and-solutions/mass-spectrometry/qtof.html> Quadripôle-Temps de vol)
RMN : Résonance Magnétique Nucléaire
ROS/ERO : Reactif Oxygen Species (ou Espèces réactives de l'oxygène)
RP-LC : Chromatographie liquide en phase inverse
SDH : Sorbitol DésHydrogénase
SEB : Serum Enhanced Binding
SEC : Chromatographie d'exclusion stérique
SGGS : Glutathion oxydé

SIRT1 : Protéine sirtuine-1

SO₂H : Acide sulfinique

SO₃H : Acide sulfonique

SOD : SuperOxyde Dismutase

SRE : Stress du Réticulum Endoplasmique

SWATH-MS : sequential window acquisition of all theoretical mass spectra

TGF : Transforming Growth Factors (ou facteur de croissance transformant)

TLR4 : Récepteur Toll-like 4

TNBS : Acide 2,4,6-trinitrobenzènesulfonique

TNF_α : Tumor Necrosis Factor alpha (ou facteur de nécrose tumorale alpha)

TOF : Time-Of-Flight (ou temps de vol)

TRAILR : Récepteur du ligand induisant l'apoptose lié au TNF

Trp : Tryptophane

VHB : Virus de l'Hépatite B

VHC : Virus de l'Hépatite C

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Introduction

La plupart des maladies hépatiques chroniques sont notoirement asymptomatiques quelle qu'en soit l'étiologie, jusqu'à ce qu'une fibrose ou une cirrhose avec décompensation clinique se produise, et même parfois un carcinome hépatocellulaire (1,2). Plus de 800 millions de personnes sont atteintes de maladies hépatiques chroniques avec un taux de mortalité d'environ 2 millions de décès par an. En France, la prévalence de la cirrhose est environ de 1 500 à 2 500 cas par million d'habitants, avec une incidence annuelle de 150 à 200 cas par million d'habitants. Le nombre de décès est environ de 15 000 décès par an. La prévention de ces maladies et l'utilisation de stratégies de diagnostic précoce et de prédiction sont vitales pour maintenir les patients dans un état asymptomatique et pour retarder la décompensation, et ainsi améliorer la prise en charge et la qualité de vie des patients. Ceci est particulièrement critique chez les patients transplantés hépatiques.

Des marqueurs biologiques sont couramment utilisés pour explorer l'intégrité des hépatocytes (aspartate transaminase et alanine transaminase), ainsi que des voies biliaires (phosphatase alcaline et gamma-glutamyltransférases) et de synthèse (ammoniac, taux de prothrombine et albumine). En raison de leur manque de sensibilité et de spécificité, ces marqueurs sériques directs sont maintenant combinés dans des tests de panel, parfois associés à des algorithmes (FibroMeter, FibroTest, HepaScore, etc.) ou à des tests d'imagerie conventionnelle (algorithme FibroMeter-VCTE) pour aider au diagnostic et à la stratification de la fibrose et/ou de la cirrhose. Toutefois, il a été récemment affirmé que ces tests "présentent une précision limitée chez les patients individuels, ne reflètent pas la progression de la maladie ou la réponse au traitement et ne permettent pas de comprendre les mécanismes des lésions" (2). D'autres biomarqueurs, tels que les molécules impliquées dans le processus de fibrose, notamment les biomarqueurs à base de protéines, les microARN ou les collagènes, ont été largement étudiés. Bien que certains soient prometteurs, ils n'ont pas encore démontré les performances diagnostiques ou prédictives requises pour le suivi à moyen ou long terme de la maladie chronique du foie.

Des biomarqueurs non invasifs, sensibles et spécifiques pour la détection précoce des dysfonctionnements hépatiques conduisant à des maladies hépatiques avancées sont donc toujours attendues. Puisque l'albumine sérique humaine (HSA) est exclusivement synthétisée dans le foie, non seulement sa quantité (60% de toutes les protéines sanguines), mais également sa qualité peut refléter un dysfonctionnement hépatique.

En effet, l'albumine présente une structure tridimensionnelle particulière, avec plusieurs sites de liaison pour plusieurs ligands endogènes et exogènes (agissant comme chélateur primaire dans le sang). L'albumine subit plusieurs modifications post-traductionnelles dans les hépatocytes, notamment : acétylation, cystéinylation, homocystéinylation, glutathionylation, glycosylation, glycation, nitrosylation, nitration, phosphorylation et oxydation.

Il a récemment été démontré que des modifications chimiques et structurelles conduisant à différentes isoformes d'albumine sérique humaine pourraient être utilisées comme biomarqueurs pour les maladies hépatiques avancées (3–10).

Notre hypothèse principale est que toutes les principales modifications de l'albumine sérique humaine surviennent aux premiers stades des lésions cellulaires, prédictives des maladies hépatiques à venir. Ces modifications peuvent être révélées par le profil des isoformes de l'HSA dans le sérum, ou encore plus efficacement par les capacités de liaison de l'HSA pour différents ligands ayant des sites spécifiques de fixation. Enfin, le profil des isoformes de l'HSA devrait être étroitement lié à l'environnement chimique au sein de l'hépatocyte permettant ainsi la détermination d'un profil type par nature d'atteinte.

Au cours de cette thèse, notre objectif était de montrer qu'il était possible de détecter des lésions hépatiques à des stades précoces grâce à la mise en évidence de changements chimiques et structurels de l'HSA. Nous avons également cherché à comprendre le moment, la raison et le mécanisme de ces altérations de l'HSA. De plus, nous avons voulu déterminer dans quels contextes pathologiques spécifiques ces changements apparaissent, ainsi que les premières modifications de l'HSA, qu'elles soient chimiques ou structurelles, et selon quelles origines de la maladie, comme l'hépatite alcoolique ou des causes toxiques.

Durant cette aventure scientifique, nous avons voulu explorer et confirmer la potentialité de ce nouveau biomarqueur pour diagnostiquer les premiers signes de lésions hépatiques. Nous avons optimisé et mis en œuvre le SEB Test, une méthode brevetée par notre équipe permettant d'évaluer les changements structurels de l'albumine grâce à la spectrométrie de masse à plasma à couplage inductif (ICP-MS). En parallèle, nous nous sommes inspirés de plusieurs publications pour élaborer une technique chromatographique en haute résolution (LC-QTOF), nous permettant d'analyser et de comprendre les variations chimiques de l'albumine et d'évaluer de façon critique la capacité des approches rapides, appelées Top-Down, à identifier de façon exhaustive les isoformes d'albumine d'intérêt dans les atteintes hépatiques.

Pour apporter la preuve du concept et appuyer nos hypothèses, nous avons conçu une stratégie expérimentale utilisant différents modèles animaux pour observer les changements

chimiques et structurels en fonction de la cause et de la gravité des lésions hépatiques. Nous avons notamment testé notre hypothèse sur des rats, en induisant des insuffisances hépatocellulaires soit par l'exposition à divers toxiques comme l'éthanol (EtOH), le tétrachlorure de carbone (CCl₄) ou le paracétamol, soit par des méthodes plus invasives, comme la ligature du canal biliaire.

De plus, nous avons élargi notre perspective en examinant des échantillons de plasma provenant à la fois de personnes saines et de patients souffrant d'hépatopathies chroniques. Cela nous a permis d'avoir une vision plus complète et plus proche de la réalité clinique.

Partie I. CONTEXTE

I.1. HÉPATOPATHIES

I.1.1. Maladies hépatiques chroniques

I.1.1.1. Définition & épidémiologie

La progression des maladies hépatiques chroniques, quelle qu'en soit l'étiologie, est caractérisée par un long processus de lésions parenchymateuses chroniques, une activation persistante de la réponse inflammatoire ainsi qu'une activation soutenue de la fibrogenèse hépatique et de la réponse de cicatrisation. La fibrogenèse hépatique, à son tour, est un processus moléculaire, cellulaire et tissulaire dynamique et hautement intégré responsable de l'accumulation excessive progressive des composants de la matrice extracellulaire (MEC) (11–13). Bien que la fibrogenèse et la fibrose puissent représenter une tentative de limiter les conséquences des lésions hépatiques chroniques, elles représentent des caractéristiques clés de la progression de toute forme de maladies hépatiques chroniques vers la cirrhose du foie et l'insuffisance hépatique. De plus, la fibrogenèse hépatique et la progression de la maladie hépatique chronique sont liées à une angiogenèse pathologique persistante, l'angiogenèse contribuant à l'expansion de la fibrose tissulaire (14,15).

Le terme cirrhose définit un stade avancé de la maladie hépatique chronique par des critères histologiques caractérisés par une structure altérée impliquant la formation de nodules régénératifs de parenchyme entourés de septa fibreux ainsi que des modifications importantes de l'architecture vasculaire hépatique pouvant entraîner le développement d'une hypertension portale et des complications associées (hémorragie variqueuse, encéphalopathie hépatique, ascite, syndrome hépatorénal, etc.) (16). La progression de la fibrogenèse présentent également un risque important de développer un cancer primitif du foie, en particulier un carcinome hépatocellulaire (CHC) (17).

Les hépatopathies chroniques représentent un problème de santé publique majeur dans le monde, avec plus de 800 millions de personnes touchées et un taux de mortalité d'environ 2 millions de décès par an (18). La progression de la maladie hépatique chronique repose principalement sur : (1) l'infection chronique par des virus hépatotropes comme le virus de l'hépatite B (VHB, le facteur de risque le plus courant en Asie) et le virus de l'hépatite C (VHC) ; (2) la consommation excessive d'alcool (hépatite alcoolique) ; et (3) la stéatose hépatique non alcoolique (NAFLD), les deux dernières sont prédominantes dans les pays occidentaux ; (4) les maladies hépatiques auto-immunes, y compris la cirrhose biliaire primitive (PBC), la cholangite sclérosante primitive (CSP) et l'hépatite auto-immune (HAI) ; (5) les maladies

héritaires, y compris la maladie de Wilson, l'hémochromatose et le déficit en α1-anti-trypsine (18–21). L'incidence et la prévalence estimées dans le monde des maladies hépatiques chroniques varient largement en fonction de l'étiologie spécifique, de la zone géographique et probablement d'autres facteurs (sexe, race, statut socio-économique) (18). Une vaste étude basée sur la population réalisée aux États-Unis a montré que la prévalence de la cirrhose dans la population générale a été rapportée comme étant de 0,27 %, représentant plus de 600 000 patients (22). Cependant, cette valeur est susceptible d'être encore plus élevée à l'échelle mondiale puisqu'un pourcentage important de patients reste asymptomatique et/ou n'est diagnostiqué qu'avant le décès (18). De plus, la cirrhose décompensée représente environ un million de décès par an dans le monde et 170 000 décès par an en Europe (23). A l'heure actuelle, la cirrhose du foie représente la principale indication de transplantation hépatique, avec plus de 5000 patients cirrhotiques transplantés par an rien qu'en Europe (23).

La cirrhose du foie est également un risque majeur de développer un carcinome hépatocellulaire représentant 75 à 80 % des tumeurs malignes primitives du foie, étant la 5^{ème} tumeur maligne solide la plus courante et la 3^{ème} cause de décès liés au cancer dans le monde (environ 700 000 cas par an, 50 000 par an en Europe) (17). Il est important de noter que la stéatohépatite non alcoolique ou NASH est en train de devenir l'indication à la croissance la plus rapide pour la transplantation hépatique chez les patients atteints de CHC, avec un pourcentage important de cas diagnostiqués chez des patients non cirrhotiques (24).

I.1.1.2. Physiopathologie & diagnostic

La progression de la maladie hépatique chronique est entraînée par un cercle vicieux interdépendant de lésions hépatiques chroniques persistantes, d'inflammation chronique et de fibrogenèse progressive ; et est généralement un processus de longue date puisque la cirrhose et sa complication se développent en moyenne après au moins 15 à 20 ans de lésions parenchymateuses chroniques. La perpétuation des lésions hépatiques est également entretenue par une réponse inflammatoire chronique à travers un certain nombre de médiateurs dommageables, les espèces réactives de l'oxygène (ROS) et d'autres médiateurs liés au stress oxydatif jouant un rôle majeur (25,26). La réponse inflammatoire chronique induite par l'activation des cellules de Kupffer et le recrutement et l'activation des cellules immunitaires innées ou adaptatives sont essentiels pour initier et perpétuer l'activation des cellules profibrogéniques dans les myofibroblastes par la libération de cytokines, de chimiokines, de d'espèces réactives de l'oxygène (ROS) et de nombreux autres médiateurs. Les myofibroblastes contribuent à l'entretien de l'hépatopathie chronique en augmentant le dépôt de matrice extracellulaire (MEC) ainsi qu'en libérant des cytokines et des chimiokines résultant en un « environnement profibrogène » affectant négativement l'hyperplasie et la

régénération du parenchyme hépatique (27,28). La génération accrue de ROS et le stress oxydatif sont impliqués dans presque toutes les conditions de la maladie hépatique chronique et peuvent être liés à l'impact de l'étiologie spécifique ainsi qu'à l'activation des cellules résidentes et recrutées de l'immunité innée, avec un rôle particulier pour l'activation de la NADPH-oxydase dans différentes populations de cellules hépatiques suite aux interactions ligand/récepteur. Les ROS et le stress oxydatif peuvent induire des lésions et la mort des hépatocytes ainsi qu'inhiber la prolifération des cellules parenchymateuses tout en entretenant directement et indirectement la fibrogenèse (25,26).

Une caractéristique émergente commune aux différentes maladies hépatiques chroniques est représentée par le rôle des vésicules dites extracellulaires, qui sont des particules de taille différente qui sont libérées par les hépatocytes blessés et/ou apoptotiques. Ces véhicules extracellulaires, contenant des protéines de signalisation, des lipides, des ARNm et des miARN, peuvent agir sur presque toutes les différentes populations cellulaires induisant et entretenant l'inflammation, la fibrose et l'angiogenèse et ont été proposés comme biomarqueurs putatifs de la progression de la maladie hépatique chronique (29,30).

La progression de la maladie hépatique chronique est également la conséquence d'un dépôt excessif de MEC et de changements significatifs dans la qualité et la distribution topographique des composants de la MEC, parallèlement à un remodelage altéré et à une expression accrue des inhibiteurs tissulaires des métalloprotéinases (31). Le remplacement du collagène IV dans l'espace de Disse par les collagènes fibrillaires I et III, suite à l'activation des cellules souches hématopoïétiques, est un événement majeur connu pour conduire à la capillarisation des sinusoïdes. Avec le développement de septa fibreux et la progression continue vers la cirrhose, des changements structurels supplémentaires deviennent évidents, y compris des changements vasculaires dus à une angiogenèse pathologique dépendante ou indépendante de l'hypoxie (25). La formation de shunts vasculaires et d'anomalies fonctionnelles dues à la dysfonction endothéliale générée par un rapport altéré entre vasodilatateurs et vasoconstricteurs va entraîner la genèse de l'hypertension portale et des complications cliniques associées (32).

Les maladies hépatiques chroniques peuvent évoluer silencieusement en une cirrhose sur plusieurs années par des stades intermédiaires selon le degré d'inflammation (hépatique chronique) et de fibrose. La cirrhose est une maladie insidieuse et reste longtemps asymptomatique. La vitesse d'évolution de la maladie et la survenue de complications sont très souvent imprévisibles. Elle est souvent diagnostiquée au stade des complications, car elle peut ne présenter aucun signe à ses débuts et les premières plaintes sont généralement peu spécifiques (fatigue, nausées, vagues douleurs dans l'hypochondre droit, perte d'appétit,

amaigrissement, etc.). Le diagnostic aux stades précoces est difficile et repose sur des signes cliniques évocateurs tels qu'un foie de consistance dure, des angiomes stellaires, une splénomégalie, une ascite ou un ictere.

La ponction biopsie hépatique (PBH) permettant l'examen anatomo-pathologique du foie recueilli, représente le « gold standard » pour apprécier le degré et la distribution des principales lésions hépatiques : activités nécrotico-inflammatoires, fibrose, stéatose, agrégats lymphocytaires et lésions biliaires ou vasculaires. La PBH permet également une orientation étiologique, montre la distribution topographique des lésions et éventuellement la présence concomitante de plusieurs types d'atteinte.

Cependant, la PBH reste un geste invasif comportant des risques de morbidité de 0,3% à 0,6% et un risque de mortalité de 0 à 0,05 % (33). Elle ne peut donc être renouvelée facilement. La PBH est un examen coûteux dont le coût varie selon la pratique mais est estimé à près à 1 000 euros. La fiabilité de la PBH peut être prise en défaut notamment pour le diagnostic de cirrhose dans 20 à 32 % des cas (34). De plus, dans une étude, seuls 14 % des patients d'une cohorte de centaines de patients atteints d'hépatite chronique C avaient une PBH d'au moins 25 mm de long (35). Ainsi, si la PBH présente un intérêt pour dépister et quantifier une fibrose hépatique et une cirrhose, elle est surtout intéressante pour étudier les co-morbidités ou les pathologies associées. Sa fiabilité en matière d'appréciation de la fibrose et/ou de la cirrhose est relative, en raison des complications (risque d'hémorragique, douleurs, septicémie, perforation d'organes), d'un problème d'échantillonnage ainsi que d'un problème lié à des variations inter et intra-observateur. Toutes ces données ne font pas de la PBH l'examen de référence en matière de quantification de la maladie hépatique chronique et justifient la quête de nouveaux biomarqueurs non invasifs de la fibrose et de la cirrhose.

Il existe plusieurs alternatives à la biopsie du foie. La méthodologie la plus appropriée dépend de la clinique et il n'existe actuellement aucune alternative capable de reproduire tous les avantages de la biopsie. Actuellement, les biomarqueurs sériques individuels sont combinés, avec différents degrés de complexité, dans des tests de panel afin de pallier le manque de sensibilité et de spécificité. L'évaluation de la fibrose a été révolutionnée par la généralisation du Fibroscan et, dans une moindre mesure, par l'utilisation de marqueurs sérologiques. Dans la NASH, il existe plusieurs méthodes d'évaluation de la fibrose. Parmi les tests basés sur des marqueurs sérologiques, les plus couramment utilisés sont le test Enhanced Liver Fibrosis (ELF) (calculé à partir des niveaux d'acide hyaluronique, de propeptide amino-terminal du procollagène de type III (PIIINP) et d'inhibiteur tissulaire de la métalloprotéinase 1 (TIMP- 1)), le score de fibrose NASH (calculé à partir de l'âge, de l'indice de masse corporelle, de la glycémie, de la numération plaquettaire, de l'albumine et du rapport aspartate

aminotransférase (ASAT) sur alanine aminotransférase (ALAT)) et le score de fibrose (FIB)-4 (calculé à partir de âge, ASAT, ALAT et numération plaquettaire). D'autres tests sérologiques incluent APRI, Fibrotest, Forns Index, HepaScore et l'algorithme NIS4 plus récent (36). Dans l'ensemble, ceux-ci ont une spécificité raisonnablement bonne mais une sensibilité moindre à la fibrose et à la cirrhose importantes : spécificité allant de 60 % à 90 % et sensibilité de 27 à 87 % et AUROC allant de 0,74 à 0,90 (37). Ces tests ont amélioré la précision du diagnostic, mais cela induit dans certains cas des coûts élevés et une disponibilité restreinte des tests, tout en exigeant également plus de temps et d'efforts du clinicien pour calculer et interpréter les résultats. Une étude récente a conclu que les tests sériques simples (tels que FIB-4) et le score de fibrose NASH ont tendance à être moins précis que les tests sériques plus coûteux qui intègrent des mesures directes de la fibrogenèse ou de la fibroylse (38). Ils ont également déclaré que si ces tests sont utiles pour exclure une fibrose ou une cirrhose avancée, ils ne sont pas suffisamment prédictifs lorsqu'ils sont utilisés isolément (38).

Malgré leur bonne performance à prédire l'atteinte hépatique (illustrée dans **le tableau 1**) et leur acceptation dans la pratique clinique, il a été récemment démontré qu'ils « présentent une précision limitée à l'échelle individuelle, ne permettent pas de prédire la progression de la maladie, ne reflètent pas la réponse au traitement et ne permettent pas de comprendre les mécanismes des lésions » (39).

L'imagerie est de plus en plus utilisée pour déterminer la présence de fibrose et de cirrhose. Il existe de nombreuses études comparant la sensibilité et la spécificité des différentes techniques. Les conclusions dépendent en partie de la maladie hépatique sous-jacente. L'échographie est relativement faible pour diagnostiquer ou exclure la cirrhose (40). L'élastographie transitoire est de plus en plus utilisée pour la détection de la fibrose et de la cirrhose. La technique est facile à mettre en œuvre, non invasive, fournit une évaluation numérique non soumise à un jugement individuel, est reproductible et le patient peut être informé des résultats à la fin de la procédure. Cependant, une revue a conclu que l'élastographie transitoire peut être utilisée comme méthode de diagnostic pour exclure la cirrhose du foie chez les personnes atteintes d'une maladie alcoolique du foie et peut également aider à exclure une fibrose sévère (F3 ou pire) (41). Dans une étude récente, l'élastographie par résonance magnétique semble plus sensible que l'élastographie transitoire dans la NASH (42). Dans l'ensemble, les méthodes d'élastographie sont plus précises que les simples tests sériques non invasifs, mais sont limitées par des taux croissants de manque de fiabilité avec l'augmentation de l'obésité (38). De même, Patel et Sebastiani ont conclu que malgré leur utilisation accrue dans la pratique clinique, ces tests n'étaient pas conçus pour refléter le processus de la fibrogenèse, pour différencier les stades adjacents de la maladie, pour diagnostiquer la NASH ou pour suivre les changements longitudinaux de la fibrose ou de

l'activité de la maladie causés par histoire naturelle ou un suivi thérapeutique (43). En outre, ils ont déclaré que ces tests non invasifs devraient être considérés comme un complément plutôt que comme un substitut à la biopsie hépatique.

Tableau 1. Différents scores d'évaluation de l'atteinte hépatique. (44)

| Index | Parameters | Year | Disease | n | AUROC for advanced fibrosis | Sens. | Spec. | NPV | PPV | Lead author |
|---|---|------|--------------------|------|-----------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|----------------------------------|
| AST/ALT Ratio (De Ritis /Sheth) | AST/ALT | 1998 | HCV | 139 | — | 53 [†] | 100 [‡] | 81 [‡] | 100 [‡] | Sheth et al., 1998 |
| | | 2010 | NAFLD | 145 | 0.83 | 74 | 78 | 93 | 44 | McPherson et al., 2010 |
| | | 2015 | PBC | 137 | 0.59 | — | — | — | — | Umemura et al., 2015 |
| | | 2000 | HCV | 151 | — | 47 [‡] | 96 [‡] | 88 [‡] | 74 [‡] | Park et al., 2000 |
| BARD | BMI, AST, ALT, DM | 2008 | NAFLD | 827 | 0.81 | — | — | — | — | Harrison et al., 2008 |
| | | 2010 | NAFLD | 145 | 0.77 | 89 | 44 | 95 | 27 | McPherson et al., 2010 |
| | | 2011 | NAFLD | 138 | 0.67 | 51 | 77 | 81 | 45 | Ruffillo et al., 2011 |
| | | 2016 | NAFLD [‡] | 1038 | 0.76 | 74 | 66 | — | — | Sun et al., 2016 [‡] |
| Bonacini-index FIB-4 | ALT/AST-ratio, INR, platelet count Platelet count, AST, ALT, age | 1997 | HCV | 79 | — | 46 | 98 | — | — | Bonacini et al., 1997 |
| | | 2006 | HCV/HIV | 830 | 0.74–0.77 | 67 | 71 | 89 | 38 | Sterling et al., 2006 |
| | | 2010 | NAFLD | 145 | 0.86 | 85 | 65 | 95 | 36 | McPherson et al., 2010 |
| | | 2009 | NAFLD | 541 | 0.80 | 52 | 90 | — | — | Shah et al., 2009 |
| | | 2016 | NAFLD [‡] | 1038 | 0.85 | 84 | 69 | — | — | Sun et al., 2016 [‡] |
| Fibrometer test | Platelet count, prothrombin index, AST, α 2-macro-globulin, hyaluronic acid, urea, age | 2005 | HCV/HBV | 383 | 0.89 ^{**} | 81 ^{**} | 84 ^{**} | 77 ^{**} | 86 ^{**} | Cales et al., 2005 |
| | | 2005 | ALD | 95 | 0.96 ^{**} | 92 ^{**} | 93 ^{**} | 83 ^{**} | 97 ^{**} | Cales et al., 2005 |
| Fibrometer A | Prothrombin index, α 2 macroglobulin, hyaluronic acid, age | 2005 | ALD | 103 | 0.88 | — | — | — | — | Nguyen-Khac et al., 2008 |
| | | 2009 | ALD | 218 | 0.83 | — | — | — | — | Naveau et al., 2009 |
| Fibrotest (FT) | Haptoglobin, α 2-macro-globulin, apolipoprotein A1, GGT, bilirubin, age, gender | 2001 | HCV | 339 | 0.87 | 75 | 85 | 80 | 80 | Imbert-Bismut et al., 2001 |
| | | 2014 | HBV [‡] | 2494 | 0.84 ^{**} | 61 ^{**} | 80 ^{**} | — | — | Salkic et al., 2014 [‡] |
| | | 2009 | ALD | 218 | 0.83 | — | — | — | — | Naveau et al., 2009 |
| | | 2008 | ALD | 103 | 0.8 | — | — | — | — | Nguyen-Khac et al., 2008 |
| Forns-index Hepascore | Age, platelet count, GGT, cholesterol Bilirubin, GGT, Hyaluronic acid, α 2-macroglobulin, age, gender | 2002 | HCV | 476 | 0.81–0.86 ^{**} | 94 ^{**} | 51 ^{**} | 96 ^{**} | 40 ^{**} | Forns et al., 2002 |
| | | 2005 | HCV | 221 | 0.9–0.96 | 74–81 [‡] | 88–95 | 95–98 | — | Adams et al., 2005 |
| | | 2009 | ALD | 218 | 0.83 | — | — | — | — | Naveau et al., 2009 |
| | | 2008 | ALD | 103 | 0.83 | — | — | — | — | Nguyen-Khac et al., 2008 |
| Hui | Body mass index (BMI), platelet count, serum albumin, and total bilirubin | 2005 | HBV | 235 | 0.79 | 88 | 50 | 92 | 38 | Hui et al., 2005 |
| Leroy-score NAFLD Fibrosis Score (NFS) | PIIIINP, MMP-1 Age, BMI, platelets, albumin, AST/ALT, IFG /diabetes | 2004 | HCV | 194 | 0.88 | 58 | 92 | — | 91 | Leroy et al., 2004 |
| | | 2007 | NAFLD | 733 | 0.82–0.88 | 77–82 | 71–77 | 88–93 | 52–56 | Angulo et al., 2007 |
| Fibrospect-II PGA-index | Hyaluronic acid, TIMP-1, α 2-macroglobulin Prothrombin time, GGT, apolipoprotein A1 | 2010 | NAFLD | 145 | 0.81 | 33–78 | 58–98 | 86–92 | 30–79 | McPherson et al., 2010 |
| | | 2016 | NAFLD [‡] | 1038 | 0.84 | 77 | 70 | — | — | Sun et al., 2016 [‡] |
| PGAA-index | Prothrombin time, GGT, apolipoprotein A1, α 2-macroglobulin | 2004 | HCV | 696 | 0.82–0.83 ^{**} | 77–83 ^{**} | 68–73 ^{**} | — | 74 ^{**} | Patel et al., 2004 |
| | | 1993 | Mixed | 169 | — | 91 [‡] | 81 [‡] | — | — | Teare et al., 1993 |
| Pohl score ELF score | AST/ALT-ratio, platelet count Hyaluronic acid, TIMP-1, age, MMP-3 | 2008 | ALD | 103 | 0.84 | — | — | — | — | Nguyen-Khac et al., 2008 |
| | | 2008 | NAFLD | 192 | 0.90 | 80 | 90 | 94 | 71 | Guha et al., 2008 |
| SHASTA Fibrosis probability-index, FPI | HA, AST, albumin Age, AST, cholesterol, insulin resistance (HOMA), past alcohol intake | 2004 | PBC | 161 | 0.75 | — | — | — | — | Mayo et al., 2008 |
| | | 2014 | Mixed [‡] | 1645 | 0.87 | 78 | 76 | — | — | Xie et al., 2014 [‡] |
| APRI score | AST, platelet count | 2003 | HCV | 270 | 0.8–0.88 ^{**} | 41–91 [‡] | 47–95 [‡] | 61–88 [‡] | 64–86 [‡] | Wai et al., 2003 |
| | | 2010 | NAFLD | 145 | 0.67 | 27 | 89 | 84 | 37 | McPherson et al., 2010 |
| Zeng | alpha2-macroglobulin, age, gamma glutamyl transpeptidase, and hyaluronic acid | 2008 | ALD | 103 | 0.43 | — | — | — | — | Nguyen-Khac et al., 2008 |
| | | 2015 | PBC | 137 | 0.84 | — | — | — | — | Umemura et al., 2015 |
| Zeng | alpha2-macroglobulin, age, gamma glutamyl transpeptidase, and hyaluronic acid | 2008 | HBV | 264 | 0.86 ^{**} | 87 ^{**} | 66 ^{**} | 81 ^{**} | 74 ^{**} | Shin et al., 2008 |
| | | 2005 | HBV | 372 | 0.77–0.84 ^{**} | 35–95 ^{**} | 44–95 ^{**} | 51–86 ^{**} | 70–91 ^{**} | Zeng et al., 2005 |

ALT, alanine aminotransferase; AST, aspartate aminotransferase; INR, international normalized ratio; GGT, γ -glutamyltransferase; PIIIINP, N-terminal propeptide of type III procollagen; TIMP, tissue inhibitors of metalloproteinases; MMP, matrix metalloproteinases.

[†]Values are for prediction of significant fibrosis.

[‡]Values are for prediction of cirrhosis.

^{*}Metaanalysis.

Afin d'évaluer la sévérité et le pronostic de la cirrhose, l'existence de scores fiables est d'importance capitale dans la prise en charge.

Le score Child-Turcotte-Pugh (figure 1) est utilisé depuis plus de 40 ans. Il a été initialement proposé afin d'évaluer les résultats des patients cirrhotiques après une chirurgie de l'hypertension portale et a progressivement été plus largement accepté (45). Deux types modifiés de score Child-Pugh englobant la créatinine sérique ont également été évalués (1).

| Child-Turcotte-Pugh Classification for Severity of Cirrhosis | | | |
|---|---------|--|------------------------------|
| Clinical and Lab Criteria | Points* | | |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Encephalopathy | None | Grade 1 or 2 | Grade 3 or 4 |
| Ascites | None | Mild to moderate (diuretic responsive) | Severe (diuretic refractory) |
| Bilirubin (mg/dL) | < 2 | 2-3 | >3 |
| Albumin (g/dL) | > 3.5 | 2.8-3.5 | <2.8 |
| Prothrombin time Seconds prolonged <i>or</i> International normalized ratio | <4 | 4-6 | >6 |
| | <1.7 | 1.7-2.3 | >2.3 |
| *Child-Turcotte-Pugh Class obtained by adding score for each parameter (total points) | | | |
| Class A = 5 to 6 points | | | |
| Class B = 7 to 9 points | | | |
| Class C = 10 to 15 points | | | |

Figure 1. Classification de Child-Turcotte-Pugh pour la gravité de la cirrhose. (45)

Le score de CTP utilise 2 paramètres cliniques (encéphalopathie et ascite) et 3 paramètres biologiques (bilirubine, albumine et taux de prothrombine). Les patients sont classés en classe A, B et C en fonction de leurs points totaux.

Le MELD (model for end-stage liver disease) (figure 2) a été appliqué pour la première fois aux patients subissant des shunts porto-systémiques intrahépatiques transjugulaires (46), mais depuis 2002, il est utilisé pour évaluer les candidats à une transplantation hépatique (47). Le MELD-Na, un score MELD modifié incorporant le sodium sérique, a été utilisé pour la prédiction de la survie, en tenant compte de l'importance de l'hyponatrémie dans la mortalité précoce par cirrhose (48,49).

| Model for End Stage Liver Disease (MELD) Score |
|---|
| MELD = $3.78 \times \log_e \text{ serum bilirubin (mg/dL)} + 11.20 \times \log_e \text{ INR} + 9.57 \times \log_e \text{ serum creatinine (mg/dL)} + 6.43$ (constant for liver disease etiology) |

Figure 2. Score MELD (model for end-stage liver disease).

Le calcul du score MELD est complexe comme le montre la formule ci-dessus et doit être réalisé via un calculateur. De nombreux ressources en ligne gratuites proposent de le calculer.

Le score ALBI (albumine-bilirubine) (tableau 2) a été récemment proposé. Il s'agit d'un score très simple qui évalue seulement 2 paramètres objectifs facilement disponibles pour chaque patient cirrhotique. Le score ALBI a été rapporté pour évaluer le dysfonctionnement hépatique et le pronostic chez les patients atteints de carcinome hépatocellulaire, chez les patients atteints de cholangite biliaire primitive, chez les patients cirrhotiques avec hémorragie gastro-intestinale haute et dans diverses hépatites B maladies du foie liées au virus (50,51).

Tableau 2. Score ALBI (albumine-bilirubine).

| ALBI Score = (\log_{10} Bilirubine x 0.66) (Albumine x 0.085) |
|--|
| ALBI Grade 1 : score < ou = à - 2.60 |
| ALBI Grade 2 : score > - 2.60 à < ou = -1.39 |
| ALBI Grade 3 : score > -1.39 |

Le score ALBI utilise 2 paramètres biologiques (bilirubine, albumine). Les patients sont classés en grade 1, 2 et 3 selon une formule (51).

I.1.2. Hépatites toxiques

I.1.2.1. Généralités

Les hépatites toxiques aiguës correspondent à une atteinte hépatique secondaire à une substance exogène, médicamenteuse ou non. L'incidence globale des hépatites toxiques n'est pas connue, mais leur fréquence est probablement élevée car un effet indésirable médicamenteux sur 10 touche le foie. De plus, on estime qu'un grand nombre de cas d'atteinte hépatique毒ique mineure passent inaperçus (52). Les hépatites aiguës toxiques sont responsables d'environ 10 % des insuffisances hépatiques aiguës et sont la première cause de transplantation hépatique aux États-Unis (53). Seules des données sur les formes symptomatiques, le plus souvent graves, provenant de déclarations de pharmacovigilance ou des registres des transplantations américains ou européens sont connues. Toute la gravité

des hépatites aiguës toxiques repose sur le degré d'insuffisance hépatique, qui dans sa forme extrême est représentée par l'hépatite fulminante.

Une étude récente a recueilli, sur trois ans, tous les cas symptomatiques déclarés de toxicité hépatique aux alentours de la ville de Nevers (54). Elle a rapporté une incidence de 14 cas par an pour 100 000 habitants, un ratio femme/homme de 0,9 avant 49 ans et 2,6 après 50 ans, un taux d'hospitalisation de 12 % et une mortalité de 6 %.

Les principaux hépatotoxiques en cause sont médicamenteux (paracétamol, antibiotiques, antiépileptiques, psychotropes, hypolipémiants et anti-inflammatoires non stéroïdiens) ou non médicamenteux : champignons (amanite phalloïde), et plus rarement les produits de phytothérapie, les substances illicites et des produits chimiques industriels. Les mécanismes de l'atteinte hépatique sont bien entendu très différents en fonction du toxique, et l'hépatotoxicité peut être soit prévisible (elle est alors dose dépendante), soit imprévisible (elle est alors indépendant de la dose et dite « idiosyncrasique » ou « immuno-allergique »).

Les mécanismes responsables de l'hépatotoxicité sont divers et souvent multiples pour un même toxique : altération de la membrane cellulaire, inhibition de protéines de transport, formation d'un métabolite actif, immuno-toxicité ou atteinte mitochondriale (55).

Le diagnostic d'hépatite aiguë toxique, hormis le cas évident d'intoxication volontaire massive avec un produit connu pour ces effets hépatotoxiques comme le paracétamol, est avant tout un diagnostic d'élimination. Aucun examen biologique, pas même la biopsie hépatique n'est assez spécifique pour porter le diagnostic d'atteinte toxique. Avant d'en arriver à la conclusion que l'origine de l'intoxication est toxique, d'autres causes plus fréquentes doivent être éliminées.

De ce fait, devant toute hépatite aiguë, la démarche devra être rigoureuse, visant tout d'abord à évaluer la gravité de l'insuffisance hépatique, éviter son aggravation en débutant un traitement spécifique s'il y a lieu, évaluer son retentissement sur les principaux organes, établir l'étiologie, évaluer la nécessité de transférer ou non le patient vers un centre permettant une suppléance hépatique et/ou une transplantation (56).

I.1.2.2. Mécanismes de toxicité

L'hépatotoxicité est généralement dose-dépendante et donc prévisible, apparaissant après un court délai (1-12 semaines) après exposition au toxique (53). Plus rarement, elle est idiosyncrasique, dose-indépendante et apparaît avec une période de latence pouvant aller jusqu'à 12 mois. Le mécanisme des lésions hépatiques n'est pas unique, mais est généralement spécifique du toxique en cause, avec une atteinte régiosélective du lobule hépatique (centrolobulaire, médiolobulaire, périportale). L'hépatotoxicité peut être cytolytique, cholestatique ou mixte et elle est classée selon la valeur du rapport ALAT/PAL (exprimé en multiple de la normale) (Tableau 3) (57). Le Tableau 4 illustre bien l'existence de différents mécanismes moléculaires pouvant induire celle-ci (55,58). Dans de très rares cas, il existe également un mécanisme immunoallergique ou d'hypersensibilité qui apparaît souvent avec un délai, favorisé par une réexposition et associé à une fièvre, une éruption cutanée ou une hyperéosinophilie.

Tableau 3. Critères diagnostiques d'une hépatite aiguë toxique. (57,59)

| Type d'atteinte hépatique | Critères diagnostiques |
|---------------------------|---|
| Atteinte cytolytique | Augmentation des ALAT > 2 N Augmentation des ALAT et PAL Avec rapport ALAT/PAL ≥ 5 |
| Atteinte cholestatique | Augmentation des ALAT > 2 N Augmentation des ALAT et PAL Augmentation de la bilirubine conjuguée > 2N Avec rapport ALAT/PAL ≤ 2 |
| Atteinte mixte | Augmentation des ALAT et PAL Avec rapport ALAT/PAL entre 2 et 5 |

L'une des causes essentielles d'atteinte hépatique, après une intoxication aiguë, est le foie ischémique qui suit un épisode de bas débit périphérique (ex. cardiotrope), d'hypoxémie extrême (ex. psychotrope avec dépression neurologique centrale) ou de vasospasme (ex. cocaïne) (52). Il existe désormais, de plus en plus de travaux qui s'attachent à comprendre la vulnérabilité individuelle pour chaque toxique. La variabilité génétique explique une part importante de la susceptibilité, comme le risque accru de toxicité à l'irinotecan en cas de réduction des capacités de glucuroconjugaaison (maladie de Gilbert) (53). D'ailleurs, l'importance des lésions hépatiques n'est pas toujours proportionnelle à l'amplitude de l'élévation des transaminases. Les cellules hépatiques possèdent, en fait, une grande capacité de récupération et d'adaptation, avec une variabilité en fonction de chaque individu et de son

terrain sous-jacent. L'hépatotoxicité devient significative lorsque la perturbation du bilan biologique hépatique s'accompagne de manifestations cliniques (asthénie, anorexie, nausée, douleur de l'hypochondre droit, urines foncées, encéphalopathie).

Tableau 4. Mécanismes moléculaires pouvant aboutir à une lésion cellulaire hépatique toxique (souvent multiples et associés pour un même hépatotoxique). (58)

| Mécanismes hépatotoxiques moléculaires | Exemples |
|---|--|
| Formation de liaisons covalentes | Formation d'adduits par liaison d'un toxique ou de son métabolite réactif à des protéines ou autres macromolécules intracellulaires à l'origine de lésions directes (ex. paracétamol en phase initiale) |
| Peroxydation lipidique | Réaction de radicaux libres avec les acides gras polyinsaturés des membranes, à l'origine de troubles de la fluidité, de la perméabilité et de la stabilité des membranes (ex. tétrachlorure de carbone) |
| Déplétion en ATP | Découplage de la phosphorylation oxydative mitochondriale (ex. acide valproïque) ou altération de l'homéostasie calcique cytoplasmique (ex. fer) |
| Lésions de l'ADN | Lésions directes ou activation de la poly(ADP-ribose) polymérase, conduisant à la mort cellulaire (ex. agents alkylants) ou à la transformation néoplasique (ex. stéroïdes) |
| Apoptose | Voies du récepteur au TNF-/Fas/caspases ou par d'autres cytokines pro-inflammatoires (ex. paracétamol en phase tardive) |
| Lésion des organelles intracellulaires | Réticulum (ex. tétrachlorure de carbone) |
| Inhibition enzymatique directe | Blocage d'une enzyme (ex. amanite phalloïde) |
| Ischémie | Trouble de l'apport d'oxygène, de nutriments et/ou réduction du débit sanguin hépatique (ex. cocaïne) |
| Trouble de l'excrétion biliaire | Inhibition du cytosquelette, des microfilaments d'actine ou des pompes de transport (ex. chlorpromazine) |

I.1.2.3. Modèle d'évaluation de la toxicité hépatique

L'origine multifactorielle des atteintes hépatiques complexifie la compréhension des mécanismes impliqués dans leur origine. L'établissement de modèles d'évaluation pertinents (utilisés à terme pour prédire et prévenir une hépatotoxicité), représente alors un challenge important pour l'ensemble des acteurs qui y sont confrontés (patients, cliniciens, entreprises pharmaceutiques, agences de régulation). Des modèles sont mis en œuvre alors pour mimer au mieux le métabolisme physiologique et la réponse après exposition à des molécules toxiques. Le modèle *in vivo* est considéré comme le gold-standard pour l'évaluation de la toxicité hépatique. Cependant, des divergences inter-espèces peuvent être observées car la transposition des résultats est dépendante de mécanismes cinétiques et toxiques propres au modèle. Des méthodes *in vitro* peuvent également se substituer à l'outil animal comme la culture d'hépatocytes primaires ou immortalisés. Enfin, des méthodes computationnelles de modélisation de la toxicité, ou approches *in silico*, se développent depuis une dizaine d'années.

I.1.2.4. Hépatite induite par le paracétamol

Le paracétamol est à l'origine de l'une des intoxications médicamenteuses les plus fréquentes dans le monde, source persistante de décès. Le paracétamol est à l'origine d'une hépatite cytolytique dose-dépendante bien connue. Celle-ci s'associe dans certains cas à des atteintes moins bien connues, comme une insuffisance rénale, une pancréatite aiguë, une coagulation intravasculaire disséminée (CIVD) ou une thrombopénie. La toxicité du paracétamol, dans les 15 premières heures après ingestion, est dépendante de son métabolisme médié par les cytochromes P450.

Lorsqu'il est consommé à des doses thérapeutiques, la majorité (80 à 90 %) du paracétamol est conjuguée à l'acide glucuronique ou au sulfate et excrétée par les reins (60). Un composant mineur subit l'action des enzymes du cytochrome P450 telles que CYP2E1 et CYP1A2 pour former un métabolite réactif hépatotoxique, la *N*-acétyl-*p*-benzoquinone imine (NAPQI) (61). Bien que hautement réactif, le NAPQI est rarement nocif après consommation de doses thérapeutiques car il se conjugue rapidement avec d'abondantes réserves de glutathion dans le foie et est excrété par la bile. Cependant, l'ingestion d'une dose excessive de paracétamol provoque la saturation des voies métaboliques d'inactivation du paracétamol (glucuro- et sulfoconjugaison), et la génération de NAPQI en quantités significativement élevées (62). Une génération excessive de NAPQI entraîne sa réaction avec les réserves hépatiques de glutathion et l'épuisement rapide du glutathion dans le foie. Cela laisse une quantité

importante de NAPQI libre, qui est très réactif et qui se lie de façon covalente avec des groupes sulphydryles de protéines intracellulaires pour former des adduits de protéines, en particulier sur les protéines mitochondrielles (60) et aboutit à une nécrose hépatocytaire centrolobulaire. La **figure 3** explique de façon précise le mécanisme de toxicité hépatique du paracétamol (63).

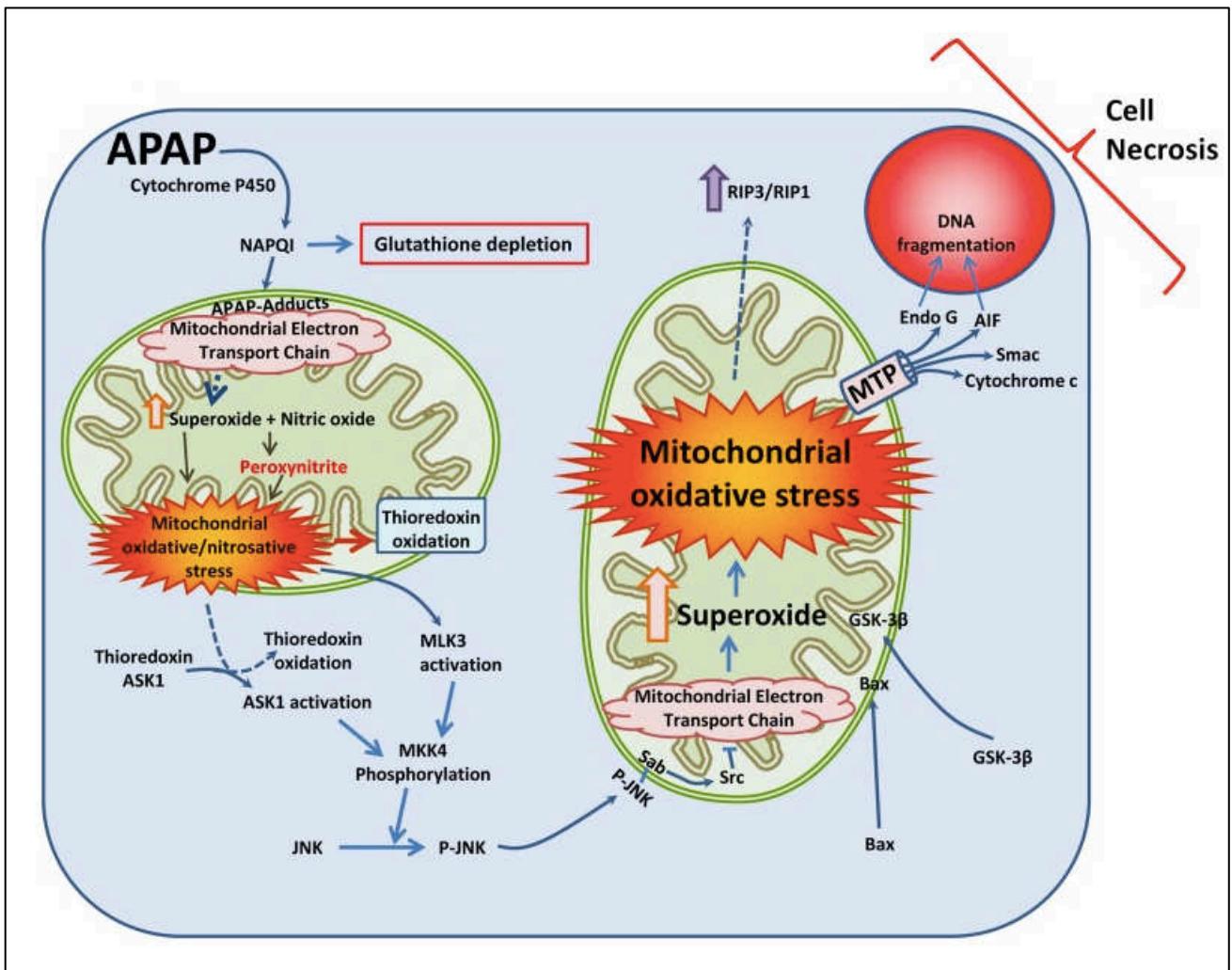


Figure 3. Mécanisme d'hépatotoxicité induite par le paracétamol. (64)

Ainsi, les composants de la chaîne de transport d'électrons tels que l'ATP synthase sont touchés, ce qui dérégule la fonction de la chaîne respiratoire et augmente la génération de radicaux libres tels que le superoxyde. Le superoxyde réagit avec l'oxyde nitrique (NO) dans les mitochondries pour produire du peroxynitrite hautement réactif, qui nitrate les protéines mitochondrielles telles que la manganèse superoxyde dismutase (MnSOD). Cela compromet les défenses antioxydantes mitochondrielles, provoquant un stress oxydant mitochondrial et l'oxydation de protéines telles que la thiorédoxine mitochondriale. L'oxydation dans le cytosol de la thiorédoxine entraîne son détachement de son partenaire de liaison, la protéine kinase 1 régulatrice du signal d'apoptose (ASK1), qui est alors activée ; ainsi que la protéine kinase 3 activée par un mitogène (MLK3), activent ensuite la protéine kinase c-jun N-terminale (JNK) en sa forme phosphorylée via la phosphorylation de la protéine kinase kinase 4 activée par un mitogène (MKK4) (**figure 3**).

La protéine kinase c-jun N-terminale (P-JNK) phosphorylée se transloque vers les mitochondries et se lie à la protéine Sab sur la membrane mitochondriale externe, ce qui inhibe davantage le transport mitochondrial d'électrons. Cela amplifie le stress oxydant mitochondrial et associe un mécanisme lésionnel supplémentaire par la translocation de la protéine membranaire BAX et de la protéine glycogène synthase kinase 3 β (GSK-3 β) du cytosol vers les mitochondries. Ce dernier mécanisme active l'ouverture des *microchondrial permeability transition pore* (MPT), qui libèrent des protéines intermembranaires mitochondrielles pro-apoptotiques comme l'endonucléase G et le facteur induisant l'apoptose (AIF), ainsi que le cytochrome c et la protéine Smac. La translocation de l'AIF et de l'endonucléase G vers le noyau induit alors une fragmentation de l'ADN nucléaire avec pour conséquence une nécrose hépatocytaire (**figure 3**).

Ces altérations cellulaires, associant également de multiples signaux d'apoptose, sont à l'origine de l'induction de la nitric oxide synthase, de la production en excès de heatshock proteins et de heme oxygenase-1 et du relargage de damage-associated molecular patterns (DAMPs) comme la cytokératine-18, le high mobility group box-1 (HMGB1), des fragments d'ADN nucléaire ou mitochondrial et des micro-ARN, tel le miR122. La protéine HMGB1 active les cellules de Küpffer hépatiques, qui produisent des cytokines et des chémokines, entraînant un afflux de cellules inflammatoires (polynucléaires et monocytes), qui à leur tour renforcent les lésions hépatocytaires, en amplifiant la production de cytokines et d'enzymes à activité cytolytique.

Les altérations cellulaires induites par le paracétamol sont associées à une cascade de signaux d'apoptose, qui déclenchent également divers processus dans les cellules hépatiques. Cela comprend l'induction de l'enzyme nitric oxide synthase (NOS), qui entraîne une production excessive d'oxyde nitrique (NO). De plus, il y a une augmentation de la production de heat shock proteins (HSP) et de heme oxygenase-1 (HO-1), qui sont des protéines de stress cellulaires. En outre, des molécules associées aux dommages cellulaires, appelées damage-associated molecular patterns (DAMPs), comme la cytokératine-18, le high mobility group box-1 (HMGB1), des fragments d'ADN nucléaire ou mitochondrial et des micro-ARN, comme le miR122, sont libérées. La protéine HMGB1 a un rôle pro-inflammatoire en activant les cellules de Kupffer, qui sont des macrophages résidents du foie. Cette activation conduit à la production accrue de cytokines et de chémokines, attirant les cellules inflammatoires telles que les polynucléaires et les monocytes vers le site de lésion hépatique. Ces cellules inflammatoires contribuent à l'amplification de la réponse inflammatoire en produisant davantage de cytokines et d'enzymes ayant une activité cytolytique. Ainsi, l'inflammation exacerbée renforce les lésions hépatocytaires (65).

Dans l'ensemble, les altérations cellulaires induites par le paracétamol, y compris la production excessive de NO, l'induction des HSP et de HO-1, ainsi que le relargage de DAMPs tels que HMGB1, conduisent à des cascades d'apoptose, d'inflammation et de lésions hépatiques. Cette cascade complexe implique une interconnexion entre différents acteurs cellulaires et moléculaires, contribuant à la toxicité hépatique induite par le paracétamol.

I.1.2.5. Hépatite toxique alcoolique

L'hépatopathie alcoolique est une atteinte hépatique chronique répandue dans le monde causée par une consommation chronique ou excessive d'alcool. Le foie est le principal organe qui métabolise l'alcool ; par conséquent, il est particulièrement sensible à la consommation d'alcool. Les métabolites et les sous-produits générés au cours du métabolisme de l'alcool provoquent des lésions hépatiques, entraînant une hépatite toxique alcoolique via plusieurs mécanismes, tels que l'altération du métabolisme des lipides, l'intensification des réactions inflammatoires et l'induction de la fibrose (66).

La forme typique d'hépatite alcoolique présente, dans 50% des cas, un tableau subaiguë fébrile avec ictere et hépatomégalie douloureuse (67). Elle peut également être asymptomatique ou responsable d'une décompensation d'une cirrhose éthylique sous-jacente, avec ses complications habituelles (encéphalopathie, syndrome hémorragique ou ascite) (52).

Lorsqu'il est consommé, l'alcool, absorbé à plus de 90% par l'estomac et les intestins, est transporté dans le sang vers le foie via la veine porte (68). En raison des niveaux élevés d'enzymes métabolisant l'alcool dans le foie, le foie joue un rôle majeur dans le métabolisme de l'alcool (68). Dans le foie, l'alcool est métabolisé par des voies oxydatives et non oxydatives (Figure 5). La voie oxydative est la principale voie du métabolisme de l'alcool et se compose de deux étapes. Premièrement, l'alcool est oxydé en acétaldéhyde par l'alcool déshydrogénase (ADH), une enzyme primaire qui convertit l'alcool en acétaldéhyde. Une consommation excessive d'alcool augmente l'expression et l'activité du cytochrome P450 2E1 (CYP2E1), et non de l'ADH. Le CYP2E1 activé favorise la production d'acétaldéhyde par la formation d'espèces réactives de l'oxygène (ROS) (69). De plus, la catalase peroxyxsomale décompose l'alcool en acétaldéhyde, mais son action est considérée comme une voie mineure en raison de sa faible contribution à la digestion de l'alcool (69). La deuxième étape de la voie oxydative implique la conversion rapide de l'acétaldéhyde en acétate par l'aldéhyde déshydrogénase (ALDH) (Figure 4). L'acétate est métabolisé en dioxyde de carbone (CO_2), en acides gras (AG) et en eau (H_2O) dans les tissus périphériques, et non dans le foie (68). La voie non oxydative représente une partie mineure du métabolisme de l'alcool en termes quantitatifs (70,71). Une petite quantité d'alcool est conjuguée de manière non oxydative à divers métabolites endogènes par différentes enzymes. Par exemple, l'estérification enzymatique de l'alcool avec des acides gras forme un ester éthylique d'acide gras (FAEE) et la phospholipase D (PLD) catalyse la transphosphatidylation de la phosphatidylcholine avec de l'éthanol pour former du phosphatidyléthanol (PEth). De plus, l'alcool conjugué à l'acide glucuronique et au sulfate génère respectivement de l'éthylglucuronide (EtG) et du sulfate d'éthyle (EtS) (70,71) (Figure 4).

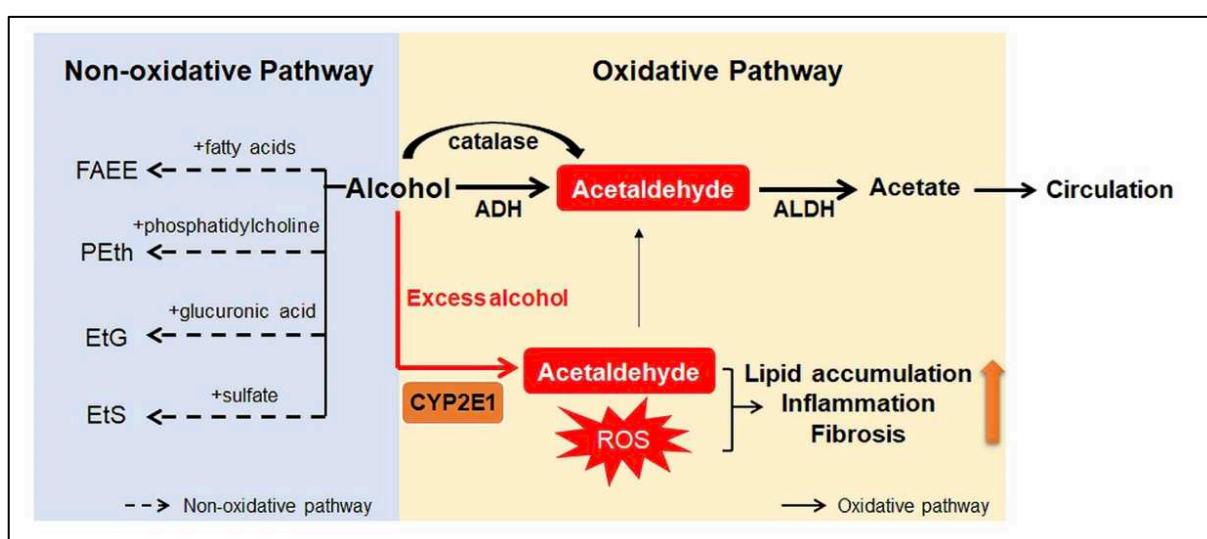


Figure 4. Métabolisme hépatique de l'éthanol. (66)

Les métabolites formés au cours du métabolisme de l'alcool endommagent le foie et agissent comme un moteur de la progression de l'hépatite alcoolique allant de la stéatose alcoolique jusqu'à la cirrhose alcoolique (72). Le composé toxique le plus connu produit par le métabolisme de l'alcool est l'acétaldéhyde (73). L'acétaldéhyde interagit directement avec l'ADN et provoque des mutations ponctuelles et des lésions chromosomiques. Il se lie également à une variété de protéines pour former des adduits d'acétaldéhyde, ce qui déforme la fonction et la structure du foie. Il a été démontré que les adduits protéiques contribuent à l'accumulation de lipides, à l'inflammation et à la fibrose, jouant un rôle clé dans la pathogenèse de divers stades de l'hépatite alcoolique (74). Il a été rapporté que l'acéate augmentait le débit sanguin portal en circulant dans la circulation sanguine, bien qu'il soit moins毒 que l'acétaldéhyde. Les métabolites dérivés de la voie non oxydative, y compris le PEth et le FAEE, sont également connus pour provoquer une toxicité de l'alcool, mais les mécanismes n'ont pas encore été déterminés.

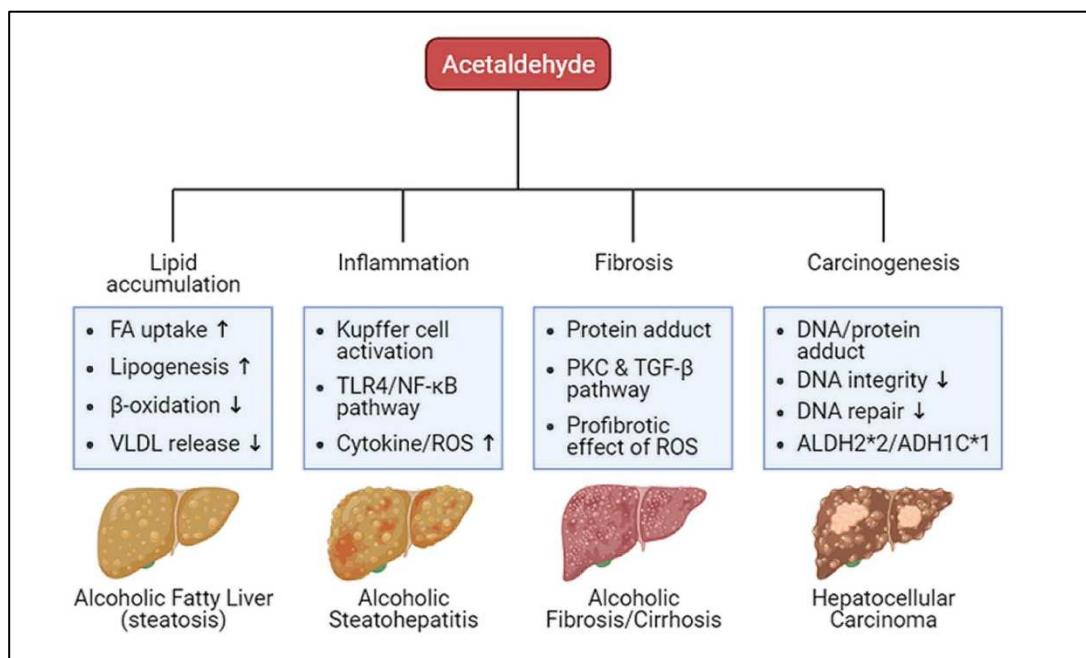


Figure 5. Effets hépatotoxiques de l'acétaldéhyde. (66)

L'acétaldéhyde, l'un des métabolites dérivés de l'éthanol oxydatif, exerce un large éventail de dommages au foie, allant de l'accumulation de lipides dans les hépatocytes à l'inflammation, la fibrose et la carcinogenèse (**figure 5**). Les hépatocytes accumulent des lipides par excès de lipides (augmentation de l'absorption hépatique des acides gras (AG) et de la lipogenèse hépatique *de novo*) et/ou par altération de l'élimination des lipides (diminution de la β-oxydation mitochondriale et sécrétion excessive de lipoprotéines de très basse densité (VLDL)).

L'acétaldéhyde active également les cellules de Kupffer (macrophages résidents du foie) pour libérer des espèces réactives de l'oxygène (ROS) et des cytokines qui recrutent d'autres cellules immunitaires. Lorsqu'elles sont exposées à l'acétaldéhyde, les cellules de Kupffer activent la voie de signalisation médiée par le facteur nucléaire NF-κB du récepteur TLR4, déclenchant des réponses inflammatoires. De plus, les adduits protéiques de l'acétaldéhyde favorisent la production de collagène par les cellules stellaires activées (CSH) via la protéine kinase C (PKC) et la voie de signalisation TGF-β. Le stress oxydatif médié par les ROS accélère aussi la fibrose hépatique. Les adduits de protéines et d'ADN avec l'acétaldéhyde provoquent une carcinogenèse hépatique. Ils affaiblissent l'intégrité de l'ADN et interfèrent avec le système de réparation de l'ADN, augmentant ainsi la mutation cancérogène de l'ADN.

I.1.2.6. Hépatite induite par obstruction du canal bilaire

Une obstruction de la synthèse, du transport et de l'excrétion de la bile est à l'origine d'une hépatite cholestatique. La rétention des constituants de la bile dans l'hépatocyte pendant la cholestase est associée à l'apoptose des hépatocytes (75). Bien que les mécanismes de cholestase associés à l'apoptose des hépatocytes soient probablement complexes et multifactoriels, les acides biliaires hydrophobes sont particulièrement hépatotoxiques, et ils s'accumulent dans le foie dans les troubles cholestatiques (76). L'incapacité à sécréter les acides biliaires dans la bile entraîne des lésions hépatiques, une cirrhose et la mort par insuffisance hépatique (77).

Certaines études suggèrent que l'apoptose des hépatocytes liée à la cholestase est liée aux récepteurs de l'apoptose (78). L'activation du récepteur du ligand induisant l'apoptose lié au TNF (TRAILR) et de la voie de signalisation du récepteur de mort Fas est une voie importante pour l'apoptose des hépatocytes induite par les acides biliaires hydrophobes. Les acides biliaires hydrophobes activent les signaux de mort liés au Fas d'une manière dépendante du ligand et de l'apoptose des hépatocytes. Ils stimulent les vésicules intracellulaires associées au complexe de Golgi et au réseau trans-Golgi, et transfère les vésicules contenant Fas aux membranes hépatocytaires, initiant une voie de signalisation de la mort dépendante du ligand, tout en augmentant la densité Fas à la surface des hépatocytes pour la rendre plus sensible aux agonistes du Fas. L'apoptose des hépatocytes médiée par les acides biliaires active non seulement l'oligomérisation des récepteurs de la mort indépendante du ligand, mais régule également la sensibilité des voies de signalisation liées aux récepteurs de la mort. L'apoptose médiée par les récepteurs de mort des hépatocytes est régulée par différents signaux apoptotiques. Sur le complexe de signalisation induisant la mort (DISC), les acides biliaires hydrophobes stimulent la phosphorylation de cFLIP pour réduire la

liaison de deux isoformes différentes de cFLIP long (cFLIP-L) et cFLIP court (cFLIP-S) au domaine de mort associé au Fas (FADD) dans DISC, puis réduire le recrutement de cFLIP dans DISC, favorisant l'activation des caspases 8 et 10 (79,80) (**Figure 6**).

Les caspases activées 8 et 10 clivent bid en tBid et y pénètrent dans les mitochondries avec Bax pour induire un dysfonctionnement mitochondrial et favoriser la libération du cytochrome c. Le cytochrome c libéré se lie au facteur 1 d'activation de l'apoptose (Apaf-1) pour favoriser l'activation de caspase 9. La caspase 9 active en outre caspase 3/6/7, ce qui conduit finalement à la mort des cellules hépatiques. En outre, les acides biliaires hydrophobes peuvent également provoquer directement la translocation de Bax dans les mitochondries, ce qui peut également conduire à la libération de cytochrome c et des effecteurs en aval de la voie de signalisation des caspases. Les acides biliaires hydrophobes peuvent également stimuler la chaîne respiratoire mitochondriale pour stimuler la production d'espèces réactives de l'oxygène (ROS) et provoquer une transition de perméabilité membranaire mitochondriale (MPT) et libérer le cytochrome c (76,81) (**Figure 6**).

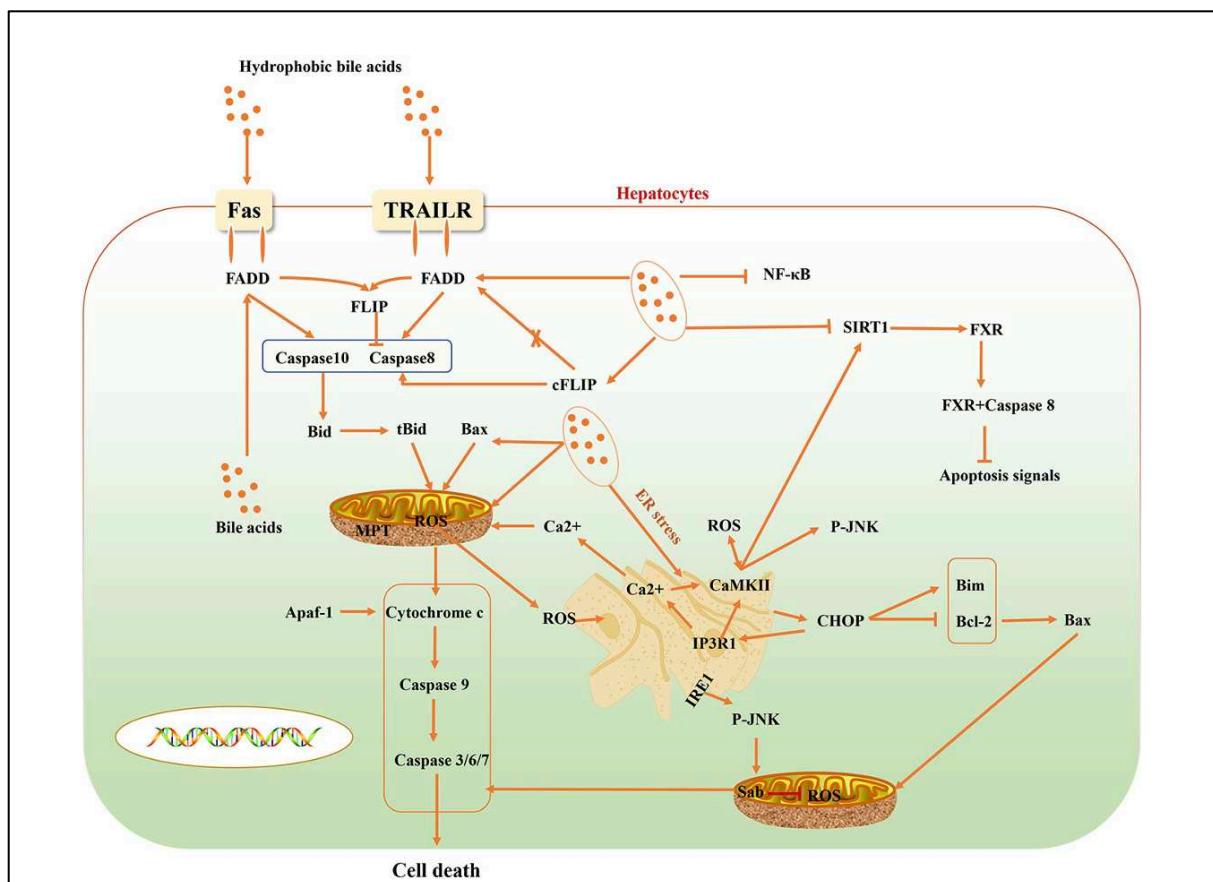


Figure 6. Voies de signalisation de l'hépatotoxicité induites par les acides biliaires hydrophobes. (82)

De plus, le récepteur nucléaire FXR peut également réguler la synthèse des acides biliaires dans le processus de cholestase par une régulation par un rétrocontrôle négative (83). Le récepteur FXR inhibe indirectement l'activation de la caspase 8 en se liant à celle-ci pour empêcher l'activation et la conduction des signaux apoptotiques dans une voie indépendante du ligand. Par conséquent, le récepteur FXR dans les hépatocytes peut inhiber la suractivation de la caspase 8 en coopérant avec cFLIP. Cependant, dans le processus de lésion hépatique, des concentrations sanguines élevées de TRAIL et FasL réduisent rapidement le niveau d'expression de FXR avant l'activation du signal d'apoptose, indiquant que la diminution de FXR dans l'hépatocyte est la principale condition pour l'activation du signal d'apoptose. La protéine sirtuine-1 (SIRT1), protéine régulant l'expression du réception FXR, peut affecter de nombreux processus biologiques, notamment l'inflammation, le métabolisme des glycolipides, etc. Dans l'état pathologique de la cholestase, les acides biliaires toxiques peuvent réduire le niveau d'expression de SIRT1 donc réduire le niveau d'expression de FXR dans les hépatocytes (84) (**Figure 6**).

Enfin, les acides biliaires peuvent libérer des ions calcium (Ca^{2+}) dans le cytoplasme en induisant un stress du réticulum endoplasmique (SRE). La concentration accrue en Ca^{2+} amène les mitochondries à générer et à libérer des espèces réactives de l'oxygène (ROS), tandis qu'un niveau élevé de ROS dans les hépatocytes provoque l'augmentation de la concentration en Ca^{2+} . De plus, les acides biliaires stimulent directement les mitochondries pour libérer des ROS et un excès de ROS dans le cytoplasme stimule la libération Ca^{2+} du réticulum endoplasmique vers le cytoplasme, et stimule davantage les mitochondries pour produire un excès de ROS, provoquant un cercle vicieux de stress oxydatif dans les cellules hépatiques. Le SRE peut également activer JNK via IRE1 (85). La kinase JNK se combine avec Sab sur les mitochondries pour inhiber la respiration mitochondriale et la production de ROS (86). La protéine kinase CaMKII dans l'apoptose induite par un SRE peut faire partie de la boucle d'amplification par rétrocontrôle positive (87). Les ROS dans le cytoplasme peuvent conduire à l'activation de CaMKII dépendant du Ca^{2+} . Lorsqu'un SRE se produit, la protéine homologue C/EBP (CHOP) est surexprimée induisant l'inhibition de la protéine anti-apoptotique Bcl-2 et l'activation des protéines pro-apoptotiques Bim et Bax (88) (**Figure 6**).

I.1.2.7. Hépatite toxique chimique

Les hydrocarbures halogénés (chloroforme, trichloroéthylène, perchloroéthylène, etc.) sont pourvoyeurs d'hépatotoxicité. Le plus connu et le plus utilisé d'entre eux dans les modèles expérimentaux d'hépatotoxicité est le tétrachlorure de carbone (CCl_4), autrefois utilisé par les industries chimiques (agent dégraissant) et agricoles (insecticide utilisé en fumigation pour le grain) et même abusé en sniff par certains toxicomanes. La molécule CCl_4 n'est pas毒ique, mais son hépatotoxicité se développe après sa transformation par le cytochrome CYP2E1 en métabolites hautement réactifs et toxiques, inducteurs de radicaux libres et d'adduits, le trichlorométhyle ($\bullet\text{CCl}_3$) et le peroxyde de trichlorométhyle ($\text{CCl}_3\text{O}_2\bullet$) (89). Ces métabolites toxiques induisent une nécrose hépatocytaire qui se produit lors de l'induction d'un stress oxydatif, lors de réactions de peroxydation des lipides des membranes cellulaires, des réactions d'inhibition enzymatique et des réactions de liaison covalente avec les protéines cellulaires (90) (**Figure 7**).

Le CCl_4 , via son mécanisme de toxicité indirecte, est à l'origine d'une nécrose hépatocytaire centrolobulaire accompagnée d'ictère et de nécrose tubulaire rénale, généralement précédée de manifestations transitoires neurologiques (vertiges, troubles visuels, confusion) et digestives (douleurs abdominales, vomissements, diarrhées). La N-acétylcystéine a été proposée avec efficacité dans cette intoxication. Les expositions chroniques aux solvants sont à l'origine de cirrhose micro- et macronodulaire. Après une phase initiale de troubles digestifs, il induit une hépatite stéatosique médiolobulaire associée à une nécrose tubulaire rénale et à une psychose toxique. L'exposition chronique à cet agent peut être à l'origine d'évolution vers une cirrhose (52).

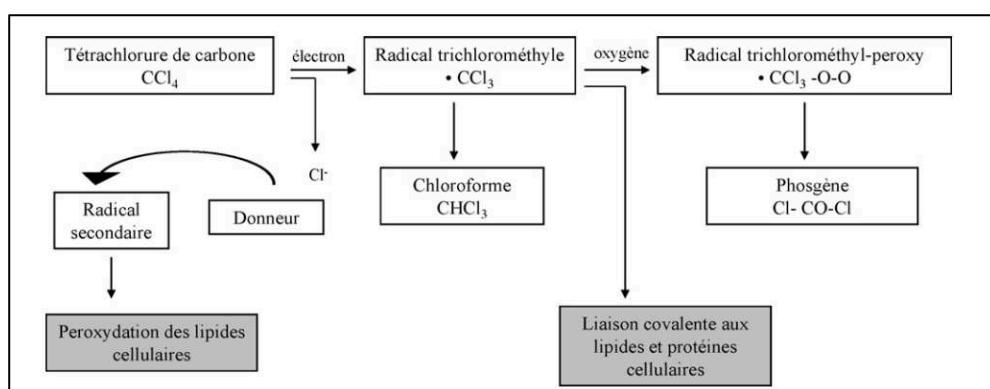


Figure 7. Mécanisme à l'origine de l'hépatotoxicité du tétrachlorure de carbone. (52)

Lors du stress oxydatif, les métabolites toxiques du CCl₄ entraînent la déplétion et le dysfonctionnement des capacités antioxydatives (CAT, SOD, GPx, GST et GSH) tout en augmentant simultanément les marqueurs pro-oxydants (Xanthine-oxydase, NADPH oxydase, GSSG et H₂O₂), ce qui entraîne un stress oxydatif et des dommages au niveau des hépatocytes (91).

Lors de la peroxydation des lipides, les métabolites toxiques du CCl₄ créent une liaison covalente avec les protéines et les lipides de la membrane de l'hépatocyte, des mitochondries et du réticulum endoplasmique, après quoi le radical réactif CCl₃O₂• élimine l'atome d'hydrogène des acides gras insaturés des membranes des hépatocytes. Le radical lipidique ainsi formé induit le processus de peroxydation lipidique qui se traduit par des dommages morphologiques et fonctionnels dans les hépatocytes (92).

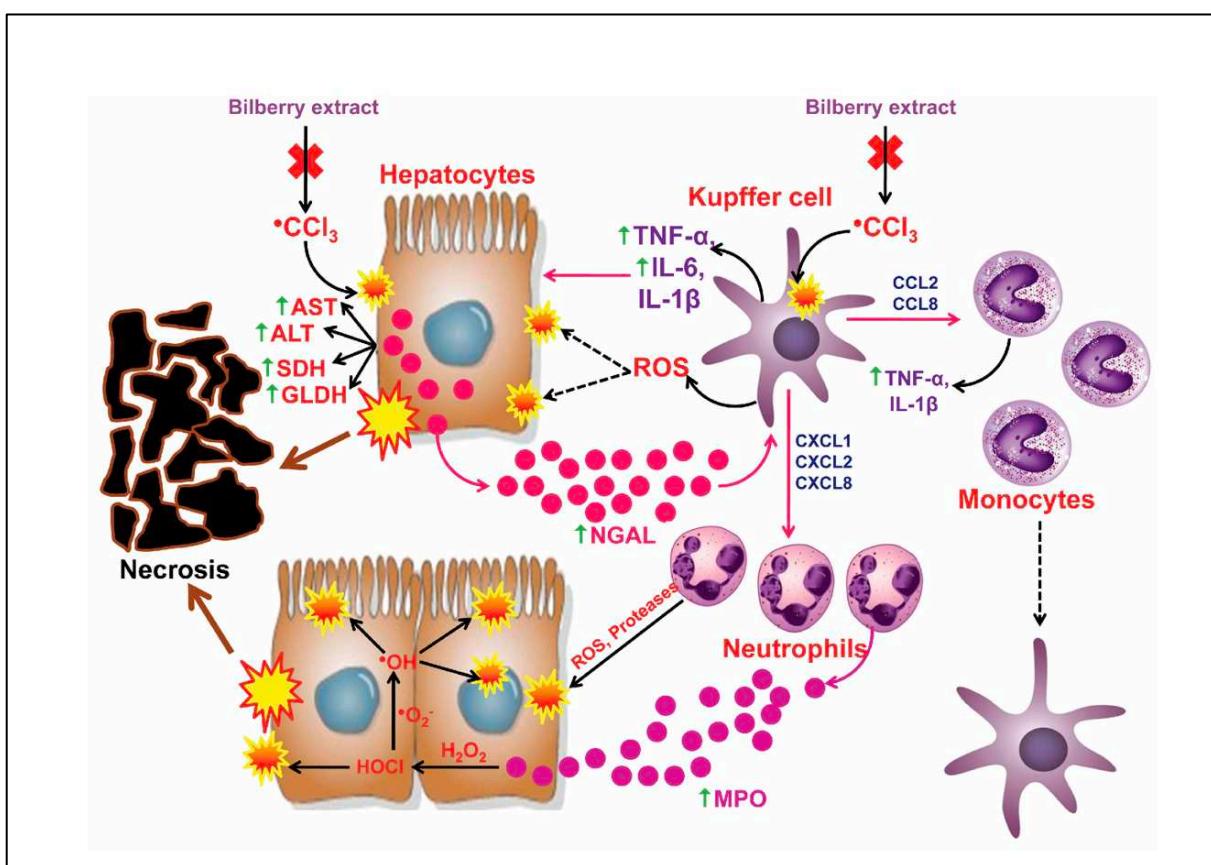


Figure 8. Mécanismes cellulaires hépatotoxiques dus à l'intoxication au tétrachlorure de carbone et aux effets du métabolite toxique du CCl₄ (•CCl₃) sur les hépatocytes et les cellules de Kupffer. (91)

Enfin, en plus de sa contribution significative au processus oxydatif et au processus de peroxydation des lipides, le radical trichlorométhyle a un rôle crucial dans l'induction de l'inflammation en activant les cellules de Kupffer dans le foie. Les cellules de Kupffer activées produisent et libèrent alors une variété de médiateurs inflammatoires (TNF- α , IL-6, IL-1 β , ROS), renforçant ainsi les dommages des cellules hépatiques parenchymateuses (93). Les cellules de Kupffer attirent les neutrophiles via CXCL1, CXCL2, CXCL8, et elles attirent les monocytes au centre de l'inflammation et des lésions hépatiques via CCL2 et CCL8 (94). Les monocytes attirés libèrent des substances pro-inflammatoires (TNF- α , IL-1 β) et les neutrophiles attirés libèrent des myélopéroxydases (MPO), des ROS et des protéases qui aggravent les lésions hépatiques provoquant ainsi la nécrose (91) (**Figure 8**).

I.2. LES CANDIDATS BIOMARQUEURS DE L'HÉPATOTOXICITÉ

Les biomarqueurs utilisés en routine manquent de spécificité et de sensibilité pour prévenir l'évolution clinique de la maladie. Le ou les biomarqueurs idéaux de devraient répondre à plusieurs caractéristiques : 1) être spécifiques du foie ; 2) être indépendants des anomalies métaboliques ; 3) ne pas être influencés par les altérations du système réticuloendothélial ou rénal ; 4) être peu ou pas influencés par des facteurs extra-hépatiques ; 5) être assez sensibles pour différencier les différents stades de l'atteinte hépatique ; 6) être faciles à réaliser et reproductibles afin de pouvoir assurer leur développement (95). De nombreux biomarqueurs sont prometteurs et pourraient améliorer la prévention des hépatopathies. Parmi eux, la glutamate déshydrogénase, la kératine 18, la sorbitol déshydrogénase, la glutathion S-transférase, les acides biliaires, l'ostéopontine et le miR-122.

I.1.3. Glutamate Déshydrogénase (GLDH)

La GLDH est une protéine mitochondriale codée par un gène nucléaire. Elle est impliquée dans l'oxydation des acides aminés et la production d'urée. Elle est spécifique du foie car elle est localisée uniquement dans la matrice mitochondriale des hépatocytes. Cette localisation permet de refléter la perte d'intégrité mitochondriale des cellules hépatiques (96). Elle n'est pas augmentée lors d'un exercice physique comparé aux transaminases (97).

D'après Schomaker et al., les taux de GLDH ne sont pas différents entre des sujets sains et des sujets ayant une atteinte chronique du foie (98). Cependant, une nécrose n'entraîne pas forcément de toxicité mitochondriale. Cela a été appuyé sur une expérience dans laquelle une dose élevée de furosémide administrée chez des souris provoquerait une nécrose hépatocytaire, avec des taux d'ALAT élevé mais sans augmentation des niveaux sériques de GLDH et d'ADN mitochondrial (99). Dans une autre expérience, des taux de GLDH élevés ont été mesurés chez des patients traités par de l'héparine, molécule sans hépatotoxicité

apparente (96,100). Il a été rapporté que l'activité sérique de la GLDH augmentait après un surdosage en paracétamol, avec des niveaux 2 fois plus élevés chez les patients décédés par rapport à ceux des survivants (101). Cependant, il reste controversé de savoir si la GLDH peut prédire avec précision la nécrose des hépatocytes, car la nécrose peut ne pas entraîner de toxicité mitochondriale et il s'agit d'un biomarqueur spécifique du dysfonctionnement mitochondrial.

I.1.4. Kératine 18 (K18)

La K18 est une protéine du cytosquelette impliquée dans la structure et l'intégrité de la cellule. Elle est exprimée par toutes les cellules épithéliales y compris les hépatocytes. Lors de l'apoptose, une caspase va cliver la kératine 18 en un fragment stable, la ccK18 (102). Ainsi, les taux sériques de K18 et de ccK18 peuvent représenter les marqueurs de nécrose et d'apoptose (103). Comme la GLDH, les taux de K18 et de ccK18 ne sont pas influencés par l'exercice physique (104).

Cependant, de nombreuses maladies sont associées à des taux élevés de K18 et ccK18 comme le cancer du poumon non à petites cellules, le cancer des voies biliaires, les infections à VHB et à VHC, et la stéatose hépatique non alcoolique (105–108).

Par conséquent, K18 et ccK18 ne sont pas très spécifiques d'une atteinte hépatique ; vu que la protéine est exprimée par toutes les cellules épithéliales simples. Néanmoins diverses maladies hépatiques entraînent des taux élevés de K18 et de ccK18 reflétant une inflammation hépatique.

I.1.5. Sorbitol déshydrogénase (SDH)

La SDH est une enzyme cytoplasmique localisée principalement dans le foie et les testicules. Elle a été proposée comme marqueur diagnostique des maladies hépatiques et testiculaires depuis de nombreuses années. C'est un indicateur sensible des dommages hépatocellulaires parce que ses augmentations sont plus importantes que celles des transaminases (109).

Il a été rapporté que certains médicaments inhibent l'expression de l'ALAT et peuvent masquer les lésions hépatiques qui pourraient être révélées par la SDH. De faibles doses de D-pénicillamine ont provoqué une légère augmentation des activités de SDH et de GLDH, alors qu'aucune augmentation de la concentration d'ALAT n'a été observée dans une hépatite granulomateuse induite par la D-pénicillamine chez la souris (110).

I.1.6. Glutathion S-transférase (GST)

La GST est une enzyme cytosolique abondante dans le foie. Une atteinte hépatique entraîne sa libération dans le plasma à partir du cytosol hépatique (111,112) et les taux de GST augmentent de façon plus importante que ceux des transaminases (113).

D'autres travaux ont démontré que les taux plasmatiques de GST seraient liés aux dépôts de lipides dans le foie, suggérant la possibilité de diagnostiquer une NASH grâce à ce biomarqueur (114).

Il a également été démontré que des polymorphismes génétiques de la GST étaient associés à diverses maladies du foie. Ainsi, chez les patients atteints d'insuffisance hépatique à hépatite B aiguë à chronique, les niveaux de méthylation du promoteur du gène GSTM3 seraient significativement élevés que ceux de sujets sains. Enfin, il a été proposé d'utiliser ce taux de méthylation pour évaluer le pronostic d'hépatite aiguë à chronique de l'hépatite B (115).

I.1.7. Acides biliaires

Les acides biliaires sont synthétisés dans le foie à partir du cholestérol et sont sécrétés dans les canalicules biliaires. Ce sont des biomarqueurs des atteintes hépatiques induites par les médicaments car ils ont des propriétés détergentes, amphiphiles et émulsifiantes qui endommagent l'intégrité de la membrane cellulaire et entraînent des effets cytotoxiques.

L'accumulation des acides biliaires dans les hépatocytes peut déclencher des mécanismes de régulation adaptatifs. Les effets toxiques des acides biliaires pourraient apparaître quand certains médicaments entraînent l'arrêt de la régulation des acides biliaires (116).

Malheureusement, des niveaux élevés d'acide biliaire peuvent être détectés dans de multiples maladies hépatobiliaires, ce qui laisse présager une spécificité limitée dans les atteintes hépatiques induites par les médicaments.

I.1.8. Ostéopontine (OPN)

Les taux d'OPN seraient associés au degré de nécrose hépatique dans les lésions hépatiques aiguës. Plusieurs études suggèrent que l'OPN agirait comme une cytokine pro-inflammatoire dans les maladies inflammatoires du foie et attirerait les neutrophiles, les lymphocytes et les macrophages vers les sites de lésion hépatique (117). L'ostéopontine (OPN) est une protéine multifonctionnelle dont l'expression est régulée par l'interleukine-1b et d'autres médiateurs inflammatoires aigus (118,119). Elle est sécrétée par plusieurs tissus et cellules, notamment les macrophages, les cellules musculaires lisses et les cellules épithéliales et endothéliales.

I.1.9. « High mobility Group Box-1 » (HMGB1)

L'HMGB1 est une protéine nucléaire qui est présente dans la plupart des tissus et qui est principalement impliquée dans la réPLICATION, la recombinaison, la réparation et la régulation transcriptionnelle de l'ADN. Elle est libérée dans l'espace extracellulaire suite à des dommages cellulaires (120,121).

Dans les conditions normales, les formes non acétylées et les formes thiol de l'HMGB1 restent localisées dans le noyau, mais peuvent être libérées en cas de lyse. De plus, une forme acétylée de l'HMGB1 peut être sécrétée par les cellules immunitaires et être facilement oxydée dans l'espace extracellulaire (122). Lorsqu'elle est libérée dans l'espace extracellulaire, l'HMGB1 peut se lier aux récepteurs des produits finaux de glycation ce qui induit un phénomène pro-inflammatoire avec recrutement cellulaire sur le site de l'atteinte (123,124).

Lors d'une hépatotoxicité aiguë, les taux sériques d'HMGB1 augmentent considérablement et plus rapidement que ceux de l'ALAT. Il a également été constaté qu'ils revenaient rapidement au niveau de base lors de la reprise de fonction hépatique (2). De plus, les taux d'HMGB1 acétylé n'augmenteraient que chez les patients ayant un mauvais pronostic suite au développement de l'atteinte hépatique, suggérant que l'HMGB1 pourrait être un biomarqueur pronostique (2).

I.1.10. « Fatty Acid binding protein 1 » FABP1

La FABP1 est une protéine principalement exprimée dans le foie et les reins, mais faiblement exprimée dans le cœur et les muscles squelettiques (125). Plus précisément, elle est abondamment exprimée dans le cytosol des cellules parenchymateuses hépatiques et elle est associée au métabolisme, au stockage, au transport et à l'utilisation des acides gras (126).

Comme la plupart des biomarqueurs présentés précédemment, il a été démontré que les taux de FABP1 augmentent plus rapidement et reviennent plus rapidement à la normale que ceux des ALAT lors d'atteintes hépatiques (125). Des niveaux accrus de FABP1 ont également été observés dans les atteintes virales au virus de l'hépatite B et les atteintes hépatiques non alcooliques, alors qu'une expression réduite a servi à protéger efficacement contre la stéatose et les lésions hépatocytaires permettant peut-être une stratégie de traitement des atteintes hépatiques (127,127). La FABP1 est impliquée dans de nombreux processus de maladies métaboliques, y compris ceux de la maladie du foie, du cancer, du diabète, de l'obésité et de l'athérosclérose.

I.1.11. Micro-ARN 122 (miR-122)

Deux études menées chez le rat et la souris ont montré que les taux de miR-122 augmentaient très significativement en présence de substances hépatotoxiques (128). Les micro-ARN (miARN) sont des petits ARN régulateurs non codants. Ils sont impliqués dans la régulation de l'expression de certains gènes. Plusieurs études de séquençage des micro-ARN ont identifié le miR-122 comme très spécifique du foie chez plusieurs espèces (rats, souris, humains, etc.). Le miR-122 représente jusqu'à 70% des miARN hépatiques. Il présente plusieurs fonctions comme la régulation de la différenciation des hépatocytes, la régulation du métabolisme du cholestérol ; et, contrairement à l'ALAT, il n'augmente pas lors d'une blessure musculaire.

I.3. LA MOLÉCULE D'ALBUMINE

I.1.12. Synthèse, structure & principaux rôles de l'albumine

I.1.12.1. Synthèse

L'albumine sérique humaine (HSA) est synthétisée dans le foie, principalement par des hépatocytes, sous la forme de pré-pro-albumine qui subit l'élimination du peptide N-terminal dans le réticulum endoplasmique et le clivage dans l'appareil de Golgi d'un oligopeptide 6-amino acide en position N-terminale afin d'obtenir la protéine plasmatique mature. L'HSA est sécrétée dans le système circulatoire à un taux de 10-15 g/jour (129). Chez les adultes en bonne santé, la demi-vie de l'HSA est relativement longue (environ 16-20 jours) (130). La dégradation de l'HSA se produit principalement dans les muscles, la peau, le foie et les reins (131).

I.1.12.2. Structure générale

La forme native de l'HSA est constituée d'une macromolécule non glycosylée multi-domaine composée de 585 résidus d'acides aminés et d'un poids moléculaire (PM) de 66438 Da (132).

La séquence primaire protéique contient un résidu de tryptophane (Trp214) et plusieurs résidus d'acides aminés chargés (lysines, arginines, acides glutamiques et aspartiques), responsables de sa forte solubilité dans l'eau (129). En outre, l'HSA contient 35 résidus de cystéine, dont 34 sont impliqués dans la formation de 17 liaisons disulfure, qui contribuent à la stabilité et la flexibilité de la protéine.

En revanche, le résidu cystéine en position 34 (Cys34) reste libre et peut réagir avec d'autres molécules circulantes. Dans un faible pourcentage de l'HSA circulante, ce résidu est impliqué dans la formation de ponts disulfures intermoléculaires conduisant à la formation de dimères d'HSA (133). L'HSA est composée de trois domaines homologues : le domaine I (du résidu 1 au résidu 195), le domaine II (du résidu 196 au résidu 383) et le domaine III (du résidu 384 au résidu 585) ; chaque domaine contient 10 α -hélices et peut être divisé en deux sous-domaines (A et B) composés respectivement de 4 et 6 α -hélices (134).

En solution, l'HSA adopte une conformation globulaire en forme de cœur, bien que des études physicochimiques aient révélé qu'il s'agit d'une protéine très flexible qui change facilement de forme (134–136).

I.1.12.3. Rôles & fonctions

Les fonctions physiologiques de l'albumine peuvent être subdivisées en propriété oncotique et non oncotique ; cette dernière étant étroitement liée à la structure particulière de la protéine (129,132). L'HSA est le principal modulateur de la distribution des liquides dans les différents compartiments du corps. Elle participe à hauteur d'environ 70 à 80% de la pression oncotique plasmatique.

Concernant les propriétés non oncotiques, l'HSA est capable de fixer de manière réversible des composés endogènes et exogènes structurellement divers, y compris des acides gras, des hormones, des ions, des médicaments et des métabolites de médicaments (137). Plusieurs sites de liaison ont été identifiés, parmi lesquels les sites I et II de Sudlow, situés respectivement dans les sous-domaines IIA et IIIA, sont les plus importants et les plus caractérisés.

La liaison à l'HSA augmente la solubilité du ligand dans le plasma, favorisant ainsi sa distribution au site d'action dans les tissus et les organes. Enfin, l'HSA est capable de lier la bilirubine et de favoriser sa clairance (138).

L'une des propriétés non oncotiques les plus importantes de l'HSA est son activité antioxydante qui dépend principalement de la présence d'acides aminés soufrés et de la capacité de liaison de la partie N-terminale. En effet, la Cys34 est le plus grand réservoir de thiols libres dans le plasma (80%) et le plus important capteur d'espèces réactives de l'oxygène (ERO) (139,140). L'activité anti-oxydante de l'HSA est renforcée par la présence de résidus de méthionine (141,142) et par les propriétés de chélation des métaux du site N-terminal (143). Le N-terminal est capable de chélater les ions de métaux de transition tels que le Cu (II) et le Fe (II), empêchant ainsi leur participation à la formation de radicaux libres (144).

L'HSA est également dotée de propriétés anti-inflammatoires. En effet, les preuves expérimentales indiquent que la capacité de l'HSA à lier certains composants de surface des bactéries Gram-positives et Gram-négatives, responsables de l'activation du système immunitaire par l'interaction avec le récepteur Toll-like 4 (TLR4), est un mécanisme important de l'activité anti-inflammatoire de l'HSA (131). Enfin, le résidu Cys34 de l'HSA est capable de lier le monoxyde d'azote (NO) avec la formation de S-nitroso-albumine. Cette liaison prolonge l'activité biologique du NO et, du fait du rôle régulateur du NO vis-à-vis de la thrombose, exerce un effet anti-thrombotique (145).

I.1.13. Modifications post-traductionnelles de l'albumine

Les propriétés non oncotiques de l'HSA sont strictement liées à sa structure dynamique. Des changements structurels minimes peuvent affecter de manière significative l'activité de l'HSA.

En effet, les altérations structurelles et conformationnelles de l'HSA résultent de modifications post-traductionnelles (PTM). Les PTMs les plus fréquents de l'HSA sont présentés ci-dessous (**figure 9**).

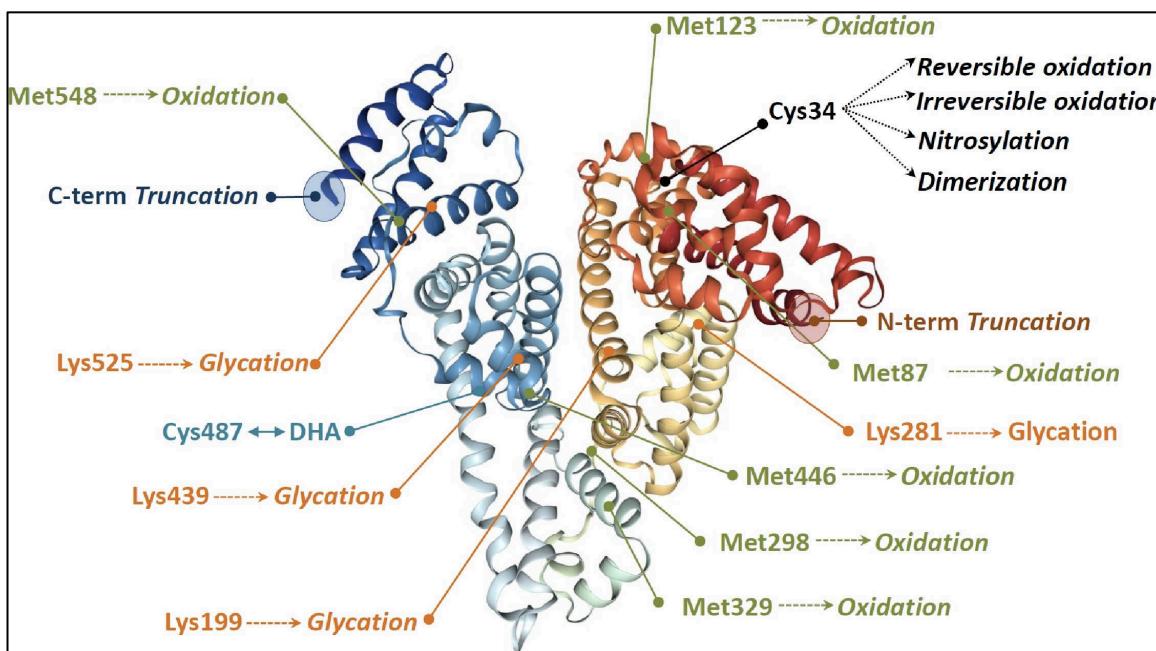


Figure 9. Les PTMs les plus abondantes affectant la structure HSA. (146)

I.1.13.1. Oxydation

Le stress oxydatif peut endommager gravement les protéines, les lipides et l'ADN. L'oxydation des protéines peut être provoquée par des espèces réactives de l'oxygène (ROS), des produits de peroxydation lipidique, des molécules spécifiques redox-actives (acide ascorbique) ou des ions divalents, tels que le fer ou le cuivre, qui augmentent la production de les radicaux libres hydroxyles (147). L'oxydation de la Cys34 sensible à l'oxydo-réduction est la PTM la plus fréquente affectant l'HSA.

Dans des conditions physiologiques, la forme native de l'HSA prédomine (70-80%). Cette forme est habituellement identifiée comme mercaptoalbumine (HMA). Elle est présente sous forme réduite avec un groupe thiol libre au niveau du résidu Cys34 (**figure 10**). Évidemment, ces changements altèrent l'état redox et, par conséquent, la capacité anti-oxydante de l'HSA (148,149). Les PTM oxydatifs peuvent également impliquer d'autres résidus d'acides aminés, tels que la méthionine, la lysine, l'arginine et la proline (150,151).

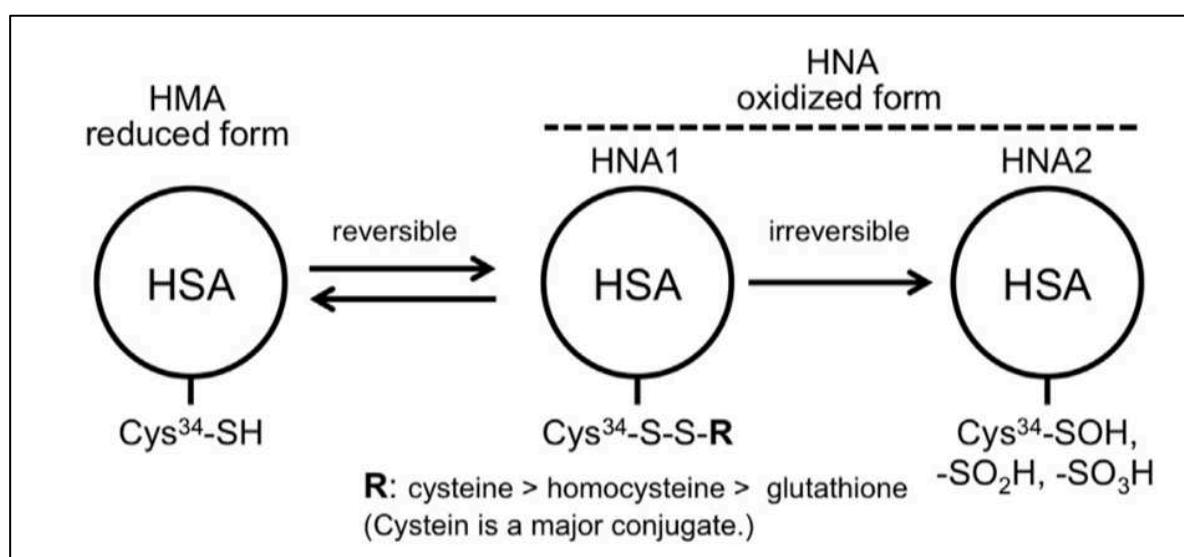


Figure 10. Les différents états redox de l'HSA. (152)

Le résidu Cys-34 est oxydé de manière réversible et se lie à de petites molécules de thiols telles que la cystéine, l'homocystéine ou le glutathion (forme non oxydée de la mercaptoalbumine 1 [HNA1]). HNA1 est en outre oxydé en non mercaptoalbumine 2 (HNA2 : forme oxydée), avec le résidu Cys-34 oxydé de manière irréversible en acides sulfinitiques ou sulfoniques, conduisant ainsi à la perte permanente de sa fonction anti-oxydante.

I.1.13.2. Dimérisation

L'HSA peut subir une dimérisation par la formation d'une liaison disulfure intermoléculaire à la Cys34 en raison d'une augmentation du stress oxydatif (3,8).

D'une part, la dimérisation réduit la quantité de résidu Cys34 libre et affecte négativement les capacités antioxydantes et les capacités de liaison de l'HSA. D'autre part, la dimérisation peut améliorer la capacité d'expansion du plasma et le transport du médicament en raison de la masse moléculaire doublée et de la demi-vie plasmatique plus longue (153,154).

I.1.13.3. S-nitrosylation

La Cys34 peut réagir avec le NO endogène et exogène de manière prédominante lorsque l'HSA est exposée à la S-nitrosoglutathione. La S-nitrosylation de la Cys34 diminue de manière allostérique l'affinité des ions Cu (II) pour l'HSA (155).

I.1.13.4. Glycation

La glycation, également appelée glycosylation non enzymatique, est une modification non enzymatique et covalente de la protéine. L'HSA native peut subir une glycation non spécifique en réagissant avec des sucres réducteurs et/ou avec leurs produits de dégradation réactifs. Les premières étapes du processus de glycation peuvent impliquer le site N-terminale et plusieurs résidus de lysine (151) (**figure 9**). L'albumine glyquée chez les patients atteints de diabète sucré altère ses capacités de liaison ainsi que ces propriétés antioxydantes. Par exemple, la capacité de fixation du Cu (II) sur l'albumine glyquée est inférieure à celle de l'albumine saine (156,157). Enfin, la capacité de liaison et les propriétés antioxydantes du Fe (III) sont considérablement réduites chez les patients atteints de diabète sucré (158).

I.1.13.5. Troncature

Un petit pourcentage de l'HSA circulante peut être tronqué à la fois sur les sites N- et C-terminaux (**figure 9**). La forme tronquée N-terminale la plus abondante est celle à laquelle manque des résidus Asp-Ala (159,160). Puisque ces résidus d'acides aminés sont impliqués dans la chélation des ions métalliques libres, cette troncature affecte la capacité anti-oxydante de l'HSA (141). La forme tronquée au niveau C-terminale la plus abondante est dépourvue de résidu leucine et présente une demi-vie réduite (161).

I.1.13.6. Déhydroalanine conversion

La conversion d'une cystéine en déhydroalanine (DHA) est une PTM commune qui peut résulter de l'exposition à des conditions alcalines et/ou à la chaleur.

La présence de résidus d'acides aminés basiques à proximité d'un pont disulfure pourrait conduire à la formation de DHA par un processus d'élimination. Ce dernier mécanisme a été mis en évidence au niveau de la Cys487 et prédispose à la formation d'une liaison disulfure avec la Cys486 (**figure 9**). Cette PTM modifie certaines fonctions physiologiques, telles que les propriétés de liaison et antioxydantes (162). De plus, la conversion d'une cystéine en DHA pourrait modifier le taux de dégradation de l'HSA (162).

I.1.13.7. Acétylation

En raison de l'absence de chaîne hydrocarbonée au niveau de l'HSA, cela rend ses résidus aminés plus accessible à l'acétylation. La réaction entre l'aspirine (acide acétylsalicylique) et l'HSA résulte une acétylation via une liaison covalente du groupe acétyle de l'aspirine aux groupements N-amino des résidus lysines de l'HSA. Cette acétylation réduirait l'affinité des prostaglandines, servant de mécanisme supplémentaire de l'action anti-inflammatoire de l'aspirine (163). Les propriétés de liaison du ligand à l'HSA pourraient être modulées par acétylation. En effet, l'affinité de l'HSA pour la phénylbutazone est augmentée pour l'HSA acétylée alors que celle pour la bilirubine est inhibée (163).

I.1.14. Propriétés de fixation de l'albumine

I.1.14.1. Sites de liaison des métaux à l'albumine

L'HSA présente une grande variété de sites de liaison pour plusieurs ions métalliques, y compris Mg (II), Al (III), Ca (II), Mn (II), Co (II / III), Ni (II), Cu (I / II), Zn (II), Cd (II), Pt (II), Au (I / II), Hg (II) et Tb (III) (132). Jusqu'à présent, trois principaux sites de liaison correspondant aux différentes géométries métalliques ont été observés (**figure 11**).

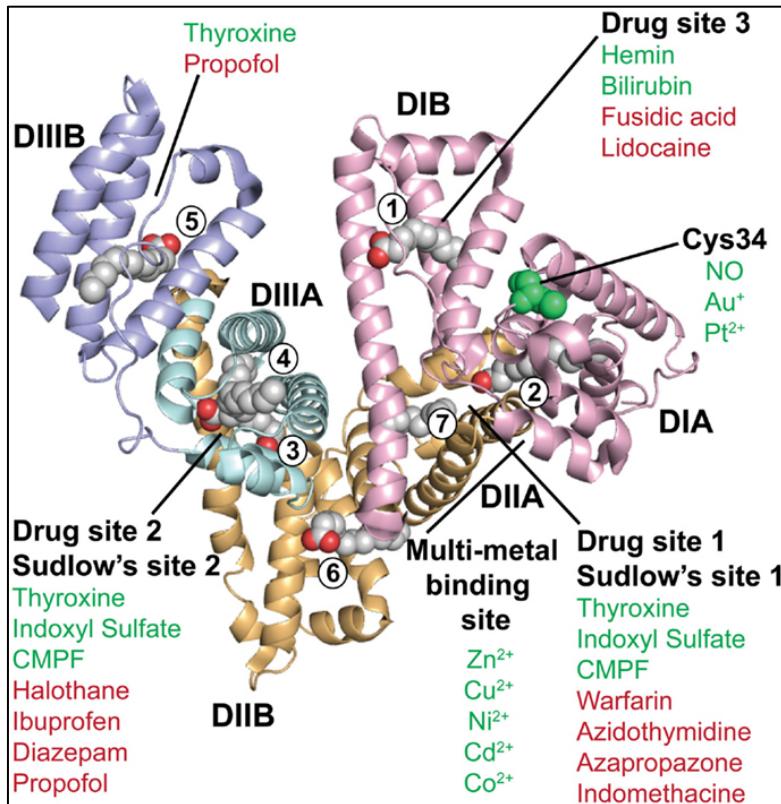


Figure 11. Structure tertiaire de l'HSA avec ses sites de fixation. (164)

Le premier site, habituellement étiqueté comme **site de liaison N-terminal (NTS)**, est situé à l'extrémité N-terminale, où se lie les ions Cu (II), Co (II) et Ni (II) (165). Le second site est représenté par le **thiol Cys34 libre** qui lie les ions Au (I), Hg (II) et Pt (II) (166,167). Le troisième site de liaison métallique est le **site de liaison multi-métallique dit primaire ou site de cadmium A (MBS-A)**. En effet, il a été suggéré que le MBS-A serait le site primaire de Zn (II) et de Cd (II) et le site secondaire du Cu (II) et du Ni (II) (168).

Malgré l'absence de preuves expérimentales, L'existence d'un site secondaire de liaison au Cd (II), appelé site de liaison multi-métallique secondaire ou site de cadmium B (MBS-B), a été suggérée (169). Enfin, d'autres ions métalliques se lient de façon non spécifique ou à des régions indéfinies (166).

I.1.14.2. Sites de fixation de la thyroxine à l'albumine

La thyroxine ou LT4 se lie à l'HSA via quatre sites, marqués Tr-1 à Tr-4 ; Tr-1 est situé dans le sous-domaine IIA, Tr-2 dans le sous-domaine IIIA, et Tr-3 et Tr-4 dans le sous-domaine IIIB (**figure 12**) (170).

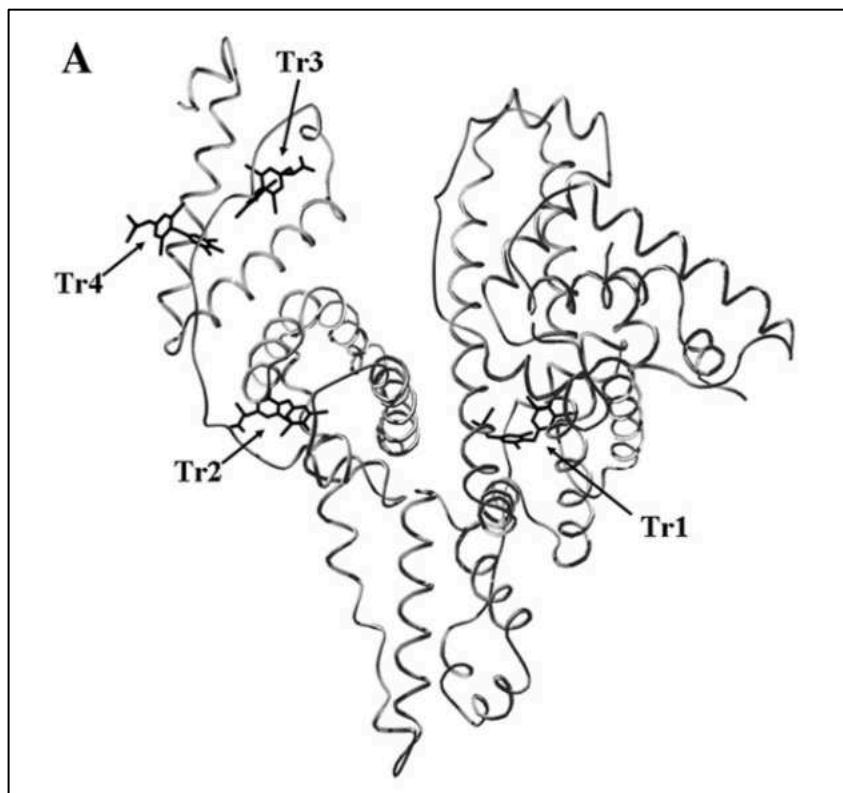


Figure 12. Sites de fixation de la L-thyroxine sur l'HSA. (132)

I.1.14.3. Interactions de différents métaux aux divers sites de liaison

I.1.14.3.1. Cuivre

Les tous premiers travaux datant de près de 50 ans suggèrent que l'HSA pourrait lier jusqu'à 4 équivalents de Cu (II) (171). Des études plus récentes ont étudié la liaison de Cu (II) au site N-terminal, pour lequel il a été montré à l'aide de titrages compétitifs avec l'acide nitrilotriacétique (NTA) qu'il aurait une constante de dissociation de 1,0 pM (172).

Il existe également un deuxième site de liaison spécifique de Cu (II) à l'HSA (173). En utilisant des titrages compétitifs de Cu (II) contre d'autres ions métalliques, il a été démontré qu'il s'agit du site A, également appelé site de liaison multi-métal (MBS-A). Ce site peut fixer d'autres cations métalliques divalents avec des affinités similaires (174). Toutefois, La différence d'un facteur 10 000 des affinités de Cu (II) entre NTS et MBS-A signifie que seul le NTS est peuplé par Cu (II) dans des conditions physiologiques, la constante de dissociation étant de 10 nM (175).

I.1.14.3.2. Cadmium

La liaison du Cd (II) à l'HSA et à la BSA est analogue à celle de Zn (II) ; et jusqu'à deux ions Cd (II) peuvent être liés au titrage direct au MBS-A et au MBS-B. Les noms de ces sites ont été suggérés pour décrire les résultats RMN 111 / 113Cd (II). L'addition d'un équivalent de 111 / 113Cd (II) à l'albumine présentait deux pics de RMN 111 / 113Cd (II), l'un d'environ 130 ppm (site A) et l'autre d'environ 20 ppm (site B) (176). Des expériences de compétition du Cu (II) ont indiqué que la liaison du Cd (II) au MBS-A de l'HSA et de la BSA est trois fois et neuf fois plus faible de la liaison Zn (II), respectivement (174). La constante de dissociation est estimée à 3 μM pour les sites de liaison Cd (II).

I.1.14.3.3. Or

Les études de la liaison d'Au (I) à l'albumine sont essentiellement des études d'échange de ligands dans des complexes ternaires, en raison de l'hydrolyse immédiate de l'Au (II) et de l'Au (III). En raison de l'intérêt pour les médicaments à base d'or, de tels complexes ont été étudiés principalement. Cys34 s'est avéré être le seul site de liaison pour Au (I) dans l'albumine (177,178).

En effet, l'étude de Et₃PAuCl avait montré que ce complexe phosphine analogue aux médicaments à base d'or n'avait aucune affinité avec le NTS ou le MBS-A (174). Les constantes de stabilité n'ont pas été déterminées à ce jour, mais on peut estimer qu'elles sont très élevées, de sorte que la liaison d'Au (I) à l'HSA était pratiquement irréversible dans des conditions expérimentales imitant le serum sanguin (178). Les complexes d'Au (III) subissent une réduction rapide en présence d'albumine, ce qui entraîne la liaison d'Au (I) à l'HSA (179).

I.4. APPROCHES ANALYTIQUES DE CARACTÉRISATION DES MODIFICATIONS POST-TRADUCTIONNELLES DE L'ALBUMINE

En raison des rôles physiopathologiques de l'HSA, des nombreux chercheurs se sont consacrés au développement de méthodologies analytiques pour l'évaluation de l'intégrité structurelle et fonctionnelle de l'HSA ainsi que pour l'identification et la quantification des isoformes de l'HSA.

I.4.1. Techniques chromatographiques

Les méthodes de chromatographie liquide utilisées pour la caractérisation de l'intégrité structurelle de l'HSA peuvent être divisées en 2 catégories : (1) les techniques permettant la séparation physique des isoformes de HSA (chromatographie par échange d'anions et chromatographie d'exclusion stérique) et (2) les techniques ne permettant pas une séparation raisonnable (chromatographie en phase inversée) mais permettent, grâce à la spectrométrie de masse, d'identifier les isoformes HSA sur la base des différentes valeurs de masse sur charge (m/z).

I.4.1.1. Chromatographie par échange d'anions (CEI)

La chromatographie par échange d'ions (CEI), ainsi que la chromatographie d'affinité, ont été la technique chromatographique de choix pour la purification de l'HSA à partir du plasma (180,181). Dans la CEI, la séparation est basée sur la charge nette de l'analyte. L'HSA est caractérisée par une charge négative nette au pH physiologique et peut être résolue à partir d'autres protéines plasmatiques en faisant varier correctement le pH ou la force ionique du tampon d'élution (182).

Les altérations conformationnelles liées au statut rédox du thiol font de la CEI une approche appropriée pour l'analyse des isoformes HSA portant une modification sur la Cys34 (183). En 1984, une première étude a décrit la séparation de l'HMA des 2 isoformes oxydées HNA (184). Plus une dizaine d'années après, la séparation des 3 isoformes (HMA, HNA1 et HNA2) a été réalisée (185).

La quantification des isoformes HMA et des HNA a permis la détermination des fractions HSA réduites et oxydées dans le plasma. Ces valeurs ont été utilisées pour évaluer le stress oxydant, afin de comprendre les mécanismes fondamentaux de la conversion de l'HMA en HNA chez les patients atteints de maladies cardiovasculaires et rénales ou de diabète sucré (186–189).

D'autres études ont proposé l'application de la CEI couplée à la détection de fluorescence pour étudier les modifications oxydatives de l'HSA chez des patients présentant divers degrés d'insuffisance hépatique, notamment chez les patients avec une cirrhose hépatique et une insuffisance hépatique aiguë ou chronique (190). La même approche a été utilisée plusieurs années plus tard pour corrélérer les modifications oxydatives de l'HSA à l'altération de sa capacité de liaison dans l'insuffisance hépatique chronique avancée et dans le sepsis (9).

I.4.1.2. Chromatographie d'exclusion stérique (SEC)

La chromatographie d'exclusion stérique (SEC) est une technique chromatographique selon laquelle les analytes sont séparés en fonction de leur volume hydrodynamique. Malgré que presque toutes les PTMs affectant l'HSA n'entraînent pas de changements suffisamment marqués dans le poids moléculaires pour permettre la séparation des différentes isoformes par SEC, cette technique peut être considérée comme une approche permettant séparer des formes monomères, dimères et oligomères de l'HSA. En effet, la SEC a été largement utilisée pour l'évaluation de la stabilité des protéines en surveillant la formation de dimères ou pour l'étude de la dimérisation de l'HSA sous stress oxydatif. Des chercheurs ont utilisé la SEC pour étudier la stabilité en fonction de la température des préparations pharmaceutiques contenant de l'HSA (191). Enfin, la SEC a été utilisée dans plusieurs travaux visant à surveiller la dimérisation de l'HSA, conséquence directe de l'augmentation du stress oxydatif (192,193).

I.4.1.3. Chromatographie liquide en phase inverse (RP-LC)

La chromatographie liquide en phase inverse (RP-LC) est une approche analytique qui ne permettent pas la séparation des isoformes de l'HSA car les différences de lipophilie résultant des PTMs sont trop faibles. Cette approche n'est pas une technique adaptée pour la séparation des formes dimères de l'HSA (8). Cependant, elle présente l'avantage d'utiliser des phases mobiles compatibles avec la détection par spectrométrie de masse (MS). Les progrès des instruments MS ont facilité le développement de méthodes sélectives et sensibles pour l'analyse de protéines complexes (194). Les deux approches protéomiques basées sur MS, à savoir l'analyse LC-MS de la protéine intacte (approche descendante ou approche top-down) et l'analyse LC-MS/MS des digestions enzymatiques (approche ascendante ou approche bottom-up) ont été appliqués à l'analyse des modifications structurelles de HSA (195).

L'approche descendante consiste en la séparation RP-LC de l'HSA des autres protéines plasmatiques ou d'éventuelles interférences suivies par l'ionisation des protéines dans la source d'ionisation par électrospray (ESI) fonctionnant à la pression atmosphérique puis en déterminant le rapport masse sur charge m/z par un spectromètre de masse (196).

Compte tenu du pouvoir de résolution et de la précision de masse requis pour l'analyse de l'HSA, l'analyseur hybride quadripôle-temps de vol (Q-TOF) est, aujourd'hui, l'analyseur de masse le plus utilisé pour les études structurelles sur HSA (197). Pour cela, à partir du spectre de masse caractéristique multichargé acquis au sommet du pic de l'albumine, un logiciel spécifique de retraitement permet de déduire le spectre de masse déconvolué dans lequel la masse intacte de la protéine est donnée. Le spectre de masse ESI déconvolué permet la distinction des isoformes de l'HSA sur la base de leurs poids moléculaires (PM). Cette approche a été utilisée pour la première fois avec succès pour étudier l'intégrité des protéines dans les formulations pharmaceutiques (198). L'identification de l'isoforme native est déterminée en comparant la masse théorique avec la valeur expérimentale, tandis que les isoformes de l'HSA affectées par divers PTMs sont identifiées sur la base du déplacement de masse par rapport à la forme native. De plus, la méthode convient à la détection d'isoformes résultant d'une combinaison de PTMs et à leur quantification relative à partir de l'intensité du signal du spectre de masse déconvolué. Une approche LC-MS pour l'analyse d'échantillons de plasma sans prétraitement approfondi des échantillons a été récemment développée pour éviter l'isolement fastidieux des protéines du plasma. La méthode impliquait une simple dilution et filtration d'échantillons de plasma et permet un gain de temps significatif (160).

I.4.2. Électrophorèse capillaire (EC)

L'électrophorèse capillaire (EC) est une technique de séparation la plus simple et la plus utilisée. En EC, un capillaire est entièrement rempli d'un électrolyte de fond, fournissant la capacité tampon et conduisant le courant électrique. À une extrémité du capillaire, une très petite zone de l'échantillon est introduite et le potentiel est appliqué. Chaque composant de l'échantillon migre différemment le long du capillaire et, après un certain temps, peut se séparer en zones distinctes. La vitesse de migration et la direction de chaque composant sont déterminées par la mobilité apparente de l'ion, qui est liée à la charge et à la taille de l'ion à un pH donné. Tous les composants neutres de l'échantillon migreront avec la vitesse de l'électrolyte de fond, tandis que les composants chargés pourront être séparés par EC (199).

Lorsqu'il s'agit d'analyse de protéines, cette approche séparative présente le pouvoir de résolution dépend de plusieurs paramètres, notamment la charge, la taille et la forme de l'analyte. Étant donné que la séparation électrophorétique est réalisée sur de petites différences dans la charge et la taille de l'analyte, la technique d'EC est considérée comme une technique bien adaptée à l'analyse des PTMs, de la dégradation des protéines ou des variations génétiques (200,201). Parmi les avantages de cette méthodologie, il convient de mentionner la possibilité d'effectuer l'analyse en milieu aqueux, donc dans un environnement analytique plus proche des conditions physiologiques, et sans aucune phase stationnaire,

évitant ainsi les changements de conformation des protéines et/ou la dégradation causée par l'interaction avec la phase stationnaire. L'adsorption des protéines sur la paroi capillaire en silice fondu en raison des interactions électrostatiques et hydrophobes est le principal inconvénient de cette technique. Seulement quelques chercheurs se sont intéressés à l'utilisation de la CE pour l'analyse des modifications de l'HSA. Ces méthodes de séparation et identification des isoformes de l'HSA ont été utilisées uniquement sur des préparations pharmaceutiques de l'HSA (201–203). En 1998, des chercheurs ont proposé une méthode CE permettant de séparer plusieurs isoformes de l'HSA et, même si une identification détaillée des isoformes n'a pas été effectuée, la méthode a été utilisée pour l'analyse comparative de différentes formulations pharmaceutiques de l'HSA (200). En 2013, une méthode CE permettant la séparation, l'identification et la quantification de 9 isoformes HSA (natives, oxydées, glyquées et leurs combinaisons) a été optimisée et a été adaptée pour dévoiler des différences importantes entre différentes préparations pharmaceutiques de l'HSA (203). Un dernier exemple applicatif montre que la CE a été utilisée dans une étude comprenant des analyses par SEC et par RP-LC pour la détermination de la variabilité de l'HSA glyquée entre différents lots de fournisseur (202).

I.4.3. Autres techniques

Plusieurs autres techniques ont été appliquées dans une moindre mesure pour étudier les modifications structurelles de l'HSA. La spectroscopie infrarouge à transformée de Fourier (IFTR) est une technique appropriée pour la détermination de la structure des protéines et a été utilisée pour étudier la conformation thermique de l'HSA (204).

Il existe également des techniques utilisant des réactions chimiques avec des réactifs spécifiques comme le TNBS (acide 2,4,6-trinitrobenzènesulfonique) afin récupérer des informations sur les modifications structurelles de l'HSA. Cette dernière technique permet la quantification des groupes aminés libres primaires dans les protéines. Puisqu'ils sont la cible principale de la glycation, ce test a été appliqué avec succès à l'évaluation de la glycation de l'HSA (205). Enfin, il existe un test immuno-enzymatique disponible permettant d'estimer le niveau de glycation de l'HSA (206).

I.5. ALTÉRATIONS DE L'ALBUMINE DANS LA CIRRHOSE

Des études récentes ont montré que l'albumine présente différentes modifications post-traductionnelles en cas de cirrhose, qui peuvent être mises en avant par plusieurs techniques :

I.5.1. Isoforme tronquée N-terminale & cystéinylée de HSA dans la cirrhose

Domenicali et al. (2014) ont tenté d'identifier les altérations structurelles de l'HSA chez 168 patients cirrhotiques dont l'état avait été stabilisé ou avec des complications cliniques aiguës et ont déterminé leur relation avec des complications cliniques spécifiques et la survie du patient (6). En utilisant HPLC / ESI-TOF-MS, ils ont identifié 7 isoformes de l'HSA. Chez les patients atteints de cirrhose, les taux de la forme native de HSA ont été significativement réduits au profit de certaines isoformes (isoformes cystéinylées, cystéinylées tronquées, glycosylées). Parmi ces isoformes, les résultats ont indiqué que la forme inchangée de l'HSA et l'isoforme HSA cystéinylée étaient des bons prédicteurs de la survie à 1 an, avec une plus grande capacité pronostique que la concentration totale de l'HSA.

I.5.2. Albumine modifiée par l'ischémie dans la cirrhose

La méthode de détection de l'albumine modifiée par ischémie (IMA) a été développée et homologuée pour des applications cliniques de routine en tant que biomarqueur cardiaque dans l'Union Européenne et aux États-Unis. Le test IMA mesure la capacité de liaison au cobalt de l'HSA. Jalan et al. (2009) ont démontré que la capacité fonctionnelle de l'HSA est altérée chez les patients atteints de cirrhose. Ils ont montré que le rapport IMA / Albumine (IMAR) était significativement plus élevé dans l'insuffisance hépatique chronique aiguë que chez les patients sains ou cirrhotiques, et une analyse de Kaplan-Meier a confirmé une mortalité accrue dans le groupe avec un IMAR $> 0,02$ (7). Ainsi, IMAR est corrélé avec la gravité de la maladie et peut avoir un usage pronostique dans l'insuffisance hépatique chronique aiguë.

I.5.3. Formes dimériques de HSA dans la cirrhose

Il a été rapporté que le rapport dimère / monomère de l'HSA était également augmenté dans le plasma obtenu chez les patients cirrhotiques comparé à celui des sujets sains, suggérant que le rapport dimère / monomère pourrait être utile comme biomarqueur de la maladie hépatique (8). La forme dimère de l'HSA a été caractérisée par la technique ESI-TOF et MALDI-TOF-MS. Le site de dimérisation s'est révélé être au niveau de la Cys-34 et comprend un pont disulfure entre deux molécules HSA.

I.5.4. État redox de la Cys-34 dans la cirrhose

Il a été montré qu'une augmentation de la sévérité de la maladie (augmentation du score Child-Pugh) était associée à une augmentation de la fraction HNA2, suggérant l'existence d'une association entre la progression de la maladie hépatique chronique et le stress oxydatif (139). La fraction HNA2 a été caractérisée par la technique ESI-TOF-MS chez 139 patients atteints d'une maladie hépatique chronique (cirrhose).

I.5.5. Capacité de liaison des ligands et capacités antioxydantes de l'HSA dans la cirrhose

Il a été signalé des altérations marquées de l'état redox de l'HSA et une altération significative de la capacité de liaison à l'HSA chez les patients atteints de cirrhose décompensée (9). Une augmentation de HNA1 ou de HNA2 accompagnée d'une diminution de HMA et une altération de la liaison de la dansylsarcosine ont été observées chez ces patients. O'Brien et al. (2014) ont rapporté des preuves montrant que la prostaglandine E2 entraîne une immunosuppression associée à la cirrhose (207). Fait important, ils ont démontré que les taux réduits de l'HSA dans la cirrhose contribuaient à l'immunosuppression et augmentaient le risque d'infection en augmentant la fraction non liée de la prostaglandine E2.

Partie II. TRAVAUX SCIENTIFIQUES

II.1. Hypothèses et objectifs

Les lésions hépatiques sont régies par des phénomènes complexes, englobant des perturbations cellulaires, moléculaires, immunitaires et hormonales. Pour les détecter, de nombreux biomarqueurs sériques ont été développés, reflétant des troubles tels que le stress oxydatif, l'inflammation et l'apoptose des cellules hépatiques. Cependant, ces biomarqueurs sériques dits « directs » ont des limites, en particulier aux premiers stades des lésions. Ainsi, ils sont souvent combinés avec d'autres tests et algorithmes pour améliorer le diagnostic et le pronostic de l'atteinte hépatique. Cependant, ces tests combinés ne sont pas toujours précis. D'autres biomarqueurs basés sur diverses molécules (collagènes, micro-ARNs) ont été explorés, mais n'ont pas encore montré leur efficacité pour détecter les lésions précoces du foie. Il est primordial de diagnostiquer le plus tôt ces lésions pour une meilleure prise en charge des patients. Des biomarqueurs non ou moins invasifs, simples, sensibles et spécifiques pour la détection précoce des dysfonctionnements hépatiques restent donc nécessaires. L'albumine sérique humaine (HSA), produite uniquement par le foie, pourrait être un indicateur d'un dysfonctionnement hépatique, non seulement par sa quantité, mais aussi par sa qualité.

Ainsi, cette thèse propose que les modifications post-traductionnelles (PTMs) de l'HSA pourraient survenir dès les premiers stades des lésions du foie, affectant la structure et la fonction de l'HSA et pouvant aggraver les lésions. Ces changements pourraient également prédire des applications cliniques multiples. Par exemple, l'HSA pourrait jouer un rôle crucial dans le domaine de la transplantation. Les PTMs de l'HSA pourraient être utilisées comme des indicateurs précoces de rejet de greffe. Dans le contexte de la transplantation hépatique, où le temps est essentiel, la détection précoce des signes de rejet pourrait améliorer considérablement les taux de survie et les résultats pour les patients. Aussi, l'impact des médicaments sur le foie est une préoccupation majeure dans la recherche et développement pharmaceutique. Les PTMs de l'HSA pourraient être utilisées comme un biomarqueur prédictif des DILI (Drug-Induced Liver Injury) pour identifier les lésions hépatiques induites par les médicaments à un stade précoce, permettant ainsi une intervention rapide dans le processus de développement d'un médicament. Enfin, en dehors de la détection, les PTMs de l'HSA pourrait servir d'outil pronostique, aidant les cliniciens à prévoir la progression de la maladie et à adapter le traitement en conséquence.

Cette thèse s'appuie sur plusieurs hypothèses complémentaires. Tout d'abord, nous avançons que les PTMs de l'HSA pourraient changer sa conformation et sa capacité à se lier à divers ligands. Cette modification pourrait être détectée grâce à un test simple et rapide

simple, nommé SEB Test (Serum Enhanced Binding Test). Ce test a été breveté par notre équipe en 2019.

Nous posons également l'hypothèse que ces PTMs de l'HSA apparaissent dès les premiers signes de lésions hépatiques, offrant un moyen de diagnostic plus précoce que les méthodes traditionnelles. De plus, l'émergence d'isoformes spécifiques de l'HSA pourrait être directement liée aux dommages des cellules hépatiques, servant d'outil pour évaluer et distinguer les patients à risque. Enfin, chaque type de lésion hépatique pourrait avoir une "signature" spécifique de PTMs de l'albumine, menant à des profils distincts d'isoformes.

L'ambition principale de cette thèse est de prouver que des troubles hépatiques avancés, tels que la fibrose et la cirrhose, pourraient être détectés tôt par l'observation de modifications chimiques et structurelles de l'HSA. L'objectif est de corrélérer ces changements de l'HSA à divers états pathologiques du foie, de comprendre les mécanismes moléculaires derrière ces modifications et d'anticiper leur impact sur la progression de la maladie. Cela facilitera une évaluation plus exacte des patients atteints de maladies hépatiques, y compris après une transplantation. Les objectifs secondaires visent à déchiffrer le moment, la raison et la manière dont ces modifications de l'HSA surviennent, ainsi que les conditions spécifiques de leur apparition.

Pour étudier et valider ce nouveau candidat biomarqueur de diagnostic des atteintes précoces du foie, nous avons d'abord optimisé et appliqué le SEB Test permettant d'identifier et d'évaluer les modifications structurales de l'albumine par spectrométrie de masse à plasma à couplage inductif (ICP-MS) de façon simple et rapide. En parallèle, nous avons développé une méthode analytique en chromatographie en haute résolution (LC-QTOF) en s'inspirant de la méthode de Naldi et *al.* pour évaluer et comprendre l'évolution de profils des modifications chimiques de l'albumine par l'identification et la quantification d'isoformes de l'albumine. Une approche expérimentale a été développée par différents mécanismes des modèles animaux d'atteintes hépatiques afin d'analyser les modifications chimiques et structurelles détectables en fonction de l'étiologie et de la sévérité des lésions. Notre hypothèse a été testée en utilisant des modèles d'insuffisances hépatocellulaires provoquées chez des rats soit par l'administration de toxiques (éthanol (EtOH), tétrachlorure de carbone (CCl₄) ou paracétamol (APAP)) soit de façon invasive par la ligature du canal biliaire. En parallèle, une approche clinique a été réalisée sur des échantillons de plasma obtenus chez des patients témoins et des patients atteints d'hépatopathies chroniques.

II.2. Travaux scientifiques

II.2.1. Serum Enhanced Binding Test (SEB Test)

II.2.1.1. Contexte

Les PTMs de l'HSA ont récemment suscité un intérêt en tant que biomarqueurs des maladies hépatiques avancées (4,6,8,10,145,151). Elles se traduisent par des modifications des propriétés de liaison de l'albumine (7). Cet aspect a été exploité par Bar-Or et *al.*, qui proposa un test de liaison albumine-cobalt (ACB), également connu sous le nom de test d'albumine modifiée par l'ischémie ou Ishemia-Modified Albumin (IMA) (208). Le test IMA repose sur l'hypothèse selon laquelle l'ischémie cardiaque est associée à des modifications structurelles de l'albumine qui, à leur tour, diminuent la liaison au cobalt. Pour résumer, le test IMA est réalisé en ajoutant du CoCl_2 et du dithiothréitol au sérum, suivi d'une mesure colorimétrique du complexe (Co-libre)-dithiothréitol à 470 nm. Bien qu'il existe une certaine controverse sur l'origine de la capacité réduite de l'HSA à lier le cobalt, une corrélation entre les fonctions de liaison de l'albumine et la gravité de la cirrhose a été observée à l'aide du même test (209). Il est important de noter que dans ces applications, étant donné que l'albumine représente 60 % de protéines sériques, on suppose que toute diminution significative de la capacité de liaison de l'HSA pour un ligand ayant une affinité élevée est principalement due à une modification de son site de liaison à l'albumine. Étant donné que certaines PTMs modifient la structure de l'HSA, nous supposons que les changements des propriétés de liaison de l'HSA peuvent être associées aux PTMs et que cela peut être indirectement révélé en étudiant la capacité de liaison de l'HSA pour différents ligands. En effet, il a été rapporté que chacun des ligands suivants possède un site de liaison spécifique sur HSA : l'or (Au) se lie préférentiellement à Cys34 ; le cuivre (Cu) au site de liaison N-terminal, le cadmium (Cd) au site de liaison multimétallique, la L-thyroxine aux 4 sites de liaison spécifiques (Tr1-Tr4), et la dansylsarcosine au site médicamenteux 3 ou au site de liaison du diazépam (125). Sur ces bases, nos travaux consistaient (1) à développer un test fonctionnel de capacité de liaison de l'albumine ou SEB Test (Serum Enhanced Binding Test) en utilisant tous les ligands mentionnés ci-dessus, comme un biomarqueur précoce des dysfonctions hépatiques ; (2) à alimenter la preuve du concept du SEB Test par la mise en pratique et l'optimisation du test. Nous avons mis au point le SEB Test en analysant des échantillons de sérum de patients atteints de différentes maladies du foie (cirrhose diagnostiquée, patients atteints de NASH sans cirrhose). Des expérimentations animales ont été menées également pour explorer la précocité des modifications de l'HSA au cours des lésions hépatiques.

II.2.1.2. Brevet 1: Methods and kits for detecting liver dysfunction in a subject

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METHODS AND KITS FOR DETECTING LIVER DYSFUNCTION IN A SUBJECT

FIELD OF THE INVENTION:

5 The present relates to the methods and kits for detecting liver dysfunction in a subject, and uses thereof for diagnostic purposes.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION:

Most chronic liver diseases are notoriously asymptomatic, until cirrhosis with clinical decompensation occurs [1, 2]. Prevention of cirrhosis and the use of early diagnosis strategies, 10 before and once it develops, are vital to maintain patients in a symptom-free state and to delay decompensation, and thus improve the outcome. This is particularly critical in liver transplanted patients. In early cirrhosis, conventional imaging and laboratory tests, often combined in scores, can lead to false-negative diagnosis [2]. Despite their lack of sensitivity and specificity, these tests are routinely used to explore the integrity of hepatocytes (aspartate transaminase and 15 alanine transaminase), as well as the biliary (alkaline phosphatase and γ -glutamyltransferase) and synthesis (ammonia, prothrombin time and albumin) functions.

Since Human serum albumin (HAS) is exclusively synthesized and matured in the liver, not only its quantity (60% of all blood proteins normally) but also its quality may reflect liver dysfunction. Indeed, albumin exhibits a peculiar 3D structure, with multiple binding sites for 20 multiple endogenous and exogenous ligands (it acts as the primary scavenger in blood).

Albumin undergoes several post-translational modifications in hepatocytes, including: acetylation, cysteinylolation, homocysteinylation, glutathionylation, glycosylation, glycation, nitrosylation, nitration, phosphorylation and oxidation. The clinical relevance of some of these modifications has been recently investigated in advanced liver diseases (1–4)[1–4]. Such 25 modifications in HSA structure translate in modifications of its conformation and binding properties [5]. This aspect has been exploited by Bar-Or et al. in cardiac ischemia, who proposed the albumin cobalt binding test (ACB) also known as the Ischemia Modified Albumin test (IMA) [6]. The IMA test is based on the fact that cardiac ischemia is associated with modifications in the structure of albumin and, thus, in the capacity of a specific binding site to 30 bind cobalt. Since the approval of the IMA as a biomarker of cardiac ischemia by the FDA (Regulation number: 862.1215; <http://www.accessdata.fda.gov>), this test has also been investigated in liver diseases showing correlation with the severity of cirrhosis [7]. Briefly, the IMA test is performed by adding CoCl₂ and dithiothreitol to serum, followed by a colorimetric

measurement of the (free-Co)-dithiothreitol complex at 470 nm. However, there still a need for additional biomarker of liver dysfunction.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION:

The present relates to the methods and kits for detecting liver dysfunction in a subject,
5 and uses thereof for diagnostic purposes. In particular, the present invention is defined by the claims.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION:

The first inventors' hypothesis is that all the principal HSA modifications, due to a diversity of liver diseases, can be indirectly revealed by investigating the binding capacity for
10 different ligands. It was reported that each of the following ligands has a specific binding site on HSA: (i) gold (Au) binds preferentially to Cys34; (ii) copper (Cu) to the N-terminal binding site, (iii) cadmium (Cd) to the multi-metal binding site, (iv) L-thyroxine has 4 specific binding sites (Tr1 – Tr4), and (v) dansylsarcosine was reported to bind to drug site 3 or to the diazepam-binding site [8]. Their second hypothesis is that modifications of the HSA conformation and
15 binding properties appear at early stages of liver cell injuries, since HSA is exclusively synthesized and matured in hepatocytes.

Therefore, the inventors believe that the most frequent HSA structural modifications can be detected by measuring the free (unbound) ligands after spiking patient serum with solutions containing the abovementioned ligands. This is possible since Cu, Au and Cd cover
20 the principal HSA binding sites, while dansylsarcosine and L-thyroxine could reflect its conformational modifications since their binding sites are located in the cavities of the protein. Thereafter, by revealing HSA modifications, liver dysfunction may be detected earlier than with conventional imaging or laboratory tests. Interestingly, all the cited ligands can be directly measured using a single method such as inductively coupled plasma mass spectrometry (ICP-
25 MS) or inductively coupled plasma optical emission spectrometry (ICP-OES).

Based on these premises, the inventors present here the serum enhanced binding (SEB) test, a simple laboratory test of liver dysfunctions. The SEB test was developed by analyzing serum samples from patients with different liver diseases (diagnosed cirrhosis, patients with NASH without cirrhosis and liver transplant patients...). Animal experimentations were also
30 conducted to explore the precocity of HSA modifications in the course of chronic liver dysfunction.

Accordingly, the present invention relates to a method for determining whether a subject suffers or is at risk of suffering from a liver dysfunction comprising i) determining the binding capacity of serum albumin to at least one ligand, ii) comparing the binding capacity determined

at step i) with a predetermined reference value, wherein detecting difference between the binding capacity determined at step i) and the predetermined reference value indicates whether the subject suffers or is at risk of suffering from a liver dysfunction

As used herein, the term "subject" as used herein refers to any mammal organism. The
 5 term subject includes, but is not limited to, humans, nonhuman primates such as chimpanzees and other apes and monkey species; farm animals such as cattle, sheep, pigs, goats and horses; domestic mammals such as dogs and cats; laboratory animals including rodents such as mice, rats and guinea pigs, and the like. The term does not denote a particular age or sex. Thus, adult and newborn subjects, as well as fetuses, whether male or female, are intended to be covered

10 As used herein, the term "liver dysfunction" "or "hepatic dysfunction" refers to a state in which the liver function is decreased relative to a normal state. Hepatic dysfunction is characteristic of liver diseases. A number of acute or chronic pathological conditions leads to liver dysfunction. These include, but are not limited to liver abscess, liver cancer, either primary or metastatic, cirrhosis, such as cirrhosis caused by the alcohol consumption or primary biliary
 15 cirrhosis, amebic liver abscess, autoimmune hepatitis, biliary atresia, coccidioidomycosis disseminated, portal hypertension hepatic infections (such as hepatitis A virus, hepatitis B virus, hepatitis C virus, hepatitis D virus, or hepatitis E virus), hemochromatosis, hepatocellular carcinoma, pyogenic liver abscess, Reye's syndrome, sclerosing cholangitis, Wilson's disease, drug induced hepatotoxicity, or fulminant or acute liver failure. In some embodiments, the liver
 20 is a non-alcoholic fatty liver disease. As used herein, the term "non-alcoholic fatty liver disease" has its general meaning in the art and is intended to refer to the spectrum of disorders resulting from an accumulation of fat in liver cells in individuals with no history of excessive alcohol consumption. In the mildest form, NAFLD refers to hepatic steatosis. The term NAFLD is also intended to encompass the more severe and advanced form non-alcoholic steatohepatitis
 25 (NASH), cirrhosis, hepatocellular carcinoma, and virus- induced (e.g., HIV, hepatitis) fatty liver disease. The term "NASH", as used herein, collectively refers to the state where the liver develops a hepatic disorder (e.g., inflammation, ballooning, fibrosis, cirrhosis, or cancer), or the state where the liver may induce such a pathological condition, and "NASH" is distinguished from "simple steatosis"; i.e., a condition in which fat is simply accumulated in
 30 the liver, and which does not progress to another hepatic-disorder-developing condition.

Accordingly, the method of the present invention is particularly suitable for determining whether a subject has or is at risk of having a liver disease.

As used herein, the term "risk" in the context of the present invention, relates to the probability that an event will occur over a specific time period and can mean a subject's

"absolute" risk or "relative" risk. Absolute risk can be measured with reference to either actual observation post-measurement for the relevant time cohort, or with reference to index values developed from statistically valid historical cohorts that have been followed for the relevant time period. Relative risk refers to the ratio of absolute risks of a subject compared either to the

5 absolute risks of low risk cohorts or an average population risk, which can vary by how clinical risk factors are assessed. Odds ratios, the proportion of positive events to negative events for a given test result, are also commonly used (odds are according to the formula $p/(1-p)$ where p is the probability of event and $(1-p)$ is the probability of no event) to no- conversion. "Risk evaluation," or "evaluation of risk" in the context of the present invention encompasses making

10 a prediction of the probability, odds, or likelihood that an event or disease state may occur, the rate of occurrence of the event or conversion from one disease state to another. Risk evaluation can also comprise prediction of future clinical parameters, traditional laboratory risk factor values, or other indices of relapse, either in absolute or relative terms in reference to a previously measured population. The methods of the present invention may be used to make

15 continuous or categorical measurements of the risk of conversion, thus diagnosing and defining the risk spectrum of a category of subjects defined as being at risk of conversion. In the categorical scenario, the invention can be used to discriminate between normal and other subject cohorts at higher risk. In some embodiments, the present invention may be used so as to discriminate those at risk from normal.

20 In some embodiments, the method of diagnosing described herein is applied to a subject who presents symptoms of liver dysfunction without having undergone the routine screening to rule out all possible causes for liver dysfunction. The methods described herein can be part of the routine set of tests performed on a subject who presents symptoms of liver dysfunction such as jaundice, abdominal pain and swelling, swelling in the legs and ankles, itchy skin, dark

25 urine color, pale stool color, bloody color stool, tar-colored stool, chronic fatigue, nausea or vomiting, loss of appetite, tendency to bruise easily... The method of the present invention can be carried out in addition of other diagnostic tools that include ultrasound evaluation (e.g. elastography), biopsy and/or quantification of at least one further biomarkers such as levels of blood AST, ALT, ALP, TTT, ZTT, total bilirubin, total protein, albumin, lactate

30 dehydrogenase, choline esterase and the like.

In some embodiments, the subject underwent a liver transplantation. As used herein, the term "liver transplantation" has the common meaning in the art and includes partial and whole liver transplantation in which a liver of a donor is partially or wholly resected and partially or wholly transplanted into a recipient. Partial liver transplantation is classified by operation mode

into orthotopic partial liver transplantation, heterotopic partial liver transplantation, and the like, and the present invention can be applied to any of them. In partial liver transplantation, a liver transplant or a partial liver transplant from a donor corresponding to about 30-50% of the normal liver volume of a recipient is typically transplanted as a graft into the recipient whose 5 liver has been wholly resected.

Accordingly, the present invention is particularly suitable for determining whether a liver transplant subject has or is at risk of having transplant rejection. The term “transplant rejection” as used herein is defined as functional and structural deterioration of the organ due to an active immune response expressed by the recipient, and independent of non-immunologic 10 causes of organ dysfunction. The transplant rejection may be acute or chronic. The term “acute rejection” as used herein refers to a rejection of the transplanted organ developing after the first 5-60 post-transplant days. It is generally a manifestation of cell-mediated immune injury. It is believed that both delayed hypersensitivity and cytotoxicity mechanisms are involved. The 15 immune injury is directed against HLA, and possibly other cell-specific antigens expressed by the tubular epithelium and vascular endothelium. The term “chronic rejection” as used herein refers to a rejection of the transplanted organ developing after the first 30-120 post-transplant days. The term “chronic rejection” also refers to a consequence of combined immunological injury (e.g. chronic rejection) and non-immunological damage (e.g. hypertensive nephrosclerosis, or nephrotoxicity of immunosuppressants like cyclosporine A), taking place 20 month or years after transplantation and ultimately leading to fibrosis and sclerosis of the allograft, associated with progressive loss of kidney function.

In some embodiments, the method of the present invention is particularly suitable for determining whether a subject suffering from a liver disease achieves a response to a therapy. The method is thus particularly suitable for discriminating responder from non-responder. As 25 used herein the term “responder” in the context of the present disclosure refers to a subject that will achieve a response, i.e. a subject who is under remission and more particularly a subject who does not suffer from liver dysfunction. A non-responder subject includes subjects for whom the disease does not show reduction or improvement after the treatment (e.g. the liver dysfunction remains stable or decreases). According to the present invention, the treatment 30 consists in any method or drug that could be suitable for the treatment of liver dysfunction. Some liver problems can be treated with lifestyle modifications, such as stopping alcohol use or losing weight, typically as part of a medical program that includes careful monitoring of liver function. Each liver disease will have its own specific treatment regimen. For example, hepatitis A requires supportive care to maintain hydration while the body's immune system fights and

resolves the infection. Patients with gallstones may require surgery to remove the gallbladder. Other diseases may need long-term medical care to control and minimize the consequences of their disease. In patients with cirrhosis and end-stage liver disease, medications may be required to control the amount of protein absorbed in the diet. Other examples include operations required to treat portal hypertension.

In some embodiments, when the liver transplant patient is at risk of transplant rejection, the treatment may consist in administering to the patient a therapeutically effective amount of an immunosuppressive treatment. As used herein, the term "immunosuppressive treatment" refers to any substance capable of producing an immunosuppressive effect, e.g., the prevention or diminution of the immune response and in particular the prevention or diminution of the production of Ig. Immunosuppressive drugs include, without limitation thiopurine drugs such as azathioprine (AZA) and metabolites thereof; nucleoside triphosphate inhibitors such as mycophenolic acid (Cellcept) and its derivative (Myfortic); derivatives thereof; prodrugs thereof; and combinations thereof. Other examples include but are not limited to 6-mercaptopurine ("6-MP"), cyclophosphamide, mycophenolate, prednisolone, sirolimus, dexamethasone, rapamycin, FK506, mizoribine, azothioprine and tacrolimus.

The method of the present invention is particularly suitable for monitoring the efficiency of a therapy. Typically a decrease of binding capacity (e.g. between measures performed at different time intervals) indicates that subject does not achieve a response with the therapy. Conversely an increase of binding capacity (e.g. between measures performed at different time intervals) indicates that subject achieves a response with the therapy.

The method of the present is also particularly suitable for evaluating the effects of drugs under development in producing liver injury during a preclinical or clinical studies.

As used herein, the term "serum albumin" has its general meaning in the art and refers to a globular protein that in humans is encoded by the *ALB* gene. Serum albumin is the most abundant plasma protein in mammals. Serum albumin is essential for maintaining the oncotic pressure needed for proper distribution of body fluids between intravascular compartments and body tissues. It also acts as a plasma carrier by non-specifically binding several hydrophobic steroid hormones and as a transport protein for hemin and fatty acids. Furthermore, serum albumin has a very long half-life of about 19 days, and its metabolism is well-known. Albumin has also been widely used as a protein stabilizer in commercial pharmaceuticals (Sangastino et al. (2012), Blood, 120(12) 2405-2411). An exemplary amino acid sequence for human serum albumin (HSA) is represented by SEQ D NO:1 (UniProtKB/Swiss-Prot primary accession number P02768).

SEQ ID NO:1 >sp|P02768|ALBU_HUMAN Serum albumin OS=Homo sapiens
 OX=9606 GN=ALB PE=1 SV=2
 MKWVTFISLLFLFSSAYSRGVRRDAHKSEVAHRFKDLGEENFKALVLIAFAQYLQQCPF
 EDHVKLVNEVTEFAKTCVADESAENCDSLHTLFGDKLCTVATLRETYGEMADCCAKQEP
 5 ERNECFLQHKDDNPNLPRIVRPEVDVMCTAFHDNEETFLKKYLYEIAARRHPFYAPELLF
 FAKRYKAATFECQAADKAACLLPKLDELDEKGAKASSAKQRLKCASTLQKFGERAFKAWAV
 ARLSQRFPKAFAEVSKLVITDLTKVHTECCHGDLLCADDRADLAKYICENQDSISSKLK
 ECCEKPLLEKSHCIAEVENDEMPADLPSLAADFVESDKVCKNYAEAKDVFLGMFLYEYAR
 RHPDYSVVLRLAKTYETTLEKCCAADPHECYAKVFDFKPLVEEPQNLIKQNCELFE
 10 QLGEYKFQNALLVRYTKKVEQVSTPTLVEVSRNLGKVGSKCKHPEAKRMPCAEDYLSVV
 LNQLCVLHEKTPVSDRVTKCCTESLVNRRPCFSALEVDETYVPKEFNAETFTFHADICTL
 SEKERQIKKQTALVELVKHKPKATKEQLKAVMDDFAAFVEKCCKADDKETCFAEEGKKLV
 AASQAALGL

As used herein, the term "ligand" refers to any molecule that has a specific binding site
 15 on albumin. In some embodiments, the ligand is selected from the group consisting of gold
 (Au), copper (Cu), cadmium (cd), L-thyroxine and dansylsarcosine.

As used herein, the term "binding capacity" refers to the amount of the ligand that the serum albumin can bind under equilibrium conditions if every available binding site on the protein is utilized.

20 Typically, the method of the present invention is carried out as follows. In a first step a serum sample obtained from the subject is prepared. As used herein, the term "serum sample" relates to a sample wherein a blood sample is tapped into a dry-glass, left to coagulate at room temperature, and after which they are centrifuged. Then the serum sample is exposed to a predetermined amount of the ligand for a time sufficient for allowing the serum albumin to bind
 25 to said ligand. In some embodiments, the time of exposure can be varied for about 1, 5 or 10 seconds, or about 1, 2, 3, 5, 10, 20 or 30 minutes, or about 1, 2, 3 or 5 hours. In a third step, the amount of the free (unbound) ligand is then measured in the sample, wherein said measure indicates the binding capacity of the serum albumin. Optionally a ratio between the free amount and the concentration of the serum albumin is calculated, wherein said ratio indicates the
 30 binding capacity of the serum albumin. Optionally, the protein contained in the sample are separated from the sample before measuring the amount of the free ligand. Typically said separation may consist in a centrifugation.

In some embodiments, the binding capacity for 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, or 6 ligands is measured.

Accordingly, 1, 2, 3, 4, or serum samples are prepared separately and each exposed to a
 35 particular amount of the corresponding ligand. In some embodiments, 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5 container (e.g. tubes) containing an amount of the corresponding ligand are prepared. The sample serum is then added to the container and finally after separating the proteins contained in the sample typically by a centrifugation the amount of the free ligand is measured in the resting sample.

In some embodiments, the binding capacity (e.g. the amount of the free ligand) is
 40 determined by mass spectrometry.

As used herein, the term “mass spectrometry” or “MS” refers to an analytical technique to identify compounds by their mass. MS refers to methods of filtering, detecting, and measuring ions based on their m/z. MS technology generally includes (1) ionizing the compounds to form charged species (e.g., ions); and (2) detecting the molecular weight of the ions and calculating their m/z. The compounds may be ionized and detected by any suitable means. A “mass spectrometer” generally includes an ionizer and an ion detector. In general, one or more molecules of interest are ionized, and the ions are subsequently introduced into a mass spectrographic instrument where, due to a combination of magnetic and electric fields, the ions follow a path in space that is dependent upon mass (“m”) and charge (“z”). See, e.g., U.S. Pat. No. 6,204,500, entitled “Mass Spectrometry From Surfaces;” U.S. Pat. No. 6,107,623, entitled “Methods and Apparatus for Tandem Mass Spectrometry;” U.S. Pat. No. 6,268,144, entitled “DNA Diagnostics Based On Mass Spectrometry;” U.S. Pat. No. 6,124,137, entitled “Surface-Enhanced Photolabile Attachment And Release For Desorption And Detection Of Analytes;” Wright et al., Prostate Cancer and Prostatic Diseases 2:264-76 (1999); and Merchant and Weinberger, Electrophoresis 21:1164-67 (2000).

Typically the serum samples are processed to obtain preparations that are suitable for analysis by mass spectrometry. Such purification will usually include chromatography, such as liquid chromatography or capillary electrophoresis, and may also often involve an additional purification procedure that is performed prior to chromatography. Various procedures may be used for this purpose depending on the type of sample or the type of chromatography. Examples include filtration, centrifugation, combinations thereof and the like. The pH of the serum sample may then be adjusted. The sample may be purified with a filtration. The filtrate from this filtration can then be purified by liquid chromatography and subsequently subjected to mass spectrometry analysis. Various methods have been described involving the use of high performance liquid chromatography (HPLC) for sample clean-up prior to mass spectrometry analysis. See, e.g., Taylor et al., Therapeutic Drug Monitoring 22:608-12 (2000) (manual precipitation of blood samples, followed by manual C18 solid phase extraction, injection into an HPLC for chromatography on a C18 analytical column, and MS/MS analysis); and Salm et al., Clin. Therapeutics 22 Supl. B:B71-B85 (2000). Commercially available HPLC columns include, but are not limited to, polar, ion exchange (both cation and anion), hydrophobic interaction, phenyl, C-2, C-8, C-18, and polar coating on porous polymer columns. During chromatography, the separation of materials is effected by variables such as choice of eluent (also known as a “mobile phase”), choice of gradient elution and the gradient conditions, temperature, etc.

In some embodiments, the ligands are ionized by any method known to the skilled artisan. Mass spectrometry is performed using a mass spectrometer, which includes an ion source for ionizing the fractionated sample and creating charged molecules for further analysis. Ionization sources used in various MS techniques include, but are not limited to, electron ionization, chemical ionization, electrospray ionization (ESI), photon ionization, atmospheric pressure chemical ionization (APCI), photoionization, atmospheric pressure photoionization (APPI), fast atom bombardment (FAB)/liquid secondary ionization (LSIMS), matrix assisted laser desorption ionization (MALDI), field ionization, field desorption, thermospray/plasmaspray ionization, surface enhanced laser desorption ionization (SELDI), inductively coupled plasma (ICP) and particle beam ionization. The skilled artisan will understand that the choice of ionization method may be determined based on the analyte to be measured, type of sample, the type of detector, the choice of positive versus negative mode, etc. After the sample has been ionized, the positively charged ions thereby created may be analyzed to determine m/z. Suitable analyzers for determining m/z include quadrupole analyzers, ion trap analyzers, and time-of-flight analyzers. The ions may be detected using one of several detection modes. For example, only selected ions may be detected using a selective ion monitoring mode (SIM), or alternatively, multiple ions may be detected using a scanning mode, e.g., multiple reaction monitoring (MRM) or selected reaction monitoring (SRM). One may enhance the resolution of the MS technique by employing “tandem mass spectrometry,” or “MS/MS.” In this technique, a precursor ion (also called a parent ion) generated from a molecule of interest can be filtered in an MS instrument, and the precursor ion subsequently fragmented to yield one or more fragment ions (also called daughter ions or product ions) that are then analyzed in a second MS procedure. By careful selection of precursor ions, only ions produced by certain analytes are passed to the fragmentation chamber, where collision with atoms of an inert gas produce the fragment ions. Because both the precursor and fragment ions are produced in a reproducible fashion under a given set of ionization/fragmentation conditions, the MS/MS technique may provide an extremely powerful analytical tool. For example, the combination of filtration/fragmentation may be used to eliminate interfering substances, and may be particularly useful in complex samples, such as biological samples. Additionally, recent advances in technology, such as matrix-assisted laser desorption ionization coupled with time-of-flight analyzers (“MALDI-TOF”) permit the analysis of analytes at femtomole levels in very short ion pulses. Mass spectrometers that combine time-of-flight analyzers with tandem MS are also well known to the artisan. Additionally, multiple mass spectrometry steps may be

combined in methods known as “MS/MS”. Various other combinations may be employed, such as MS/MS/TOF, MALDI/MS/MS/TOF, or SELDI/MS/MS/TOF mass spectrometry.

In some embodiments, since most of the ligands are metals, ICP-MS may be preferred. Inductively coupled plasma mass spectrometry (ICP-MS) is a type of mass spectrometry which 5 is capable of detecting metals and several non-metals at concentrations as low as one part in 10^{15} (part per quadrillion, ppq) on non-interfered low-background isotopes. This is achieved by ionizing the sample with inductively coupled plasma and then using a mass spectrometer to separate and quantify those ions. Inductively coupled plasma optical emission spectrometry (ICP-OES), is an analytical technique used for the detection of chemical elements. It is a type 10 of emission spectroscopy that uses the inductively coupled plasma to produce excited atoms and ions that emit electromagnetic radiation at wavelengths characteristic of a particular element. It is a flame technique with a flame temperature in a range from 6000 to 10000 K. The intensity of this emission is indicative of the concentration of the element within the sample.

One or more steps of the methods may be performed using automated machines. In some 15 embodiments, one or more purification steps are performed on-line, and more preferably all of the LC purification and mass spectrometry steps may be performed in an on-line fashion.

Typically, the predetermined reference value is a threshold value or a cut-off value, which can be determined experimentally, empirically, or theoretically. A threshold value can also be arbitrarily selected based upon the existing experimental and/or clinical conditions, as 20 would be recognized by a person of ordinary skilled in the art. For example, retrospective measurement of the binding capacity in properly banked historical samples may be used in establishing the predetermined reference value. The threshold value has to be determined in order to obtain the optimal sensitivity and specificity according to the function of the test and the benefit/risk balance (clinical consequences of false positive and false negative). Typically, 25 the optimal sensitivity and specificity (and so the threshold value) can be determined using a Receiver Operating Characteristic (ROC) curve based on experimental data. For example, after determining the binding capacity in a group of reference, one can use algorithmic analysis for the statistic treatment of the expression levels determined in samples to be tested, and thus obtain a classification standard having significance for sample classification. The full name of 30 ROC curve is receiver operator characteristic curve, which is also known as receiver operation characteristic curve. It is mainly used for clinical biochemical diagnostic tests. ROC curve is a comprehensive indicator that reflects the continuous variables of true positive rate (sensitivity) and false positive rate (1-specificity). It reveals the relationship between sensitivity and specificity with the image composition method. A series of different cut-off values (thresholds

or critical values, boundary values between normal and abnormal results of diagnostic test) are set as continuous variables to calculate a series of sensitivity and specificity values. Then sensitivity is used as the vertical coordinate and specificity is used as the horizontal coordinate to draw a curve. The higher the area under the curve (AUC), the higher the accuracy of diagnosis. On the ROC curve, the point closest to the far upper left of the coordinate diagram is a critical point having both high sensitivity and high specificity values. The AUC value of the ROC curve is between 1.0 and 0.5. When $AUC > 0.5$, the diagnostic result gets better and better as AUC approaches 1. When AUC is between 0.5 and 0.7, the accuracy is low. When AUC is between 0.7 and 0.9, the accuracy is moderate. When AUC is higher than 0.9, the accuracy is high. This algorithmic method is preferably done with a computer. Existing software or systems in the art may be used for the drawing of the ROC curve, such as: MedCalc 9.2.0.1 medical statistical software, SPSS 9.0, ROCPOWER.SAS, DESIGNROC.FOR, MULTIREADER POWER.SAS, CREATE-ROC.SAS, GB STAT VI0.0 (Dynamic Microsystems, Inc. Silver Spring, Md., USA), etc.

15 In some embodiments, a score which is a composite of the measured binding capacities is determined and compared to a reference value wherein a difference between said score and said reference value indicates whether the subject suffers or is at risk of suffering from a liver dysfunction.

In some embodiments, the method of the invention comprises the use of a classification algorithm typically selected from Linear Discriminant Analysis (LDA), Topological Data Analysis (TDA), Neural Networks, Support Vector Machine (SVM) algorithm and Random Forests algorithm (RF). As used herein, the term "classification algorithm" has its general meaning in the art and refers to classification and regression tree methods and multivariate classification well known in the art such as described in US 8,126,690; WO2008/156617. Thus, 20 in some embodiments, the method of the present invention comprises a) measuring a plurality of binding capacity (i.e. 2, 3, 4 or 5); b) implementing a classification algorithm on data comprising the measured binding capacities so as to obtain an algorithm output; c) determining the probability that the subject suffers from a liver dysfunction. The algorithm of the present invention can be performed by one or more programmable processors executing one or more 25 computer programs to perform functions by operating on input data and generating output. The algorithm can also be performed by, and apparatus can also be implemented as, special purpose logic circuitry, e.g., an FPGA (field programmable gate array) or an ASIC (application-specific integrated circuit). Processors suitable for the execution of a computer program include, by way of example, both general and special purpose microprocessors, and any one or more processors 30

of any kind of digital computer. Generally, a processor will receive instructions and data from a read-only memory or a random access memory or both. The essential elements of a computer are a processor for performing instructions and one or more memory devices for storing instructions and data. Generally, a computer will also include, or be operatively coupled to

5 receive data from or transfer data to, or both, one or more mass storage devices for storing data, e.g., magnetic, magneto-optical disks, or optical disks. In some embodiments, the algorithm can be implemented in a computing system that includes a back-end component, e.g., as a data server, or that includes a middleware component, e.g., an application server, or that includes a front-end component, e.g., a client computer having a graphical user interface or a Web browser

10 through which a user can interact with an implementation of the invention, or any combination of one or more such back-end, middleware, or front-end components.

A further object of the present invention relates to a kit or device for performing the method of the present invention, comprising means for determining the binding capacity(ies) as described above. In some embodiments, the kits or devices of the present invention comprise

15 at least one sample collection container for sample collection. Collection devices and container include but are not limited to syringes, lancets, BD VACUTAINER® blood collection tubes. In some embodiments, the container contains a predetermined amount of the ligand. In some embodiments, the kits or devices described herein further comprise instructions for using the kit or device and interpretation of results. In some embodiments, the kit or device of the present

20 invention further comprises a microprocessor to implement an algorithm so as to determine the probability that the patient suffers from a liver dysfunction. In some embodiments, the kit or device of the present invention further comprises a visual display and/or audible signal that indicates the probability determined by the microprocessor. In some embodiments, the kit or device of the present invention comprises: i) a mass spectrometer; ii) a receptacle into which

25 the serum sample is placed, and which is connectable to the mass spectrometer so that the mass spectrometer can quantify the amount of the free ligand; iii) optionally a microprocessor to implement an algorithm on data so as to determine the probability that the subject suffers from a liver dysfunction and iv) a visual display and/or audible signal that indicates the probability determined by the microprocessor.

30 The invention will be further illustrated by the following figures and examples. However, these examples and figures should not be interpreted in any way as limiting the scope of the present invention.

FIGURES:

Figure 1. Serum enhanced binding of Cu, Cd, Au and dansylsarcosine.

Figure 2. Discrimination between control patients with no liver disease and cirrhotic patients by the SEB test. Ligands were spiked to serums using solutions at the following concentrations, expressed as HSA/ligand ratios (namely 1 molecule of HSA for X atoms or molecules of ligand): Cu 1/10, L-thyroxine 1/10, Au 1/100, dansylsarcosine 1/5. Cu 5 was tested in 18 patients, Au in 16 patients, L-thyroxine in 16 patients and dansylsarcosine in 6 patients only. The ordinates represent the (μM of free ligand)/(μM of HSA) ratio.

Figure 3. Determination of HSA isoforms in 18 cirrhotic and 18 control patients.

The mass chromatogram at the right is an example of a deconvoluted HSA spectra.

Figure 4. Discrimination between non-cirrhotic and cirrhotic patients by the SEB 10 test with lower concentrations for Au, Cu and L-thyroxine. Cd was also tested in this group at a ratio of 1/5 (HAS/Cd). ** means $p < 0.001$. $n = 12$ for all ligands in both groups except L-thyroxine where $n=6$.

Figure 5. Time evolution of ligand binding in rats after daily administration for 1, 3, 7, 10 and 14 days of high doses of ethanol. The groups of rats ($n=9$ each) D1, D3, D7, D10 15 and D14 received 0.4 g of ethanol for 1, 3, 7, 10 and 14 days respectively. * = $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$.

Figure 6. Relative abundances of albumin isoforms in all the groups of rats. Alb-Acet, Alb-Cys, Alb-Gly, and Alb-Glut stands for acetylated albumin, cysteinylated albumin, glycosylated albumin and glutathione-conjugated albumin respectively. * = $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$.

EXAMPLE: The “Serum Enhanced Binding” test as a biomarker of liver dysfunction

Methods

Chemicals:

25 The following reagents were purchased from Sigma-Aldrich and used to prepare the ligands solutions: cobalt(II) chloride (CAS : 7646-79-9), gold(III) chloride trihydrate (CAS : 16961-25-4), copper(II) chloride (CAS : 7447-39-4), silver acetate (CAS : 563-63-3), L-thyroxine sodium salt pentahydrate (CAS : 6106-07-6). Dansylsarcosine Piperidinium Salt >95%, was purchased from RareChemicals GmbH. All ligands solutions were prepared in 30 MiliQ purified water. Albumin Vialebex®, 200mg/mL was used to test HSA binding capacity.

Patients and samples

Patient samples were all from blood leftovers of biochemistry laboratory tests prescribed according to the standard of care. In accordance with French regulations and Good Clinical

Practice for biomedical studies, patients were informed of, and were able to oppose to, the use of the leftovers of their blood samples at any time (CSP article L1211-2).

The cohort was composed of cirrhotic patients and of patients with no liver dysfunction as controls. Patients were considered as free from liver dysfunction on the basis of their clinical
5 diagnosis and their liver function biochemical tests, namely, aspartate transaminase, alanine transaminase, alkaline phosphatase, γ -glutamyltransferase, free and total bilirubin and albumin.

Cirrhotic patients were included based on the gastroenterologists' diagnosis, their liver function biochemical tests and their Child-Pugh scores.

Plasmas or serums were obtained by centrifugation of blood at 3000 rpm for 10 min at
10 4°C. For the cohort, the SEB test was performed within 24h of the biochemical tests. When volume permitted, plasma or serum samples were then stored at -20°C for stability tests.

HSA isoforms were determined for all patients, as described below.

Study of the binding capacities of HAS in patients with no hepatic dysfunction:

In a first step, we have evaluated separately the global capacity of serum to bind Cu,
15 Au, L-thyroxine, Cd and dansylsarcosine in patients with no liver dysfunctions. Increasing concentrations of each ligand were added to patient serum samples in order to obtain HSA/ligand theoretical ratios (mol/mol) of 1/1, 1/5, 1/10, 1/20, 1/50, 1/100, 1/500 and 1/1000 when possible. These theoretical ratios were calculated on the basis of HSA blood concentration of 0.6 mM, which is the average concentration in healthy subjects.

20 Six different serums (from six different patients) per ratio and per ligand were used for this evaluation. After incubation for 30 min of the serum samples spiked with a ligand, they were ultracentrifugated to measure the unbound ligand in the ultrafiltrates. In details,

Serum (200 μ L) was incubated for 30 min at 4°C with the abovementioned ligands with different solutions concentrations (500 μ L of solutions at increasing concentrations of ligands),
25 The incubated serum was ultrafiltrated on Amicon® filters with a 30 kDa cut-off,

The ultrafiltrate (10 μ L) was then diluted in HNO₃ 0.1 M before analysis using a multi-element ICP-MS method for the determination of free (unbound) ligand concentrations. The ICP-MS method measured Cu, Au, Cd, iodine (for L-Thyroxine) and sulfur (for dansylsarcosine) separately or simultaneously, depending on the sample content.

30 Percentages of retained ligands quantity as well as the real ratios of HSA/bound ligands (mol/mol) were then calculated, since the actual HSA concentration in each serum was known.

This allowed us to determine the maximum capacity of the serum to bind each ligand. These ceilings are at the basis of the SEB test to discriminate serum with modified HSA forms from serum with mostly native HSA.

**Comparison of binding capacities of HSA in cirrhotic patients and controls
(patients without hepatic dysfunction)**

After setting thresholds corresponding to the retention of more than 90% of each ligand, we performed the SEB test on the serum of patients with diagnosed cirrhosis (n=18) as compared to patients with no liver dysfunctions (n=18). The SEB test was then performed as described above but with the different solutions containing ligands, at specific concentrations proportional to the ligands' binding threshold. Briefly, solutions of Cu, Au, dansylsarcosine and L-thyroxine were prepared at 5950 µM, 23800 µM, 11900 µM and 150 µM, respectively. The solutions were incubated separately with 200 µL of serum for Cu, Au, and dansylsarcosine and with 50 µL of serum for L-thyroxine.

Albumin isoforms were determined in all serum samples of these two groups as described below.

In another experiment, we analyzed serum samples from 12 cirrhotic patients and 12 controls in order to study the discrimination power of the test when using solutions of ligands at lower concentrations. For this, Cu, Cd and Au solutions concentrations were set at 1190 µM for Cu, 1190 µM for Cd, 11900 µM for Au and 75 µM for L-thyroxine.

Animal model:

We also set up an animal experiment to investigate the time and severity of liver dysfunction at which the test turns positive. In this experimentation, high doses of ethanol were used to induce liver injuries in six groups of male Wistar rats (Janvier Labs, France). Each group contained 6 to 9 rats. Two ml of a solution of 50% of ethanol (0.4 g of ethanol) was administrated orally for 1 day in the 1st group, for 3 days in the 2nd group, for 7 days in the 3rd, for 10 days in the 4th group and for 14 days in the 5th group. Blood and liver were collected from the sacrificed rats 24h after the last ethanol administration. A control group (n=9) received oral administration or a saline solution for 14 days and rats were sacrificed and sampled at day 15. The SEB test was applied to the rats of all these groups. Albumin isoforms, as described below, were also determined for all the groups.

ICP-MS analysis

Calibration curves were built with 6 calibrants for each element. Concentrations ranged between 10 and 100 µg/L for Cu, Cd, Au and sulfur and between 1 and 20 µg/L for L-thyroxine.

L-cysteine was used for the calibration of sulfur and L-thyroxine for the calibration of iodine. Cu was measured Cu at *m/z* 65, Cd at *m/z* 112, Au at *m/z* 197, iodine at *m/z* 127 and sulfur at *m/z* 48 as described in EL BALKHI et al. 2010 [9]. To be able to measure sulfur (³²S), interfered by ³²O₂, we introduced oxygen as a reactant gas in the reaction cell of the instrument

to generate ^{48}SO . For this, the kinetic energy discrimination (KED) mode was used with oxygen flow rate at 0.3 ml/min. This was applied for all element measurements and for all calibration points, controls and ultrafiltrates. The ultrafiltrates were diluted with HNO_3 0.1 M when necessary.

5 **HSA isoforms determinations:**

To study the albumin modifications in all samples, analysis was carried out using micro-liquid chromatography coupled to high resolution Q-TOF mass spectrometry (TripleTOF® 5600+, Sciex). Plasma or serum samples from all studied groups were diluted with ultrapure water to 1:1,000 (v:v) and 5 μL of the diluted serum were injected. A C4 Chrom XP (100X0,3 mm; 3 μm) Eksigent column was used for the chromatographic separation of albumin isoforms, together with a mobile phase solvent A (0.1% formic acid in ultrapure water) and solvent B (0.1% formic acid in acetonitrile). The analysis was performed in gradient mode, programmed as follows: 0–1 min, 20% B; 1–5 min, 20% to 50% B; 5–6 min, 50% to 95% B; 6–8 min, 95% B; 8–8.5 min; 95% to 20% B; 8.5–13 min, equilibration with 20% B. The run lasted 13 min and 15 the total flow rate was kept constant at 5 $\mu\text{L}/\text{min}$.

All MS parameters were controlled by Analyst® TF 1.7 (Sciex). m/z ratios were first scanned from m/z 400 and 1250 using the TOF MS scan mode with an accumulation time of 2 s. The albumin spectra obtained were then deconvoluted within the mass range from 66,000 Da to 67,000 Da with PeakView 2.1 software (Sciex). From the intensity of the peak, the relative abundance of albumin isoforms was calculated relative to the intensity of native albumin.

The same method of isoform determination was applied to rat serum obtained from the animal experiment.

Results

Enhanced binding capacity of serum/HSA

25 By adding increasing concentrations of Cu to serum, we observed that up to 12 Cu atoms per albumin molecule were retained on the ultracentrifugation filter with an average retention of 95%. This percentage dropped to 40% or less when more Cu was added (**Figure 1**). Serum samples were able to bind with 100% retention up to 150 atoms of Au, 50 atoms of Cd and 2.5 molecules of dansylsarcosine per molecule of albumin. Serum samples were able to bind at 30 least 10 molecules of L-thyroxine with 100% retention, but L-thyroxine could not be tested above the 1/10 ratio (HSA/L-thyroxine) because of dissolution problems. In order to confirm that the binding is only due to HAS and that there is no unspecific binding to other serum proteins, we performed the same tests with the Vialebex® commercial albumin solution at 200mg/mL (supplemental data). The binding capacities of commercial solution of pure HSA

were equivalent or higher than those of patient serum: for instance, the Cu/HSA retention ratio was 40 and the Au/HSA 150.

Based on these results we set thresholds best able to discriminate native HSA from modified HSA. Solutions of Au, Cu, dansylsarcosine and L-thyroxine were then prepared to obtain theoretical ratios of 1/100, 1/10, 1/5, and 1/10, respectively. The solutions were then incubated with serums samples from cirrhotic and control patients, as described above.

Comparison of serum enhanced binding capacities in cirrhotic and patients with no liver dysfunction

Among the 18 cirrhotic patients, cirrhosis was due to alcohol alone in 8 patients, to alcohol and VHC in 1 case, to a metabolic syndrome (NASH) in 5 cases, alcohol and NASH in 3 cases, alcohol, NASH and viral infection in 1 case. Albumin concentrations ranged between 18.2 and 34 g/L. Child-Plugh scores for all patients are shown in **Table 1**.

Au, dansylcarcosine, and L-thyroxine were able to discriminate with 100% specificity and sensitivity cirrhotic patients from control patients, as shown in **Figure 2**. Cu was able to discriminate cirrhotic patients with 72 % specificity but with 100% sensitivity.

All the 18 cirrhotic patients and the 18 control patients were analyzed to determine the abundance of HSA isoforms in their serum. We observed high abundances of HSA isoforms in all cirrhotic patients with the presence of significantly increased cysteinylated HSA (HSA-Cys), Glycated HSA (HSA-Gly), nitrosylated HSA (HSA-NO3) and cysteinylated and nitrosylated HSA (HSA-Cys/NO3), as shown in **Figure 3**.

In a second step, 12 cirrhotic patients and 12 control patients were then included to test lower concentrations for Cu, Au and L-thyroxine (1/5, 1/50 and 1/5, respectively). Additionally, Cd was tested in this group at a ratio of HSA/Cd of 1/5. All the ligands were able to discriminate cirrhotic patients with 100% sensitivity and specificity as shown in **Figure 4**.

25 Animal experiment

After daily administration of 0.4 g of ethanol (1.6 g ethanol/kg of body weight) to the different groups of rats, we observed a significant increase of AST in the groups receiving ethanol for more than 7 days. After 10 days of ethanol administrations ALT was significantly higher than in the control group. Alkaline phosphatase (ALP), free and total bilirubin were unchanged in comparison to controls (**Table 2**). Histological tests on the liver of rats of group D14 showed a very slight fibrosis (data not shown). No liver tissue damages were visible in the other groups.

The SEB test was performed in the serum of all groups of rats using Cu, Cd, L-thyroxine at thresholds 1/5 and Au at a threshold 1/50, as described above. As shown in **Figure 5**, all rats

in the group D14 were positive for all tested ligands. Rat serum had decreasing binding capacities for Au after the first day of administration but this capacity was restored in the group D7. The same profile was observed for the biding capacity of Cu and L-thyroxine. However, the binding capacity of Cd was only decreased in the group D14.

5 Micro-LC- HRMS showed significant increases of all the identified albumin isoforms in these groups of rats. As depicted in **Figure 6**, acetylated albumin (Alb-Acet), glycosylated albumin (Alb-Gly), and gluthation-conjugated albumin increased very rapidly showing significant differences between groups. The cysteinylated albumin (Alb-Cys) was increased also in all groups, except D7.

10 **Discussion:**

In this study, we have demonstrated that the binding capacities of the selected ligands are significantly different between cirrhotic patients and patients with no liver dysfunctions. The decreased binding capacities in cirrhotic patients were paralleled by the presence of significantly higher HSA isoforms. This allow us to assume that the most important 15 modifications of albumin structure due to liver dysfunction could be revealed by measuring the unbound fraction of specific ligands spiked in serum. Several studies have reported HSA chemical and/or structural modifications in advanced liver diseases.

Albumin chemical modifications have been extensively reviewed in [7, 10]. Albumin undergoes several post-translational modifications including: acetylation, cysteinylation, 20 homocysteinylation, glutathionylation, glycosylation, glycation, nitrosylation, nitration, phosphorylation and oxidation.

Although oxidation could affect several residues such as methionine, lysine, arginine, and proline, the oxidation of the Cys34 residue is the most studied. This modification was characterized on the basis of the redox state of Cys34 as follows:

- 25 1. Human mercaptalbumin (HMA), the reduced and most abundant form of HAS (70 -80% of total HAS in healthy subjects),
 2. Nonmercaptalbumin 1 (HNA1), a reversibly oxidized form (20 – 30%) and
 3. Nonmercaptalbumin 2 (HNA2) the irreversible oxidized form of albumin (< 5%)[10].

30 The clinical relevance of these modifications has been recently investigated in advanced liver diseases (1–4,11,12)[1–4, 11, 12]. The significant reductions in HMA percentage with a concomitant increase in HNA1 and HNA2 isoforms have been well documented in end-stage liver injuries. It has also been reported that a progressive increase of the oxidized forms of HSA is detected in cirrhotic patients. In particular, circulating levels of both HNA1 and HNA2 were

increased in patients with decompensated cirrhosis and, to a greater extent, in those with acute-on-chronic liver failure, a syndrome characterized by a very high short-term mortality rate [2, 4, 7]. Interestingly, in these patients, HNA2 level significantly correlated with parameters of systemic inflammation and was directly related to disease prognosis. Lately, it was reported
 5 that patients with severe alcoholic hepatitis (SAH) had a significant increase in albumin oxidation due to the oxidative stress environment related to the disease. In such conditions, albumin acts as a pro-oxidant and promotes additional oxidative stress and inflammation through activation of neutrophils [13]. Of note, in this study, HNA2 was only increased in SAH and not in chronic alcoholic cirrhotic patients.

10 Structural alterations involving sites other than Cys34 were also reported. N- or C-terminal truncated, as well as glycated, forms were found in plasma samples from patients with acutely decompensated cirrhosis or severe alcoholic hepatitis [14]. Dimerization of HSA has also been reported in patients with decompensated cirrhosis, although a controversy exists about its pejorative role in the disease. However, the homodimeric isoform with N-terminal truncation
 15 was independently associated to disease complications and was able to stratify 1-year survival [14]. Very recently, it has been reported that in SAH patients, excess binding of bilirubin with albumin helps to predict 3-months mortality and that this excessive binding contributes to the observed decrease in binding capacity of dansylsarcosine to albumin [15].

Therefore, to elaborate the SEB test, we have selected several ligands with known
 20 specific binding sites on albumin. The binding sites were chosen in order to cover the most important HSA modifications with reported clinical relevance in liver dysfunctions. On these bases, Au was selected to reveal Cys34 modifications (16–18)[16–18], Cu for its high affinity to the N-terminal site and the multi binding site B [18, 19], L-thyroxine for its 4 binding sites distributed in the 4 cavities of HSA (Tr1 to Tr4) [20], dansylsarcosine for its affinity to the
 25 drug site 3 (or diazepam-binding site), which is also the bilirubin binding site [5], and Cd for its high affinity to the multi binding sites A (or Cd binding site) [8].

We observed that serum is able to bind up to 12 atoms of Cu, 150 atoms of Au, 50 atoms
 30 of Cd, 2.5 molecules of dansylsarcosine and at least 10 molecules of L-thyroxine per molecule of albumin. These values were much higher than the theoretical and experimental reported ones. For instance, it has been reported that HSA is able to bind less than 2 atoms of Cu [21]. It has been confirmed later that only one specific binding site, namely, the NTS is able to bind Cu, and that the multi metal binding site has a very low affinity for Cu. In this kind of studies, metal binding strategies employing equilibrium dialysis were mostly used [22, 23]. In the later studies, low molecular weight weak chelates were used to prevent metal hydrolysis and

subsequent polymerization and thus nonspecific binding. In our experimental conditions in the SEB test, metals hydrolysis could obviously occur which could be responsible for nonspecific bindings due to Van der Waals forces [23]. These nonspecific bindings are even more important when commercial and pure solutions of HSA are incubated with our ligands (supplemental data). The presence of endogenous weak chelators (such as free amino acids) in serum could be the reason behind this. Therefore, we decided to apply the SEB test with lower ligands concentrations. All the tested ligands were then able to discriminate cirrhotic patients from non-cirrhotic individuals with 100% sensitivity and 100% specificity.

The nature and relative abundances of the HSA isoforms found in our analysis are in agreement with previous results [2, 4, 12, 13, 15] and with the results of the SEB test. Indeed, in comparison with patients with normal liver functions, all the cirrhotic patients presented high levels of modified HSA (nitrosylation, cysteinylolation and glycation). Nitrosylation and cysteinylolation occur on the Cys34 [1], which is consistent with decreased Au binding to HSA in cirrhotic patients. Glycation can occur on Lys199, Lys281, Lys439, and Lys525 [3], all located near the L-thyroxine sites, which might hinder this ligand to bind to HSA. Finally, it has been demonstrated that oxidation of Cys34 could result in a number of conformational changes of HSA [5]. It alters the conformation and dynamics of the entire domain I, as well as of the domain I/II interface, which results in lower binding capacities of endogenous (L-Trp) and exogenous ligands (cefazoline and verapamil), whose binding sites are distant from cys34. This point could explain the decreasing binding capacity of Cd in cirrhotic patients. Cd is reported to coordinate with one His and four carboxylates; however, its location is unknown but should be distant from Cys34 [23].

Despite the very small patient numbers, we observed that the binding capacity of HSA is more decreased in alcohol cirrhotic patients than in those with metabolic cirrhosis or in mixed cirrhosis (Table 1). The HSA-Cys isoform seems to be higher in the first group. The same observation could be done with the results of the Cu SEB test. In addition, patients with the highest Child and MELD scores (patients 2,3 and 8) have the highest HSA-Cys abundances. Patient 19 (not included in the statistics) had a NASH without cirrhosis. The abundance of his HSA-Cys is among the lowest but L-thyroxine and Au binding to HAS was lower than in control patients and higher than in cirrhotic patients. This might be explained by the modifications of Cys34 and L-thyroxine sites and the absence of modification in the NTS, but we have no clue to support this hypothesis so far.

The animal model allowed us to demonstrate that the albumin modifications were mostly acetylation, cysteinylolation, glycation and glutathionylation. The SEB test was positive

for Cd at Day 14, and for Au and L-thyroxine as soon as D1. Liver injuries after D7 were confirmed by increased serum concentrations of AST and ALT, markers of hepatocyte integrity. As the albumin of rats has not been crystalized and its 3D structure elucidated yet, it is hard to find the link between albumin modifications and binding capacities. However, the
5 results suggest that our test may reveal hepatocyte suffering early, before the current biochemistry biomarkers and that decreased capacity of albumin to bind Cd could be a marker of more advanced liver injuries.

TABLES:

| Patient | Age | Cirrhosis etiology | MELD Score | Child-Pugh Score | HSA Cys (%) | HSA Gly (%) | HSA NO3 (%) | Ratio Au/HSA (%) | Ratio Cu/HSA | Ratio Li/HSA | Ratio Ds/HSA |
|---------|-----|--|-------------|------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| | | Reference values in Control patients (mean+/-SD) | 0.63+/-0.11 | 0.39+/-0.04 | 0.48+/-0.02 | 0.42+/-0.06 | 10+/-7.9 | 4.3+/-1.6 | 0.09+/-0.03 | 0.23+/-0.26 | |
| 1 | 64 | Alcohol | n.a | B | 1.25 | 0.71 | 0.54 | 0.76 | 86.23 | 7.5 | 1.82 |
| 2 | 74 | | 23 | C14 | 1.16 | 0.57 | 0.57 | 0.73 | 57.8 | 4.97 | 0.86 |
| 3 | 69 | | 23 | C | 1.84 | 0.81 | 0.63 | 1.21 | 120.09 | 9.33 | 3.04 |
| 4 | 47 | | 9 | B9 | 0.79 | 0.41 | 0.49 | 0.44 | 102.89 | 15.85 | 1.4 |
| 5 | 52 | | 15 | C12 | 0.77 | 0.53 | 0.58 | 0.61 | n.a | 5.5 | n.a |
| 6 | 73 | | 16 | B8 | 1 | 0.45 | 0.47 | 0.6 | 145.77 | 10.45 | 3.33 |
| 7 | 70 | | 14 | C10 | 0.83 | 0.54 | 0.49 | 0.5 | 84.18 | 9.07 | 2.71 |
| 8 | 72 | | 24 | C11 | 1.24 | 0.61 | 0.55 | 0.74 | 89.43 | 6.86 | 2.17 |
| 9 | 80 | NASH | 21 | B9 | 0.9 | 0.53 | 0.53 | 0.64 | n.a | 9.64 | n.a |
| 10 | 70 | | n.a | n.a | 0.89 | 0.61 | 0.62 | 0.73 | n.a | 7.54 | n.a |
| 11 | 77 | | n.a | n.a | 0.83 | 0.6 | 0.52 | 0.55 | 61.55 | 6.74 | 2.06 |
| 12 | 77 | | n.a | A | 0.82 | 0.38 | 0.44 | 0.47 | 46.25 | 4.76 | 1.92 |
| 13 | 75 | | 7 | n.a | 0.88 | 0.46 | 0.54 | 0.61 | 64.58 | 5.59 | 1.72 |
| 14 | 80 | Mixt: alcohol and NASH | 7 | AS | 0.66 | 0.46 | 0.49 | 0.45 | 97.75 | 8.25 | 2.15 |
| 15 | 80 | | 29 | B9 | 1.69 | 0.63 | 0.59 | 1.05 | 116.64 | 10.68 | 2.52 |
| 16 | 78 | | 7 | A6 | 0.73 | 0.39 | 0.47 | 0.45 | 87.56 | 11.02 | 2.55 |
| 17 | 62 | Mixt: alcohol and VHC | 12 | B9 | 0.89 | 0.54 | 0.52 | 0.59 | 39.78 | 5.26 | 1.52 |
| 18 | 50 | Mixt: VHC, alcohol and NASH | 15 | C | 1.05 | 0.51 | 0.51 | 0.67 | 70.47 | 5.56 | 1.24 |
| 19 | 60 | NASH without cirrhosis | n.a | n.a | 0.73 | 0.35 | 0.45 | 0.41 | 59.64 | 5.1 | 1.9 |

Table 1. Patients age and etiology of cirrhosis are indicated along with their Child-Pugh and MELD scores. The abundances of identified albumin isoforms were all higher than in control patients. Isoform percentages are calculated on the basis of the abundance of the native HSA. For all the tested patients the SEB test was positive in comparison to control patients except for Cu in some patients. Ratios are calculated as follows: concentration of ligands in the filtrates (μM)/concentration of albumin ($\mu\text{g/L}$).

| Tests | Control rats | Group D1 | Group D3 | Group D7 | Group D10 | Group D14 |
|--|--------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| ALB (g/L) | 14,4 | 13,8 | 12,4* | 12,2* | 16,35 | 12,9* |
| | [12,7-17,6] | [13,2-14,1] | [11,8-14,2] | [11,0-13,8] | [12,4-17,7] | [10,2-13,5] |
| AST (UI/L) | 70,8 | 78 | 80 | 96* | 92* | 90* |
| | [61-75] | [70-85] | [52-144] | [75-157] | [81-157] | [85-294] |
| ALT (UI/L) | 57 | 63 | 62 | 69 | 78* | 82* |
| | [46-61] | [52-71] | [46-123] | [52-97] | [68-98] | [65-104] |
| ALP (UI/L) | 196 | 232 | 180 | 159 | 172 | 230 |
| | [101-325] | [153-304] | [121-329] | [84-263] | [100-222] | [110-327] |
| Free BILI (μM) | 0,75 | 0,7 | 0,7 | 0,7 | 0,8 | 0,6 |
| | [0,6-1] | [0,3-1] | [0,5-1,3] | [0,4-4,4] | [0,5-1,1] | [0,4-0,7] |
| Total BILI (μM) | 0,75 | 0,8 | 0,8 | 1 | 1 | 0,9 |
| | [0,4-1,3] | [0,4-1,6] | [0,2-1,7] | [0,2-1,9] | [0,8-1,6] | [0,5-1,8] |

Table 2. Biochemical test results in rats after daily administration of ethanol for different time spans. Group D1 received ethanol for 1 day, D3 for 3 days, D7 for 7 days, D10 for 10 days and D14 for 14 days.

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Throughout this application, various references describe the state of the art to which this invention pertains. The disclosures of these references are hereby incorporated by reference into the present disclosure.

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CLAIMS:

1. A method for determining whether a subject suffers or is at risk of suffering from a liver dysfunction comprising i) determining the binding capacity of serum albumin to at least one ligand, ii) comparing the binding capacity determined at step i) with a predetermined reference value, wherein detecting difference between the binding capacity determined at step i) and the predetermined reference value indicates whether the subject suffers or is at risk of suffering from a liver dysfunction.
5
2. The method of claim 1 wherein the subject suffers or is at risk of suffering from a liver disease selected from the group consisting of liver abscess, liver cancer,, cirrhosis, amebic liver abscess, autoimmune hepatitis, biliary atresia, coccidioidomycosis disseminated, portal hypertension, hepatic infections, hemochromatosis, pyogenic liver abscess, Reye's syndrome, sclerosing cholangitis, Wilson's disease, drug induced hepatotoxicity, fulminant liver failure and acute liver failure.
10
3. The method of claim 1 wherein the subject suffers from a non-alcoholic fatty liver disease, such as non-alcoholic steatohepatitis (NASH).
15
4. The method of claim 1 wherein the subject underwent a liver transplantation.
5. The method of claim 1 wherein the ligand is selected from the group consisting of gold (Au), copper (Cu), cadmium (cd), L-thyroxine and dansylsarcosine.
6. The method of claim 1 comprising the steps of i) providing a serum sample, ii) exposing the serum sample to a predetermined amount of the ligand for a time sufficient for allowing the serum albumin to bind to said ligand, iii) measuring the amount of the free ligand in the serum sample, and iv) optionally calculating a ratio between the free amount and the concentration of the serum albumin.
20
7. The method of claim 1 wherein binding capacity for 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, or 6 ligands is measured.
25
8. The method of claim 1 wherein the binding capacity is determined by mass spectrometry, in particular by inductively coupled plasma mass spectrometry (ICP-MS).

9. The method of claim 7 wherein a score which is a composite of the measured binding capacities is determined and compared to a reference value wherein a difference between said score and said reference value indicates whether the subject suffers or is at risk of suffering from a liver dysfunction.
- 5 10. The method of claim 7 which comprises the use of a classification algorithm.
11. Use of the method of claim 1 for determining whether a subject suffering from a liver disease achieves a response to a therapy.
12. Use of the method of claim 1 for evaluating the effects of drugs under development in producing liver injury during a preclinical or clinical studies.

10

ABSTRACT OF THE INVENTION**METHODS AND KITS FOR DETECTING LIVER DYSFUNCTION IN A SUBJECT**

5

Most chronic liver diseases are notoriously asymptomatic, until cirrhosis with clinical decompensation occurs. The use of early diagnosis strategies is vital to maintain patients in a symptom-free state and to delay decompensation, and thus improve the outcome. Albumin (HAS) undergoes several post-translational modifications in hepatocytes but clinical relevance 10 of some of these modifications has been recently investigated in advanced liver diseases. Now, the inventors demonstrate that the binding capacities of some ligands, measured by inductively coupled plasma mass spectrometry (ICP-MS), are significantly different between cirrhotic patients and patients with no liver dysfunctions. The decreased binding capacities in cirrhotic patients were paralleled by the presence of significantly higher HSA isoforms. Animal 15 experimentations were also conducted to explore the precocity of HSA modifications in the course of chronic liver dysfunction. This allow the inventors to assume that the most important modifications of albumin structure due to liver dysfunction could be revealed by measuring the unbound fraction of specific ligands spiked in serum.

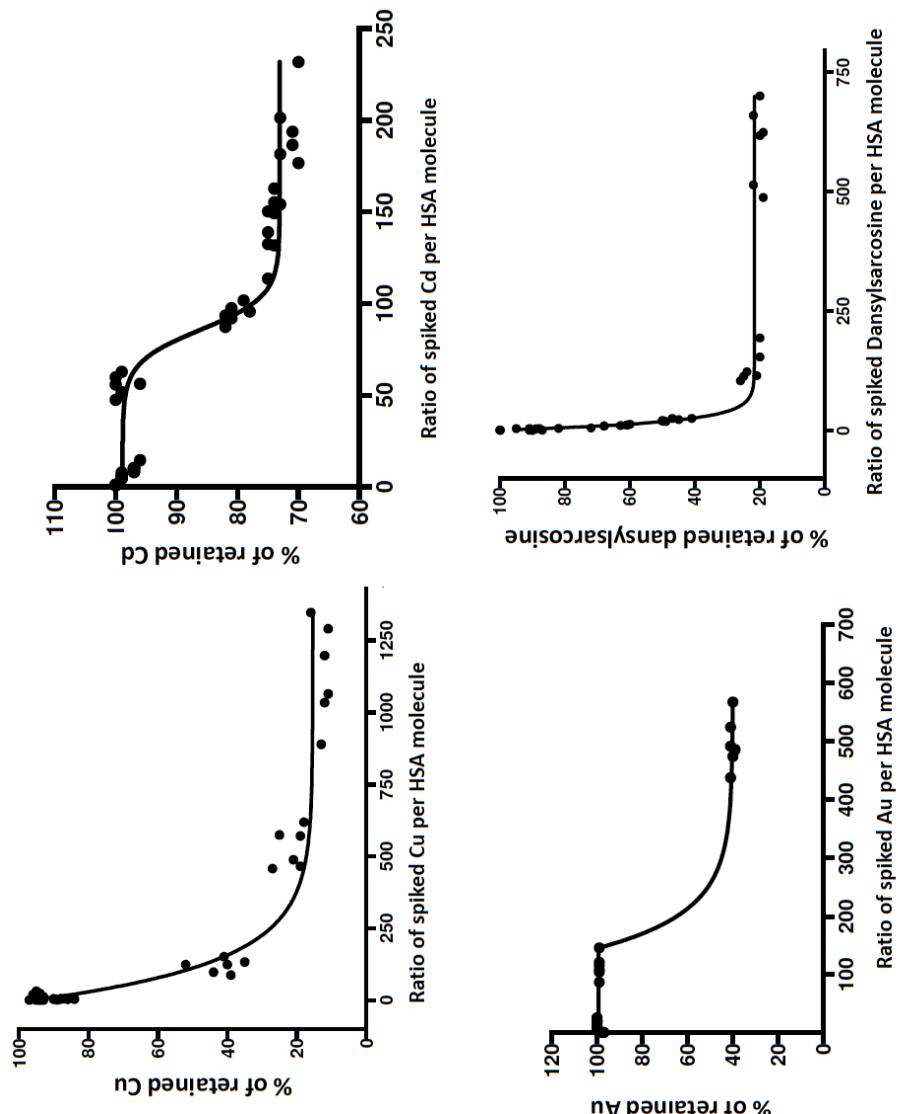


Figure 1

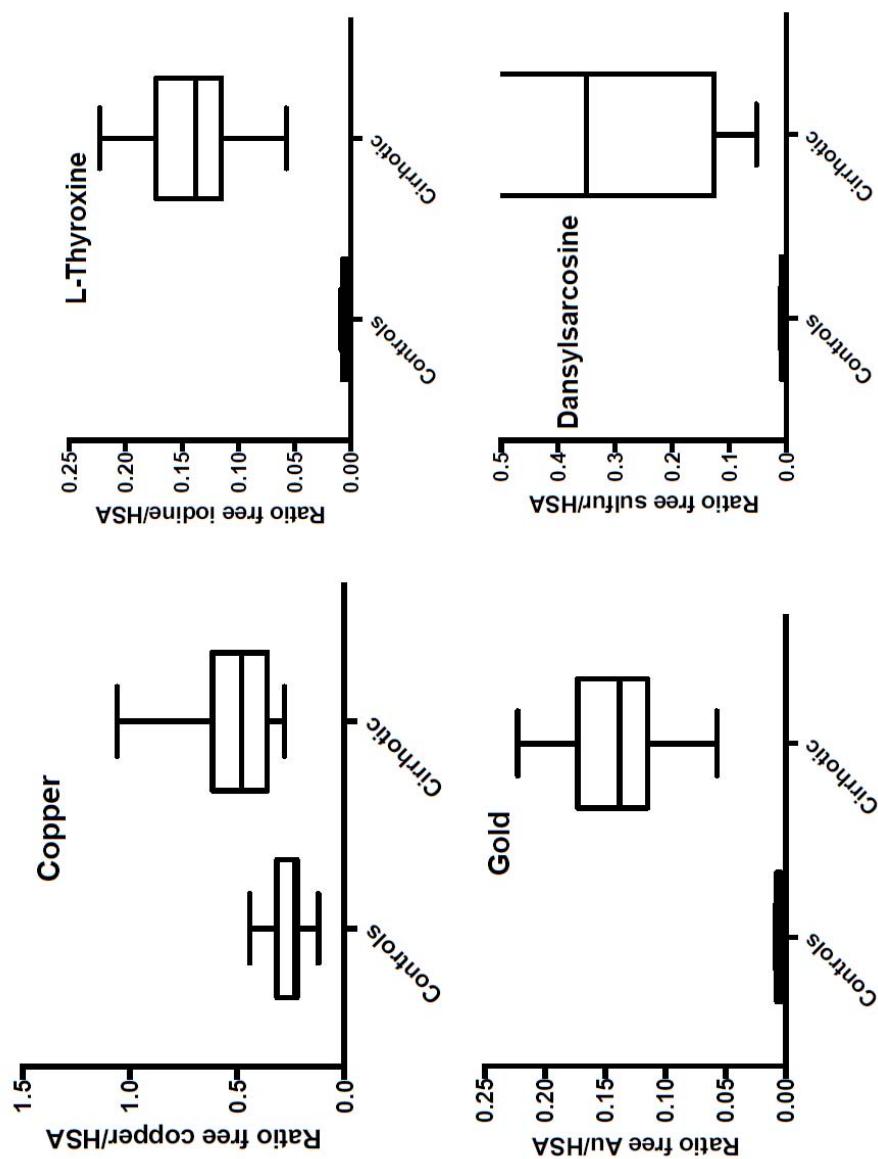


Figure 2

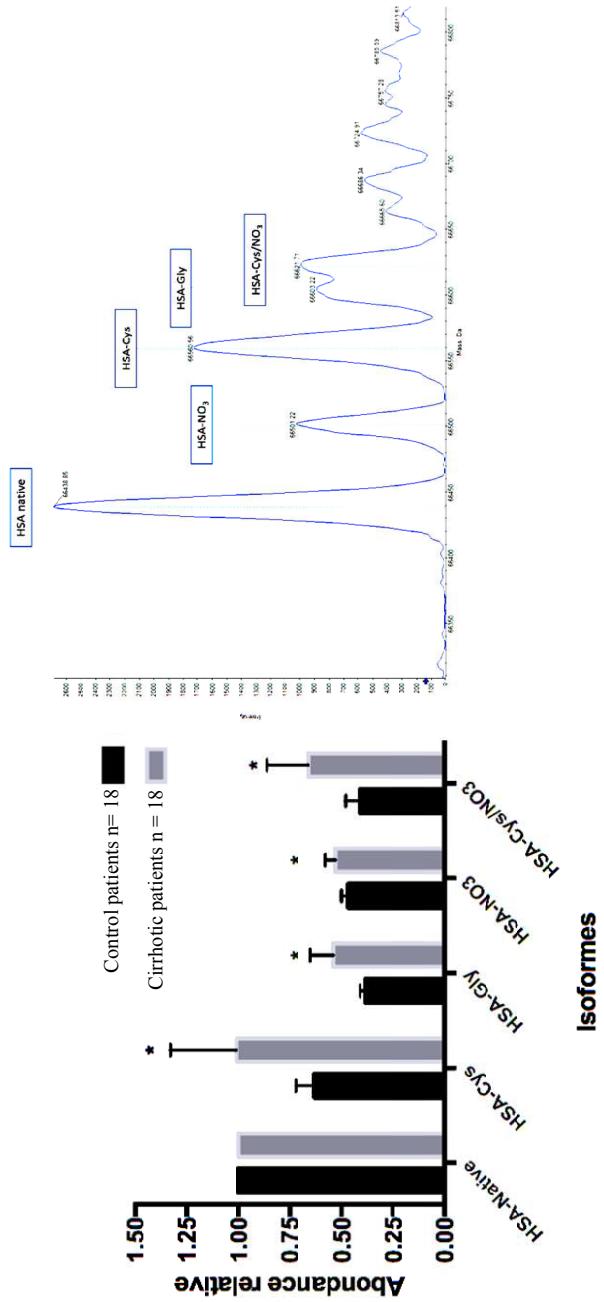


Figure 3

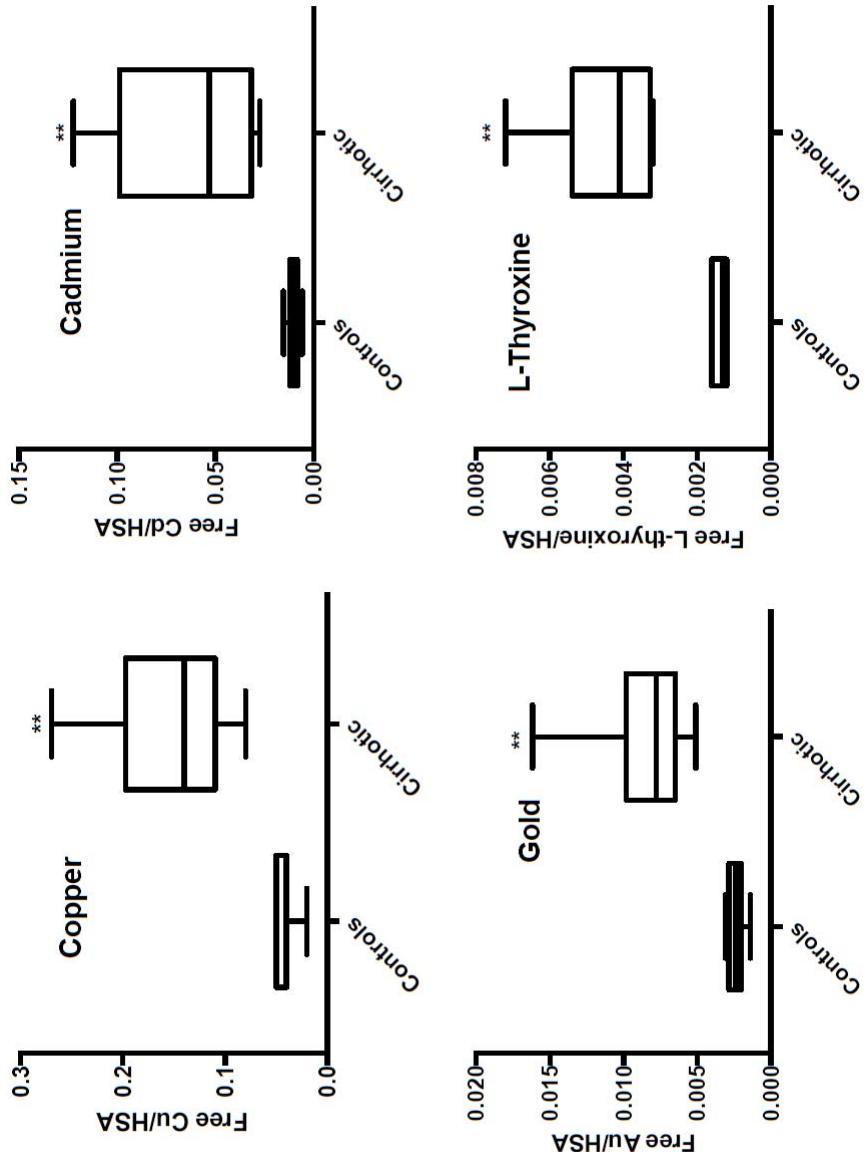


Figure4

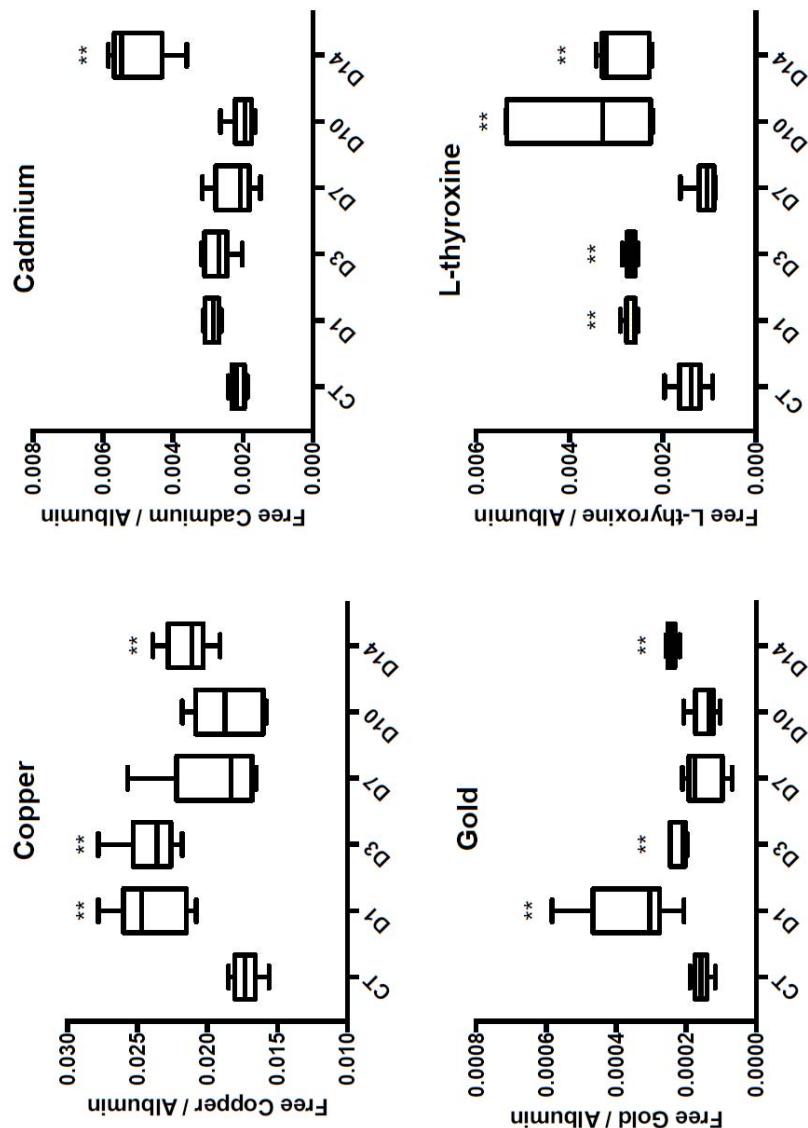


Figure 5

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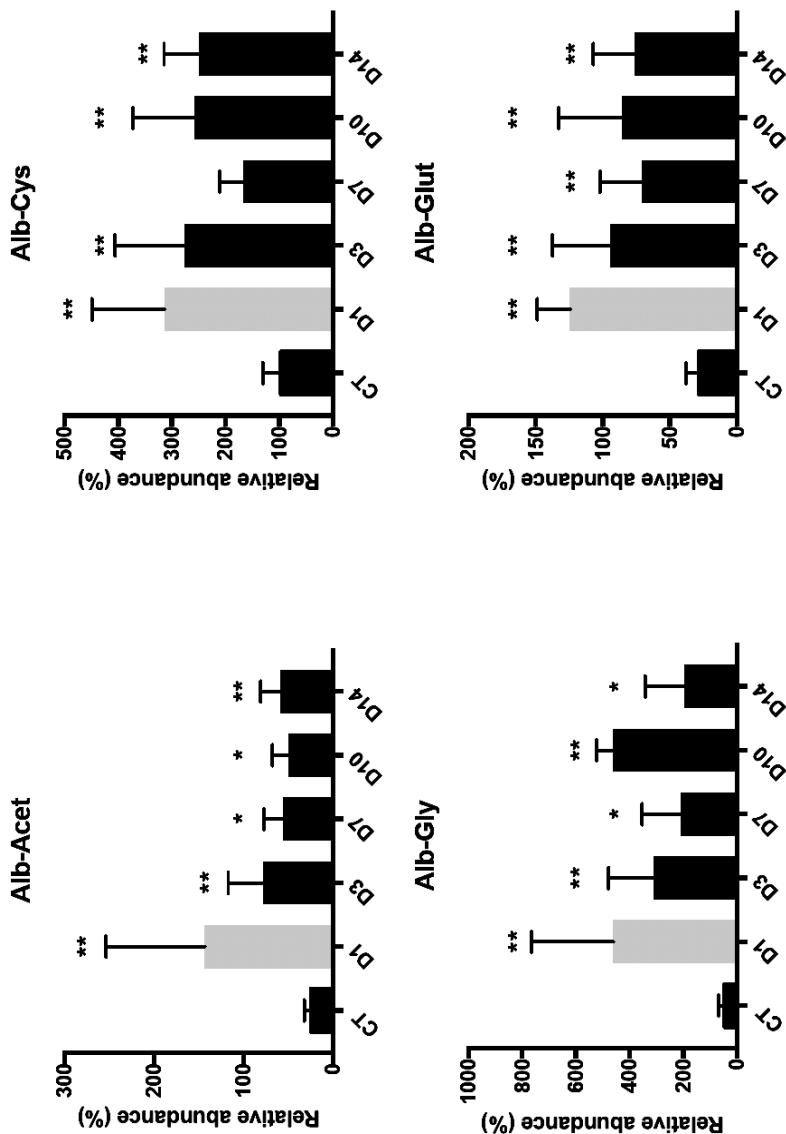


Figure 6

II.2.1.3. Article 3: Early detection of liver injuries by the Serum enhanced binding test sensitive to albumin post-transcriptional modifications (article en reviewing)

Early detection of liver injuries by the Serum enhanced binding test sensitive to albumin post-transcriptional modifications

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François Ludovic Sauvage: Sample analysis, data collection, analysis and interpretation

Marving Martin and Angelika Janaszkiewicz: Data collection and interpretation of molecular simulation, Roland Lawson and Ruben Goncalves: Design of in vivo experiments, data collection and analysis.

Paul Carrier and Veronique Loustaud-Ratti: patients sample collection, data analysis and interpretation

Anne Guyot: Histological analysis, data collection

Pierre Marquet and Franck Saint-Marcoux: Methodology, data analysis and interpretation, critical revision of the article.

Florent Di Meo: Molecular simulation, methodology, data collection, analysis and interpretation, drafting the article.

Conflicts of interest statement: The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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Data availability: The datasets used and/or analysed during the current study available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Keywords: DILI, biomarker, Post-transcriptional modification, albumin, ligand binding.

Declaration of transparency and scientific rigour

This study involved animal experimentation: This Declaration acknowledges that this paper adheres to the principles for transparent reporting and scientific rigour of preclinical research as stated in the scientific reports guidelines for Design and Analysis, and Animal Experimentation, and as recommended by funding agencies, publishers and other organisations engaged with supporting research.

Ethics and integrity Statements

Declaration of transparency: this declaration acknowledges that this paper adheres to the principles for transparent reporting and scientific rigour of preclinical research as stated in the scientific reports guidelines for design and analysis, and as recommended by funding agencies, publishers and other organizations engaged with supporting research. All methods were performed in accordance with the guidelines for animal experimentation of the European Communities Council Directive (EU/63/2010). The animal experiments and procedures are reported according to the ARRIVE guidelines (<https://arriveguidelines.org>).

Abbreviations:

PTM: Post-translational modification
HAS: Human serum albumin
IMA: Ischemia Modified Albumin test
ABC: albumin cobalt binding test
HMA: Human mercaptalbumin
HNA1: Nonmercaptoplbumin 1
HNA2: Nonmercaptoplbumin 2
Au: gold
Cu: copper
Cd: cadmium
SEB: serum enhanced binding test
CCl₄: Carbon tetrachloride
ALP: alkaline phosphatases,
GGT: gamma-glutamyl transferases
BILIT and BILD : total and conjugated bilirubin,
LDH: lactate dehydrogenase
EtOH: Ethanol
FABS: fatty acid binding sites
PLM: palmitate molecules
RMSD: root-mean square deviations

Abstract

Background: Early and sensitive biomarkers of liver dysfunction and drug-induced liver injury (DILI) are still needed, both for patient care and drug development.

Methods: We developed the Serum Enhanced Binding (SEB) test to reveal post-transcriptional modifications (PTMs) of human serum albumin resulting from hepatocyte dysfunctions and further evaluated its performance in an animal model. The SEB test consists in spiking serum ex-vivo with ligands having specific binding sites related to the most relevant albumin PTMs and measuring their unbound fraction. To explore the hypothesis that albumin PTMs occur early during liver injury and can also be detected by the SEB test, we induced hepatotoxicity in male albino Wistar rats by administering high daily doses of ethanol and CCl₄ over several days. Blood was collected for characterization and quantification of albumin isoforms by high-resolution mass spectrometry, for classical biochemical analyses as well as to apply SEB test.

Results: In the exposed rats, the appearance of albumin isoforms paralleled the positivity of the SEB test ligands and histological injuries. These were observed as early as D3 in the Ethanol and CCl₄ groups, whereas the classical liver tests (ALT, AST, PAL) significantly increased only at D7. The behavior of several ligands were supported by structural and molecular simulation analysis.

Conclusion: The SEB test and albumin isoforms revealed hepatocyte damage early, before the current biochemical biomarkers. The SEB test should be easier to implement in the clinics than albumin isoform profiling.

Introduction

Post-translational modifications (PTMs) of Human serum albumin (HSA) have gained interest recently as biomarkers of advanced liver diseases ¹⁻¹¹. HSA may undergo several PTMs including truncations, acetylation, cysteinylation, homocysteinylation, glutathionylation, glycation, nitrosylation, nitration, phosphorylation and oxidation ¹². They translate in modifications of albumin binding properties [5]. This aspect has been exploited by Bar-Or et al., who proposed the albumin cobalt binding test (ACB) also known as the Ischemia Modified Albumin test (IMA) to detect cardiac ischemia [6]. The IMA test is based on the fact that cardiac ischemia is associated with modifications in the structure of albumin and, thus, in the capacity of a specific binding site to bind cobalt. Since the approval of the IMA as a biomarker of cardiac ischemia by the FDA (Regulation number: 862.1215; <http://www.accessdata.fda.gov>), this test has also been investigated in liver diseases showing correlation with the severity of cirrhosis ^{7,13-15}. Briefly, the IMA test is performed by adding CoCl₂ and dithiothreitol to serum, followed by colorimetric measurement of the (free-Co)-dithiothreitol complex at 470 nm.

Thereafter, the clinical relevance of other albumin modifications has been investigated in advanced liver diseases ^{10,12}. PTMs related to Cys34 oxidation have been the most studied. They are characterized on the basis of the redox state of Cys34 as follows: (i) Human mercaptalbumin (HMA), also known as reduced HAS or native HSA (70 -80% of total HAS in healthy subjects); (ii) Nonmercaptalbumin 1 (HNA1), a reversibly oxidized form (20 – 30%); and (iii) Nonmercaptalbumin 2 (HNA2), an irreversibly oxidized form of albumin (< 5%) ¹². The increase in HNA1 and HNA2 has been documented in end-stage liver pathologies, with a progressive increase of these isoforms in severe cirrhosis that is associated with a very high short-term mortality ^{4,9,10}. PTMs involving sites others than Cys34 were also reported. N- or C-terminal truncated, as well as glycated, forms were found in plasma samples from patients with acutely decompensated cirrhosis or severe alcoholic hepatitis ⁴. Interestingly, HNA1 played a pejorative role in decompensated cirrhosis ¹⁶,

whereas native HSA had a protective role by reducing the proinflammatory environment present in patients with acutely decompensated cirrhosis¹⁷. At present, it is not fully established whether other albumin isoforms possess yet uncharacterized biological properties.

This bundle of arguments strongly suggests that albumin modifications detected in blood may reflect the dys/function of hepatocytes and could represent a versatile tool for the diagnosis and the prognosis of liver injuries and/or diseases. Since HSA is continuously and exclusively synthesized and matured in the liver, albumin modifications may be directly related to the chemical environment into the hepatocytes, hence any liver dysfunction. Also, due to its peculiar structure, to its abundance in blood (60% of all proteins), to the multiplicity of its ligands and binding sites and to its role as the primary scavenger, it is now clear that not only the quantity, but also the quality of albumin could impact its physiological roles.

We here hypothesize that PTMs occur at early stages of liver injuries. Furthermore, given that some of PTMs locally modify albumin structure, we assume that modulations of binding properties of HSA can be associated with different structural dynamics. This can in turn be indirectly revealed by investigating HSA binding capacity for different ligands. Interestingly, it was reported that each of the following ligands has a specific binding site on HSA: (i) gold (Au) binds preferentially to Cys34; (ii) copper (Cu) to the N-terminal binding site; (iii) cadmium (Cd) to the multi-metal binding site; (iv) L-thyroxine up to 5 specific binding sites and (v) dansylsarcosine to drug site 2[8].

On these premises, this study aimed to: (i) develop the serum enhanced binding (SEB) test, using all the ligands mentioned above, as a functional test of PTMs and an early biomarker of liver dysfunctions; (ii) evaluate the SEB test as well as albumin PTMs in an animal model repeatedly exposed to toxic doses of ethanol and Carbon tetrachloride (CCl₄); (iii) investigate the impact of PTMs onto the structure and dynamics of albumin, (iv) interpret the results of the SEB test in light of albumin PTMs, classic hepatic laboratory tests and liver histology.

2. Materials and methods

2.1 Chemicals:

The ligand solutions were prepared using reagents purchased from Sigma-Aldrich: cobalt(II) chloride (CAS: 7646-79-9), gold(III) chloride trihydrate (CAS: 16961-25-4), copper(II) chloride (CAS: 7447-39-4), silver acetate (CAS: 563-63-3), and L-thyroxine sodium salt pentahydrate (CAS: 6106-07-6). Dansylsarcosine Piperidinium Salt (>95%) was obtained from RareChemicals GmbH. All ligands were diluted with MilliQ purified water, and their pH levels were measured before use. Human albumin Vialebex, 200 mg/mL, was utilized to test binding capacity.

2.2 Setting up the Serum Enhanced Binding (SEB) test

2.2.1. Patients

We collected residual serum samples from 90 patients admitted to Limoges University Hospital, following their consent for the use of residual biological materials, in accordance with local and French regulations (Code de la Santé Public, Art. L1211-2) and the declaration of Helsinki for experiments involving human subjects. The study was coordinated by the University Hospital of Limoges and the biocollection was authorized by the French Ministry of Health and registered under numbers DC 2010-1074 and AC-2016-2758, in accordance with the French Bioethics Act 2011-814 of July 7, 2011. Informed consent has been obtained from all patients.

Among the 90 collected samples, 45 were obtained from control patients without hepatic impairment, and the remaining 45 were from patients at various stages of cirrhosis. The serum samples, collected in dry tubes and sent to the laboratory for routine biochemical tests, were used in this study after the completion of routine analyses. Control patients were included when their clinical diagnosis did not indicate any liver dysfunction, and their levels of transaminases (AST, ALT), alkaline phosphatases (ALP), gamma-glutamyl transferases (GGT), total and conjugated bilirubin (BILIT, BILD), and lactate

dehydrogenase (LDH) were within normal ranges. Cirrhotic patients, classified as cirrhosis A, B, or C using Child-Pugh scores, were diagnosed according to BAVENO VII recommendations¹⁸.

2.2.2. Analytical procedures

2.2.2.1. Ligands optimization

We first evaluated the global capacity of serum to bind Cu, Au, L-thyroxine, Cd and dansylsarcosine in patients with no liver dysfunction. Each ligand was independently added in increasing concentrations to patient serum samples in order to obtain HSA/ligand theoretical ratios (mol/mol) of 1/1, 1/5, 1/10, 1/20, 1/50, 1/100, 1/500, and 1/1000 when possible. These theoretical ratios were calculated with 0.6 mM as an average concentration HSA in the serum.

Six different serum samples (from six different patients) per ligand and per ratio were used for this evaluation. After incubation for 30 min at 4°C, the serum samples were ultrafiltrated on Amicon® filters with a 30 kDa cut-off and 10 µL of the ultrafiltrate was then diluted in HNO₃ 0.1 M before analysis using a multi-element ICP-MS method for the determination of free (unbound) concentrations of Cu, Au, Cd, iodine (for L-Thyroxine) and sulfur (for dansylsarcosine). The bound fractions as well as the concentration ratios of HSA/bound ligand (mol/mol) were then calculated.

To confirm that the binding is only due to HSA and that there is no unspecific binding, we performed the same tests on a commercial human albumin solution Vialebex®, 200mg/mL. This allowed us to determine for each ligand its maximum unspecific binding capacity. These thresholds were then set to best discriminate between serum samples containing mostly modified HSA or mostly native HSA.

Comparison of HSA binding capacities in patients with liver cirrhosis or no hepatic dysfunction:

After establishing the threshold for >90% albumin binding for each ligand, we proceeded to apply the Serum Enhanced Binding (SEB) test to a separate group of patients: 12 diagnosed with cirrhosis and 12 with no liver dysfunction. It's important to note that these patients were different from those used in the analytical development of the SEB test.

In brief, independent solutions of Cu and Cd at 1190 µM, Au at 11900 µM, and L-thyroxine at 75 µM were individually incubated with 200 µL of serum for Cd, Cu, L-thyroxine, and dansylsarcosine to achieve HSA/ligand theoretical ratios (mol/mol) of 1/5. For Au, 50 µL of serum was incubated to obtain an HSA/ligand ratio of 1/50. The same ligands and concentrations were also applied to rat plasma albumin in our animal models for comparison.

2.2.2.2. ICP-MS analysis:

Calibration curves were constructed for each element using a six-point calibration range of 10 to 100 µg/L for Cu, Cd, Au, and sulfur, and 1 to 20 µg/L for L-thyroxine. Sulfur calibration employed L-cysteine, while iodine calibration utilized L-thyroxine. The KED mode was applied with oxygen at a flow rate of 0.3 ml/min for both calibrators, controls, and ultrafiltrates. When necessary, ultrafiltrates were diluted with 0.1 M HNO₃. Cu was measured at m/z 65, Cd at m/z 112, Au at m/z 197, iodine at m/z 127, and sulfur at m/z 48, following previously described methods¹⁹. To standardize SEB test results across samples, the concentration of each ligand in the ultrafiltrate was normalized by the total albumin concentration in the sample.

2.3 Animal experiments:

All animal care and experimental procedures were approved by the French Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (APAFIS reference APAFIS#20354-2019042414581742) and were performed in accordance with the guidelines for animal experimentation of the European Communities Council Directive (EU/63/2010). These experiments and procedures are reported according to the ARRIVE guidelines^{20,21} with the recommendations made by French Ministry of Higher Education. All methods are reported in accordance with ARRIVE guidelines (<https://arriveguidelines.org>).

For all included animals, weight was recorded daily throughout the experimental period until sacrifice. Animals were euthanized with intraperitoneal injection of pentobarbital (150 mg/kg). Blood was collected in Vacutainer® lithium heparin tubes (Beckton Dickinson, France) and centrifuged at 3000 rpm for 10

minutes. The resulting plasma samples were stored at -80 °C for analysis. The liver was promptly excised and fixed in formalin for histological analysis.

2.3.1. Induction of ethanol (EtOH) hepatotoxicity:

Six different groups of 6 rats were orally administered (by gavage) 2 mL of a 50% EtOH solution (equivalent to 0.4 g or 1.6 g/kg of body weight) prepared in physiological saline (0.9% NaCl). The groups were followed for 1, 3, 7, 10, or 14 days, respectively to evaluate the time-dependent changes in biochemical markers and histological liver injuries. The animals were sacrificed 24 hours after their last intake of EtOH. Control rats (n=6) received 0.9% NaCl by gavage for 14 days.

2.3.2. Induction of carbon tetrachloride (CCl₄) hepatotoxicity:

Five groups of 6 rats were orally administered (by gavage) 1 mL/kg body weight of a 30% solution of CCl₄ diluted in olive oil (equivalent to 1.594 g/kg of body weight). The groups were followed for 1, 3, 7, 10 days, respectively and the animals were sacrificed 24 hours after their last intake of CCl₄. Control rats (n=6) received olive oil by gavage for 10 days.

2.3.3. Pathological analysis of the liver

After animal sacrifice, the liver was cut into sections of 1 to 1.5 cm perpendicular to the major axis to allow homogeneous fixation in a 4% formalin solution, and kept at ambient temperature for a maximum of 7 days. Samples were stained for light microscopy with hematoxylin, eosin and Masson's trichrome. The pathologist performed histological analysis blindly of the experimental groups.

2.3.4 Biochemistry analyzes

From the collected plasma, measurements of classic biochemistry parameters such as albumin (ALB), total (BILIT) and conjugated (BILD) bilirubin, aspartate aminotransferases (ASAT), alanine aminotransferases (ALAT) and alkaline phosphatases (PAL) were determined using a COBAS® 8000 system (Roche, Germany).

2.3.5. Characterization and quantification of albumin isoforms in rat plasma

Albumin isoforms were determined using the method described elsewhere²². Briefly, 20 µL of plasma were diluted with 980 µL of an aqueous solution of 20mM ammonium formate with 0.1 % formic acid, vortex-mixed before filtration on a 0.22 µm cellulose filter and then injected on LC-HR-MS system (Nexera LC40 system coupled to a TripleTOF® 5600+, Shimadzu, Noisiel, France and Sciex, Concord, Canada). The LC-HRMS data were processed using PeakView® 2.2 and its Bio Tool Kit 2.2.0 (Sciex). The input MS spectra were filtered-in between 1300 to 1600 and then deconvoluted at low resolution (5000) between m/z 1,000 to 200,000.

2.4 Molecular dynamics simulations:

The initial HMA model was obtained from the protein data bank (PDB ID 5GIX) which has been co-crystallized with seven palmitate (PLM) molecules²³. Missing N- and C-terminal residues were added using the Modeller software²⁴. Protonation states of titratable residues (namely arginine, lysine, glutamate and aspartate) were determined using the H++ server assuming a physiological pH at 7.4. Since HMA was shown to be natively bound to PLM with a molecular ratio ranging from 0.1 to 2.0 in physiological conditions, we built the present HMA model with two PLM molecules, which were considered docked in fatty acid binding sites (FABS) 2 and 5^{25,26}. The apo form of HMA was also considered in the present investigations. Three models of palmitate-bound PTM albumins were also built in the present study, namely HNA1, HNA2 and N-truncated HMA. All systems were solvated in explicit water box for which minimal distance between atoms and box edges were set up at 10 Å. Systems were all neutralized considering physiological NaCl salt concentration ([NaCl] = 154 mM). FF14SB²⁷ and TIP3P^{28,29} forcefields were used to respectively model protein residues and water molecules. Parameters from Joung and Cheatham³⁰ were used to model Na+ and Cl- counterions. Parameters for PLM, S-bonded cysteine were derived from Lipid17³¹ and FF14SB force fields while those for cysteic acid residues were derived from

amber 99SB-based parameters available in the literature ³². Each replica was minimized and then equilibrated for 10.25 ns. MD production run were performed for 2 μ s. Simulations were analyzed using the CPPTRAJ package ³³, and in house python scripts. Plots were obtained using the matplotlib v3.7.0 Python package ³⁴. Rendering was prepared using VMD software (alpha-v1.9.4). Structural clustering was carried out using density peak algorithms ³⁵, with inter-subdomain distances as metrics. Clusters representing more than 10% of the overall conformational space were considered. Allosteric communications were calculated with Allopath Tool ³⁶.

3. Results

3.1. Enhanced binding capacity of serum/HSA

By adding increasing concentrations of Cu to serum, we observed that up to 12 Cu atoms per albumin molecule were retained on the filter with an average retention of 95%. This percentage dropped to 40% or less when more Cu was added (Figure 1). Serum samples were able to bind up to 150 atoms of Au, 50 atoms of Cd, 2.5 molecules of dansylsarcosine and 10 molecules of L-thyroxine per molecule of albumin, all with near 100% retention. However, L-thyroxine could not be tested further than 1/10 (HSA/L-thyroxine) because of dissolution problems. The binding capacities of the commercial solution of pure HSA Vialebex® at 200mg/mL (40 Cu per HSA and 150 Au per HAS for example) were equivalent or higher than those of patient serum samples (data not shown), suggesting that binding to other proteins is negligible.

3.2. Comparison of HSA binding capacities in patients with liver cirrhosis or no hepatic dysfunction:

Among the 45 cirrhotic patients, 17 (37.8%) were diagnosed with Child-Pugh score A, 16 patients (35.5%) Child-Plugh B and 10 patients (22.2%) Child-Pugh C. The ligands of the SEB test had individually excellent sensitivity and specificity to discriminate cirrhotic patients from control patients (Figure 2). All cirrhotic patients had at least 3 ligands above threshold (except one patient who had only 2) (Figure 3): 26 patients (57.8%) had 5 ligands above threshold, 9 patients (20%) had 4 and only 7 patients (15.5%) had 3 positive

ligands. Among the 45 control patients, only 4 patients had one ligand above threshold. None of the ligands alone was able to discriminate patients regarding their Child-Pugh score (Figure 2).

3.3. Early diagnostic performance of the SEB test in animal models

After daily administration of 1.6 g ethanol/kg or 1.59 g CCl₄/kg of body weight to different rat groups, the SEB test was performed in the serum of all rats using Cu, Cd, L-thyroxine, dansylsarcosine at 1:5 mol ratio and Au at 1:50 mol ratio as described above. In the EtOH model, on D14, all rats were positive for all ligands except dansylsarcosine (Figure 4.A). The Au binding capacity was decreased on D1 (24h after the first dose), restored on D7 and reduced again thereafter. The same behavior was observed for the binding capacity of Cu and L-thyroxine. In contrast, the binding capacity of Cd was only decreased on D14 (Figure 4.B). In the CCl₄ model, albumin-binding capacities were reduced for Cu, Au and dansylsarcosine (except on D7), but not for Cd at any time (Figure 4.B).

In both models, the decrease of albumin-binding was paralleled by albumin modifications. Native albumin was decreased as soon as 24h after the administration of hepatotoxic compound. It then increased back at D3 and D7 in the CCl₄ and EtOH models, respectively, prior to a final drop observed at D10 or D14. Decreases in native albumin were associated with increases of ALB isoforms, as shown in figure 1 (e.g., ALB+Cys, ALB+SO₂H or glycated albumin, see Figure 4.A and 4.B).

In the EthOH model, a significant increase in AST level was observed at D7, D10 and D14 (Table 1). In the CCl₄ model, AST and ALT levels were significantly increased at all time points and bilirubin (BILIT & BILD) levels at D7 and D10 (Table 2). Histologically, only minor inflammation was detected in some rats receiving ethanol. Rats exposed to CCl₄ exhibited steatosis from D3 onwards and 2 rats exhibited fibrotic liver tissue (1 on D3 and 1 on D10).

3.4. Structural variabilities of HSA isoforms

The secondary structure of albumin was not affected by Cys34 oxidation nor N-truncation as pictured by the backbone root-mean square deviations (RMSD) versus X-ray structure²³ ranging from ca 3.0 and 5.0 Å (Supplementary Figure S1-S4). MD simulations revealed that albumin isoforms adopted different conformational dynamics of inter-domain arrangements. Inter-subdomain distances were monitored showing the impact from Cys34 oxidation or N-truncation (Supplementary Figure S5). This is particularly true for following subdomain pairs: IA-IIIB, IB-IIIB IIA-IIIB and to a lesser extent IA-IIA, IA-IIB IIA-IIIA. Representative structures were obtained from structural clustering and are shown in Figure 5. Palmitate-bound HMA and HNA2 isoform exhibited similar patterns in which the overall structure showed dynamic closing of central cleft defined by the distance between domains I and III for which domain II acts as pivot. Palmitate-bound HNA1 and Δ^{DA} HMA isoforms showed less variability in term of domain arrangements. Palmitate-bound HNA1 clusters are slightly more open cleft conformations, The N-truncated Δ^{DA} HMA isoform only populated open-cleft conformations pictured by larger distances between subdomain IA/IB and IIIB (Figure 5c and Supplementary Figure S5). This was confirmed by largest RMSDs when comparing Δ^{DA} HMA subpopulations with other isoforms (Supplementary Figure S6).

Subtle differences in term of structural dynamics were observed by comparing per-residue root-mean-squared fluctuations with those of native HMA (ΔRMSF , Figure 5b). Simulations revealed larger deviations for domains I and III. This is particularly true for the domain I of Δ^{DA} HMA isoforms which exhibited ΔRMSF up to 1.5 Å. To lesser extent, HNA1 and HNA2 also exhibited similar trends.

Albumin PTMs leads to subtle but significant differences which may be associated with different binding capacities. Different dynamics for the bound palmitate molecules were observed. The FA5 palmitate molecule showed larger structural variability for HMA than for other isoforms as shown by different binding modes for during MD simulations. In contrast, FA5 palmitate molecule remains tightly bound for HNA1, HNA2 and Δ^{DA} HMA isoforms. It may suggest a lower binding affinity for HMA which might favour palmitate substitution by other ligands. Interestingly, no significant difference regarding palmitate

dynamics in FA2 was observed. This might be explained by (i) the known highest affinity of FA2^{25,37} and (ii) its location in domain IIA which was not shown to be affected by PTMs.

Albumin PTMs might affect the distant communications between the different subdomains. To this end, the efficiency of the information flow from Cys34 or Asp1-Ala2 sequence to different substrate binding sites were assessed for every systems (Figure 1e). Allosteric communications from Cys34 to all binding sites is significantly lower in the N-truncated Δ^{DA} HMA isoform than in others. Likewise, HNA1 and HNA2 isoforms exhibited lower allosteric communications from N-terminal region to all binding sites. Oxidation of Cys34 might disrupt the propagation of the information flow from N-terminal domain to the rest of the protein. Finally, metal binding capacities were assessed by simply considering electrostatic potentials for each representative snapshots (Supplementary Figure S7). Open-cleft conformations lead to more exposed electropositive regions which may be associated to larger repulsion with cationic metals. This may be relevant for the N-truncated Δ^{DA} HMA isoform for which only such a population was observed during MD simulations.

4. Discussion

We developed a multi-element functional test of albumin binding capacities, whose results parallel the relative decrease in native human serum albumin and discriminate patients with liver cirrhosis from controls. When applied to two different induced hepatotoxicity models in rats, the SEB test detected liver injuries very early, when the most important posttranslational modifications of albumin also appeared, contrary to classical functional liver tests.

The ligands used for the SEB test were carefully selected based on their binding sites to albumin in order to cover the most important albumin modifications that may occur in liver dysfunctions. This has been inspired by recent studies by Baldassare *et al.* and Dominicali *et al.* showing the decrease of effective albumin (the native form) and the increase of several isoforms in advanced liver diseases^{2,4}. Three metals, Au, Cu and Cd, were selected to respectively monitor modifications occurring at (i) the Cys34 position³⁷,

³⁹, (ii) the N-terminal site and the multi binding site B (18,19) and (iii) multi binding sites A (also known as Cd binding site) (8). Organic ligands were also considered. L-thyroxine was shown to possibly bind up to 5 binding sites (20) and dansylsarcosine having a binding site located in the drug site2 (5). Albumin binding capacities toward dansylsarcosine and L-thyroxine are expected to reflect conformational modifications since their binding sites are positioned in the cavities of the protein. It is worth mentioning that the ligands used to perform the SEB test can be directly measured using a single and rather straightforward analytical method based on inductively coupled plasma mass spectrometry (ICP-MS), and possibly by means of other analytical procedures. Our analytical approach is in line with a former work by Bar-Or *et al.* in the context of cardiac ischemia. They proposed the albumin-cobalt binding test (ACB), also known as the Ischemia Modified Albumin test (IMA) [6]. The IMA test is based on the hypothesis that cardiac ischemia is associated with modifications of albumin structure which, in turn, decrease cobalt binding. Briefly, the IMA test is performed by adding CoCl_2 and dithiothreitol to serum, followed by a colorimetric measurement of the (free-Co)-dithiothreitol complex at 470 nm. Although there is some controversy about the origin of the decreased HSA capacity to bind cobalt, a correlation between the albumin binding functions and the severity of cirrhosis was observed using the same test ⁷. Importantly, in these applications, given that albumin represents 60% of serum proteins, it is assumed that any significant decrease of HSA binding capacity for a ligand with a high affinity is prominently due to a modification on its albumin-biding site.

In developing the SEB test, we determined the maximum binding capacities of different ligands. Serum can bind up to 150 atoms of Au, 50 atoms of Cd, 50 atoms of Cu, 2.5 molecules of dansylsarcosine, and at least 10 molecules of L-thyroxine per albumin molecule (Figure 1). Our study goes beyond assessing known albumin binding sites by using high ligand concentrations to investigate adsorption on the albumin surface (except for dansylsarcosine). Molecular modeling shows that PTMs affect albumin dynamics and inter-domain communications, particularly with Cys34 oxidation or N-truncation. Dansylsarcosine predominantly binds Sudlow's site 1, minimally affected by PTMs, but PTMs impact Sudlow's site 2 and FA

binding site 5 more in HNA1 and Δ DA albumin isoforms. This may explain lower binding affinity for a second dansylsarcosine binding.

In the preliminary phase, various molar ratios (ligands/albumin) were tested on patients with liver diseases and control patients. Surprisingly, even at molar ratios below maximum binding capacities, all ligands effectively differentiated cirrhotic patients from non-cirrhotic individuals with satisfactory sensitivities and specificities (data not shown). Based on these findings, we selected the lowest effective ratios observed in patients for further application in a cohort of cirrhotic and control patients, as well as in our animal experiments. The SEB ligands successfully discriminated cirrhotic patients, regardless of the Child-Pugh score, further supporting our hypothesis that albumin PTMs occur early during liver injury. However, it is important to acknowledge a potential limitation of our study, as we relied on an animal model to test this hypothesis due to the absence of crystallized rat albumin. Nevertheless, the results obtained in our study align with the assumption that the same binding sites and mechanisms apply to rat albumin, reinforcing the validity of our findings.

In the animal hepatotoxicity models, the decrease in the binding capacities of the SEB test ligands was correlated with the decrease of the native albumin fraction to the benefit of the other isoforms. Although the decrease of native albumin might explain the behaviors of some ligands as observed in Figure 4, it is worth further interpretation. First, albumin oxidation on Cys34 resulted in the disruption of Au binding, leading to decreased Au-binding capacities in intoxicated rats. Cys34 oxidation was also associated to conformational and dynamic alterations of human albumin (5), at the interface between domain I and domain I-II, leading to lower binding capacities of endogenous (L-tryptophan) and exogenous ligands (cefazoline and verapamil). The corresponding binding sites being distant from Cys34, allosteric modulation might explain lower binding capacity of Cd in some of our experiments. Actually, the Cd binding site has not been fully characterized yet, but would be in the vicinity of the L-tryptophan, cefazoline

and verapamil binding site. Secondly, the normal binding capacities for Au, Cu and dansylsarcosine observed at D3 and/or D7 in the EtOH and CCl₄ models is consistent with the normal levels of native albumin observed. This is likely due to a short phase of liver regeneration, which has been extensively reported at least for animals intoxicated with CCl₄.⁴⁰⁻⁴² Third, Cu is reported to have strong affinity for the N-terminal binding site and the metal binding site B (MBSB). However, we did not identify any isoform with a truncation of the N-terminal moiety, suggesting that MBSB modifications alone are responsible for decreased Cu binding. Also, we detected N-Glycation and hypothesized that they occurred on Lys199, Lys281, Lys439, and Lys525 (3), all located near the L-thyroxine sites. These modifications would alter local dynamics and in turn affect the L-thyroxin binding capacity. Finally, Cu binding capacity showed the earliest decrease in our models. Therefore, Cu could be considered as a very early sensitive marker of an albumin PTM. In contrast, decreased Cd binding capacity was observed only at later stages, suggesting that it could be used as a biomarker of more intense, or different, albumin PTMs.

Our results show that the use of one ligand (as proposed with the IMA test) might not be sufficient to detect albumin PTMs in general. Actually, the coverage of a larger part of the albumin structure seems to be key to detect liver injuries early. Further investigations including molecular modeling should be further conducted to comprehend the albumin isoforms-ligands binding relationships and to finely tune the SEB test.

The SEB test and albumin PTMs show potential for early detection of Drug-induced liver injury (DILI), a life-threatening adverse effect of certain drugs and a significant challenge in patient care and drug development. DILI is a major concern for regulators and the pharmaceutical industry, often leading to termination of drug development or post-approval withdrawal. Despite efforts to identify biomarkers, DILI diagnosis remains challenging due to the diverse presentations and lack of early, specific indicators. While some mechanistic biomarkers have shown promise, the extensive number of candidates highlights the unmet medical needs in DILI diagnosis and prediction. Timely medical care and prediction of outcomes,

particularly in DILI-induced acute liver failure (ALF), are crucial. Prognostic biomarkers for overall DILI and predicting injury development in patients with normal-to-low ALT values are still lacking. Although micro-RNA-122 is the most promising biomarker to date, its clinical use is limited by biological variations. The SEB test and albumin PTM monitoring hold promise in addressing these gaps, offering a patient-specific, temporal approach for DILI diagnosis and prognosis. Future investigations are warranted to explore their broader potential in hepatology. The early detection capability of the SEB test suggests its potential as a prognostic biomarker, pending further confirmation through future studies.

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Figure legends

Figure 1. Structural and dynamic variabilities of HSA isoforms. a) Overview of HMA albumin used as reference. Domains I, II and III are colored blue-ish, red-ish and green-ish, respectively, for which each subdomain A and B are stressed out. Residues modified by PTM considered in this work are also located, namely N-terminal Asp1 and Ala2 residues for Δ^{DA} HMA as well as Cys34 for HNA1 and HNA2. Sudlow's sites 1 and 2 are also shown as well as the two main fatty acid binding sites used in the present models (FA2 and FA5). b) Per-residue Root Mean Squared Fluctuation differences (ΔRMSF , Å) between PTM HSA isoforms and native HMA. Subdomains are shown as background. c) Representative snapshots of each structural cluster obtained from MD simulations for each HSA isoforms. d) Structural variabilities of bound palmitates to HSA isoform representative snapshots. 300 different palmitate molecules along MD trajectories are displayed for FA2 and FA5. e) Allosteric communication between different sources (Cys34, Asp1 and Ala2) to main albumin binding sites, namely Sudlow's site 1 and 2 and L-thyroxine site 3, 4 and 5, as well as metal binding sites (N-terminal binding site – NTS – and Metal binding site – MBS). Efficiency of information flow from source to sink are shown from current flow closeness from Allopath tool.

Figure 2. Serum enhanced binding of Cu, Cd, Au and dansylsarcosine.

Figure 3. SEB test performance to discriminate cirrhosis patients from control patients.

Figure 4. Number of positive ligands of the SEB test for each patient included in the cohort.

Figure 5. SEB test ligands evolution and albumin isoforms in the rat models. A. Ethanol model. B. CCl_4 model.

Table 1: Effect of EtOH on biochemical markers expressed as the median [min-max] (* p < 0,05).

| Biomarkers | Controls | D1 | D3 | D7 | D10 | D14 |
|------------------|---------------------|---------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| ALB (g/L) | 14,4 [12,7-17,6] | 13,8 [13,2-14,1] | 12,4* [11,8-14,2] | 12,2* [11,0-13,8] | 16,35 [12,4-17,7] | 12,9* [10,2-13,5] |
| AST (UI/L) | 70,8 [61-75] | 78 [70-85] | 80 [52-144] | 96* [75-157] | 92* [81-157] | 90* [85-294] |
| ALT (UI/L) | 57 [46-61] | 63 [52-71] | 62 [46-123] | 69 [52-97] | 78* [68-98] | 82* [65-104] |
| PAL (UI/L) | 196 [101-325] | 232 [153-304] | 180 [121-329] | 159 [84-263] | 172 [100-222] | 230 [110-327] |
| BILID (μ M) | 0,75 [0,6-1] | 0,7 [0,3-1] | 0,7 [0,5-1,3] | 0,7 [0,4-4,4] | 0,8 [0,5-1,1] | 0,6 [0,4-0,7] |
| BILIT (μ M) | 0,75 [0,4-1,3] | 0,8 [0,4-1,6] | 0,8 [0,2-1,7] | 1,0 [0,2-1,9] | 1,0 [0,8-1,6] | 0,9 [0,5-1,8] |
| Histology | | 2/7 Inflammation | 1/6 inflammation | 4/7 inflammation | 2/8 inflammation | 3/9 inflammation |

Table 2: Effect of CCl₄ administration on biochemical markers expressed as the median [min-max] (* p < 0,05; ** p < 0,01).

| Biomarkers | Controls | D1 | D3 | D7 | D10 |
|------------------|---------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------|
| ALB (g/L) | 14,4 [12,7-17,6] | 14,2 [12,9-14,5] | 13,0* [11,8-14,2] | 12,9* [10,4-14,5] | 16,0 [15,9-16,7] |
| AST (UI/L) | 70,8 [61-75] | 123* [90-251] | 151* [82-214] | 232** [168-305] | 337** [192-473] |
| ALT (UI/L) | 57 [46-61] | 77* [67-181] | 90* [78-208] | 200** [107-638] | 355** [166-538] |
| PAL (UI/L) | 196 [101-325] | 232 [192-270] | 237 [174-329] | 248 [117-341] | 205 [149-250] |
| BILID (μ M) | 0,75 [0,6-1,0] | 1,1 [0,7-1,5] | 1,2 [0,3-1,3] | 1,6** [1,2-2,0] | 2,5** [1,8-2,9] |
| BILIT (μ M) | 0,75 [0,4-1,3] | 1,4 [0,4-2,0] | 1,3 [0,6-3,5] | 2,3** [1,8-4,5] | 3,5** [2,4-5,3] |
| Histology | | | Steatosis 5/5 1/5 fibrosis | Steatosis 6/6 | 6/6 steatosis 1/6 fibrosis |

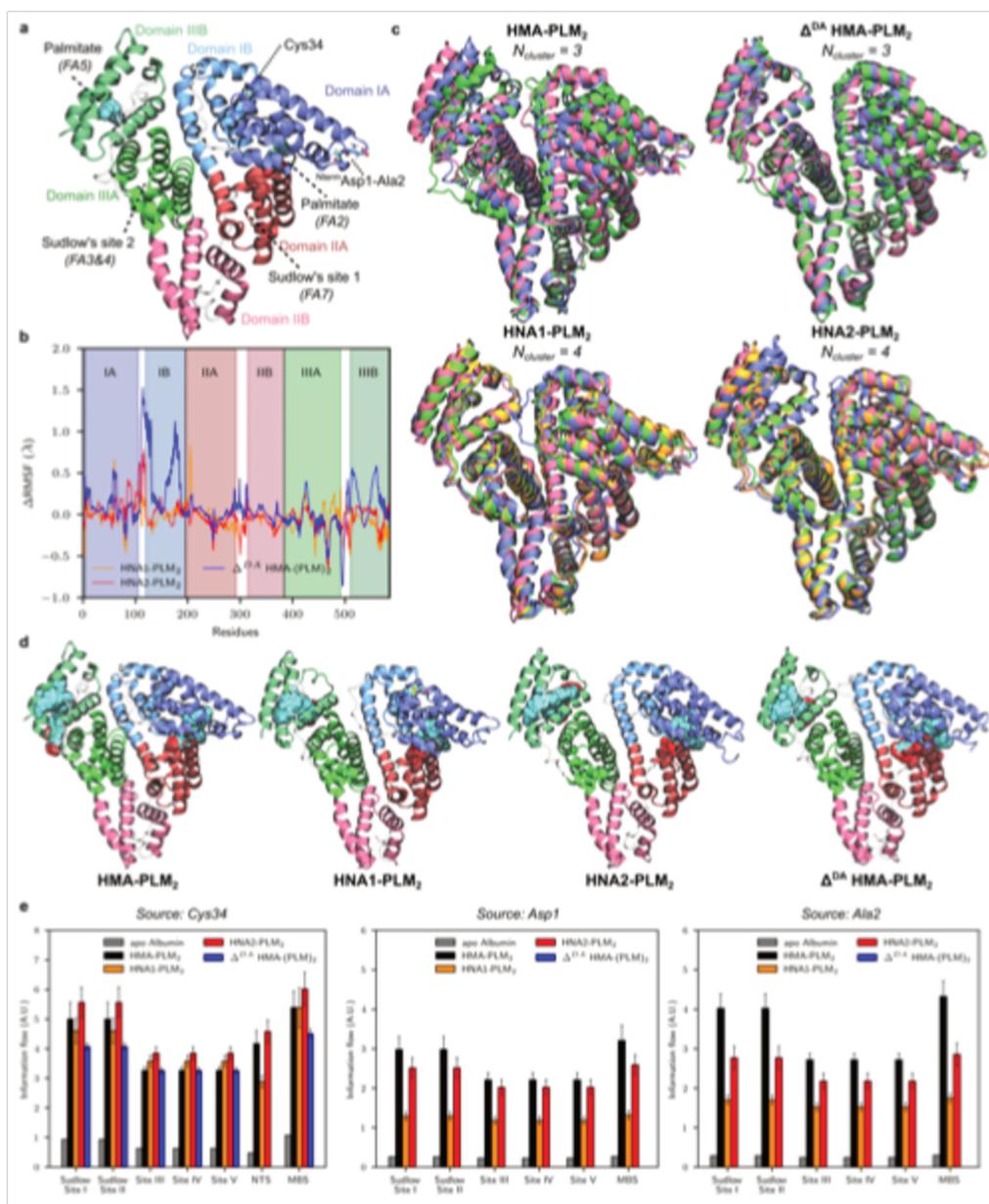


Figure 1

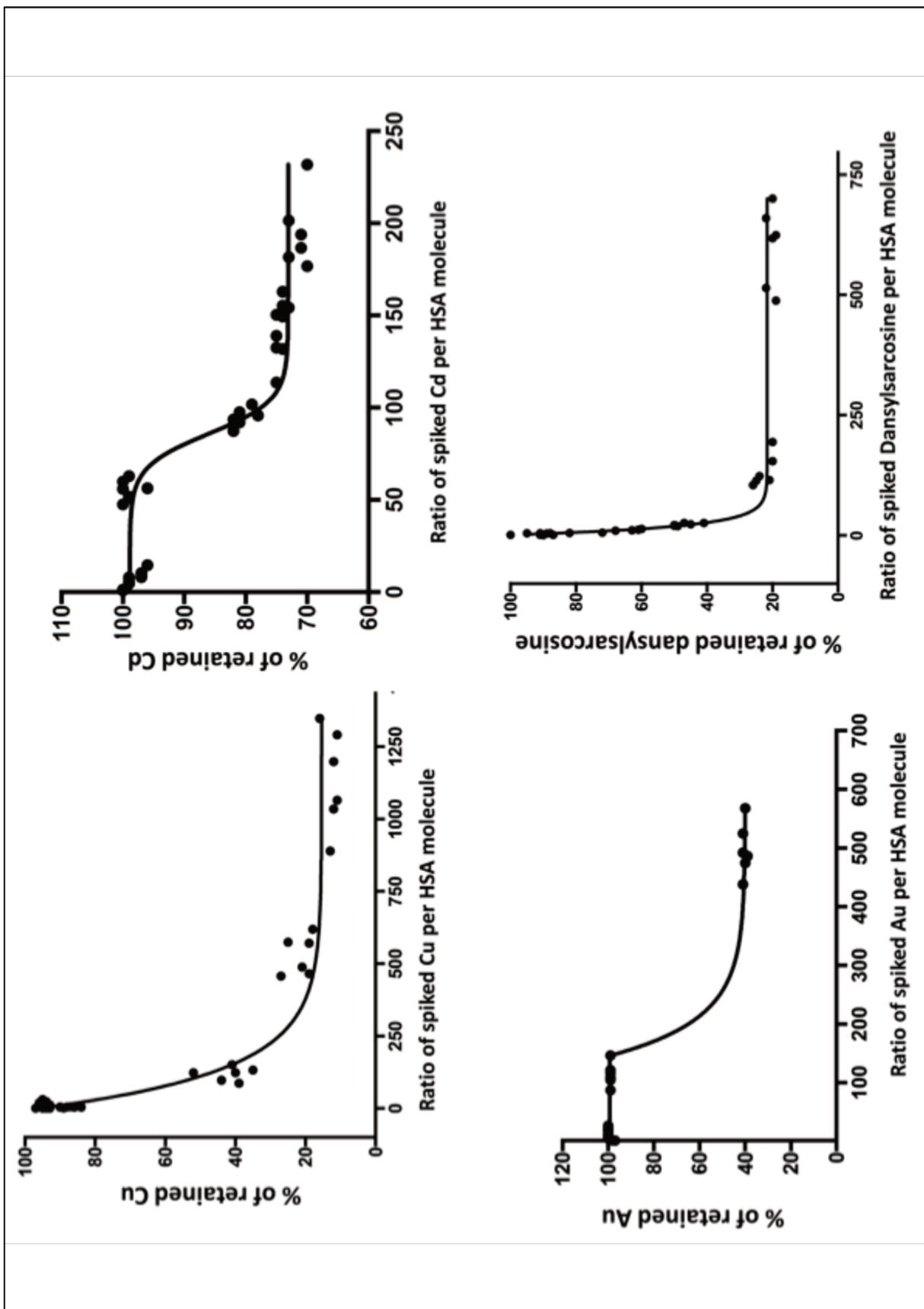


Figure 2

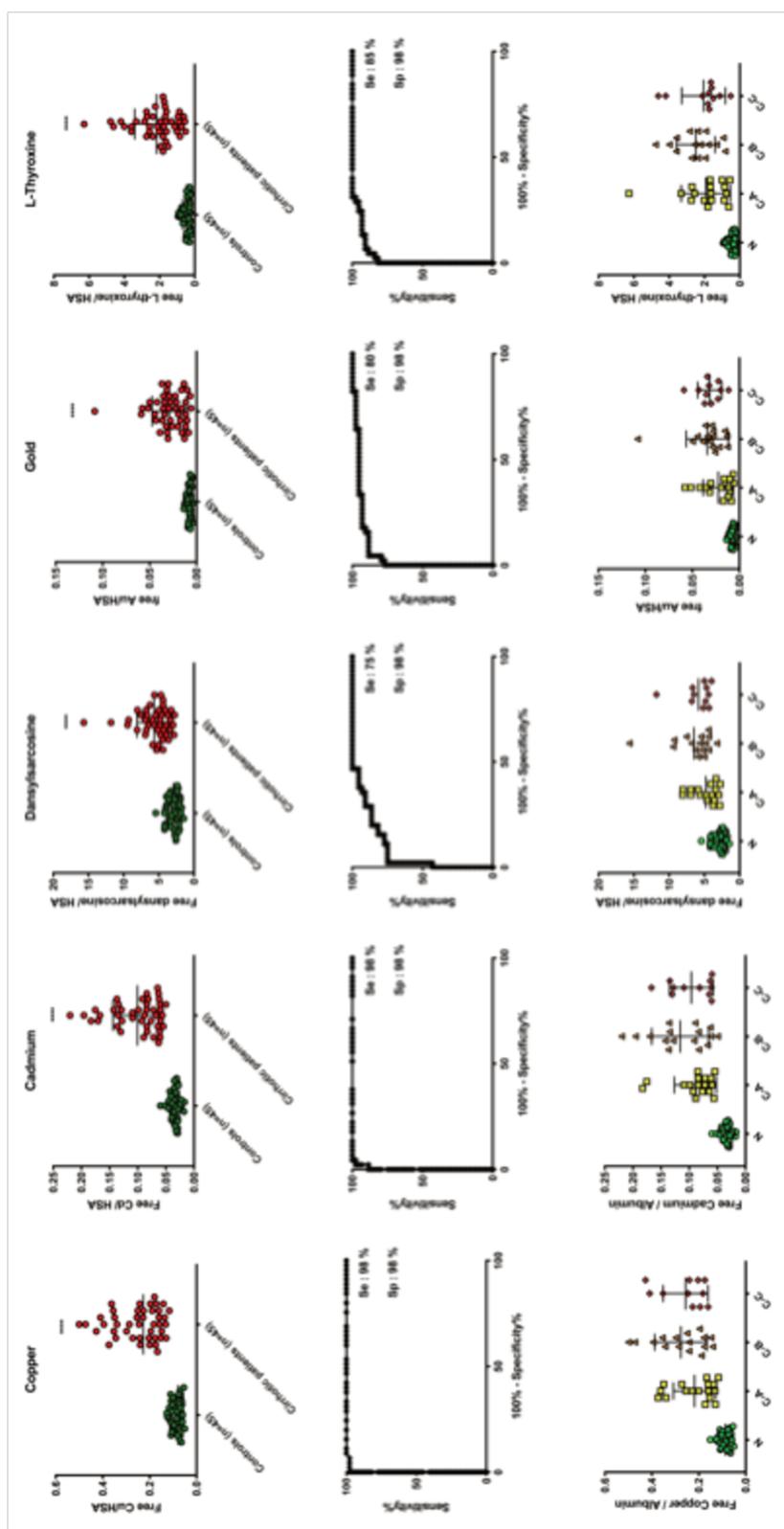


Figure 3

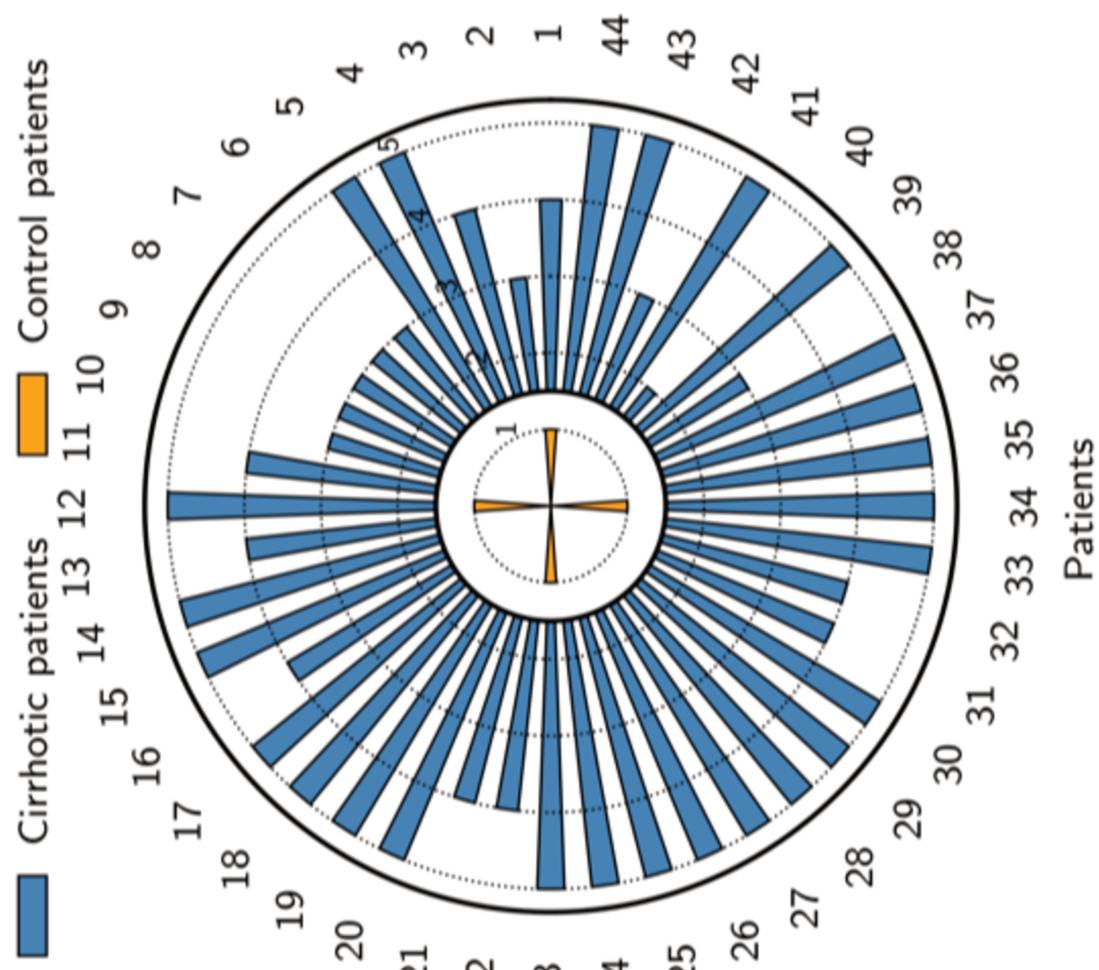


Figure 4

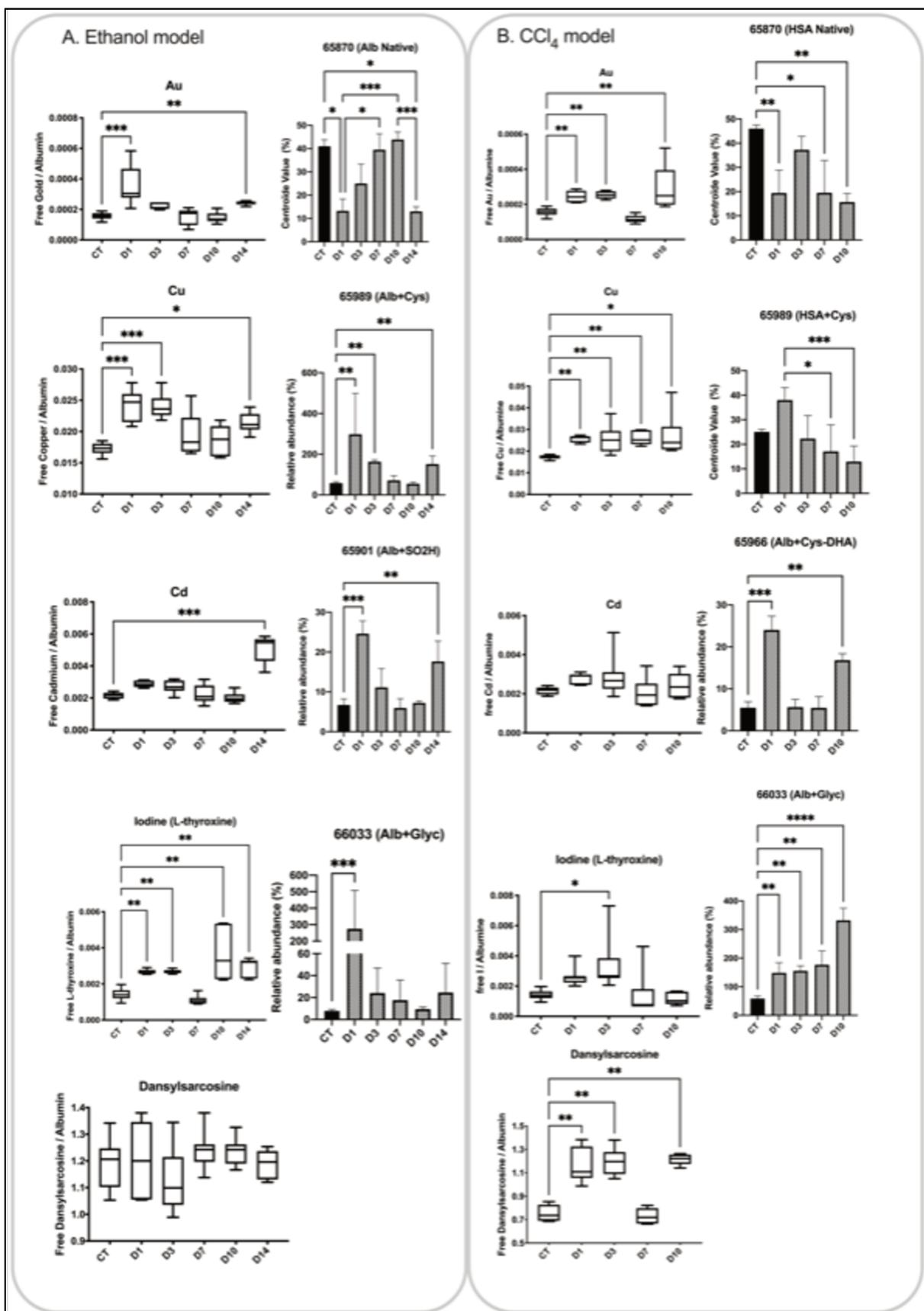


Figure 5

II.2.1.4. Discussion

Les modifications structurelles de l'HSA les plus fréquentes peuvent être détectées en mesurant les ligands libres (non liés) après avoir enrichi le sérum du patient avec des solutions contenant les ligands mentionnés ci-dessus. Ceci est possible puisque le cuivre (Cu), l'or (Au) et le cadmium (Cd) couvrent les principaux sites de liaison de l'HSA, tandis que la dansylsarcosine et la L-thyroxine pourraient refléter ses modifications conformationnelles puisque leurs sites de liaison sont situés dans les cavités de la protéine. Il est intéressant de noter que tous les ligands cités ci-dessus peuvent être directement mesurés à l'aide d'une technique simple qu'est la spectrométrie de masse à plasma à couplage inductif (ICP-MS) dont la méthodologie est illustrée dans la figure ci-dessous et est détaillée dans le brevet (**Figure 13 ; Brevet 1, p13-p16**).

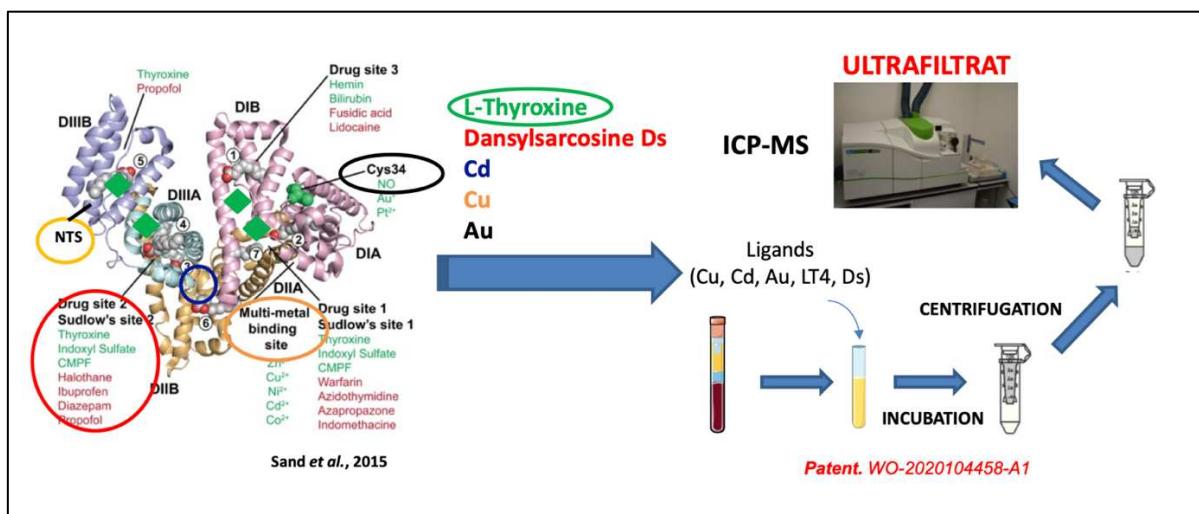


Figure 13. Schéma représentatif du Serum Enhanced Binding Test (SEB Test)

Pour mettre au point le SEB Test, nous avons testé plusieurs ligands possédant des sites de liaison spécifiques connus sur l'albumine. Les sites de liaison ont été choisis afin de couvrir les modifications de l'HSA ayant une pertinence clinique rapportée dans les hépatopathies. Pour cela, l'or a été choisi pour révéler les modifications Cys34 (210–212), le cuivre pour sa forte affinité pour le site N-terminal et le site de liaison multiple B (159,168), la L-thyroxine pour ses 4 sites de liaison répartis dans les 4 cavités de l'albumine (Tr1 à Tr4) (170), la dansylsarcosine pour son affinité avec le site médicamenteux 3 (ou site de liaison au diazépam), qui est aussi le site de liaison de la bilirubine (213), et le cadmium pour sa forte affinité pour les multi-sites de liaison A (ou site de liaison du cadmium) (132).

Lors de tests préliminaires, nous avons observé que le sérum était capable de lier jusqu'à 12 atomes de Cu, 150 atomes d'Au, 50 atomes de Cd, 2,5 molécules de dansylsarcosine et au moins 10 molécules de L-thyroxine par molécule d'albumine (**Brevet 1 : Figure 1**). Ces valeurs

observées étaient bien supérieures aux valeurs théoriques et expérimentales rapportées dans la littérature. Dans nos conditions expérimentales concernant le SEB Test, une hydrolyse des métaux pourrait se produire, ce qui pourrait être responsable de liaisons non spécifiques dues aux forces de van der Waals (214). Pour cela, nous avons décidé d'utiliser le SEB Test avec des concentrations de ligands plus faibles. Nous avons fixé des valeurs seuils (rapport « atomes de ligand ajoutés sur la valeur d'ALB mesurée ») à 5 atomes pour le cuivre, le cadmium et la thyroxine, à 20 atomes pour la dansylsarcosine et 50 atomes pour l'or. En analysant des échantillons de sérum de patients avec le SEB Test, tous les ligands testés ont été capables de discriminer significativement les patients cirrhotiques des individus non cirrhotiques (**Brevet 1 : Figure 4**). La diminution des capacités de liaison chez les patients cirrhotiques s'est accompagnée de la présence d'isoformes de l'HSA significativement plus élevées (**Brevet 1 : Figure 3**). Cela nous prouve que les modifications structurelles les plus importantes de l'HSA dues à une atteinte hépatique pourraient être révélées en mesurant la fraction non liée de ligands spécifiques enrichis dans le sérum. Plusieurs études ont rapporté les modifications chimiques de l'albumine (132,209,215,216) (125,203–205). Par exemple, il a été démontré récemment que, chez les patients atteints d'hépatite alcoolique sévère, une liaison excessive de la bilirubine avec l'albumine permet de prédire une mortalité à 3 mois et que cette liaison excessive contribue à une diminution de la capacité de liaison de la dansylsarcosine à l'albumine (5).

En parallèle, une approche analytique par chromatographie haute résolution (LC-QTOF) a été réalisée pour évaluer et identifier les isoformes de l'HSA responsables de ces modifications structurelles. La nature et les abondances relatives des isoformes HSA trouvées dans notre analyse sont en accord avec la littérature (5,6,9,10,217) et avec les résultats du SEB Test. En effet, en comparaison avec les patients ayant une fonction hépatique normale, tous les patients cirrhotiques présentaient des taux élevés de l'HSA modifiée (nitrosylation, cystéinylation et glycation) (**Brevet 1 : Figure 3**). La nitrosylation et la cystéinylation se produisent sur la Cys34 (146), ce qui concorde avec une diminution de la liaison de l'Au à l'HSA chez les patients cirrhotiques. La glycation peut se produire sur Lys199, Lys281, Lys439 et Lys525 (151), tous situés à proximité des sites L-thyroxine, ce qui pourrait empêcher ce ligand de se lier à l'HSA. Enfin, il a été démontré que l'oxydation de la Cys34 pourrait entraîner des changements conformationnels de l'HSA (213). Il modifie la structure conformationnelle de l'ensemble du domaine I, ainsi que de l'interface domaine I/II, ce qui entraîne une diminution des capacités de liaison des ligands endogènes (L-Trp) et exogènes (céfazoline et vérapamil), dont les sites de liaison sont éloignés de la Cys34. Ce point pourrait expliquer la diminution de la capacité de liaison du cadmium chez les patients cirrhotiques. On rapporte que le cadmium se

coordonne avec une histone et quatre carboxylates ; cependant, son emplacement est inconnu mais devrait être éloigné de la Cys34 (132).

Or, malgré un faible échantillonnage des patients, nous avons observé que la capacité de liaison de l'HSA était plus diminuée chez les patients atteints de cirrhose alcoolique que chez ceux atteints de cirrhose métabolique ou de cirrhose mixte (**Brevet 1 : Tableau 1**). L'isoforme HSA-Cys semble être plus élevée chez les patients avec une cirrhose alcoolique. La même observation pourrait être faite avec le SEB Test avec une fraction libre (non liée) en cuivre plus élevée chez ces patients. De plus, les patients ayant les scores Child et MELD les plus élevés (patients 2, 3 et 8) ont les abondances de HSA-Cys les plus élevées (**Brevet 1 : Tableau 1**). Le patient 19 (non inclus dans les statistiques) avait une NASH sans cirrhose. L'abondance de ses isoformes HSA-Cys est parmi les plus faibles, mais la liaison de la L-thyroxine et de l'or à l'HSA était inférieure à celle des patients témoins et supérieure à celle des patients cirrhotiques. Cela pourrait s'expliquer par les modifications des sites de la Cys34 et de la L-thyroxine et par l'absence de modification au niveau du NTS, mais nous n'avons aujourd'hui aucune preuve pour étayer cette hypothèse.

II.2.1.5. Conclusion

Grâce à l'élaboration du SEB Test, nos travaux démontrent que l'utilisation d'un seul ligand (comme proposé avec le test IMA) pourrait ne pas être suffisante pour détecter les modifications post-traductionnelles de l'albumine. En réalité, couvrir une plus grande partie de la structure de l'albumine semble être la clé pour détecter les lésions hépatiques de manière précoce. Or, nous avons démontré que les capacités de liaison de certains ligands, mesurées par spectrométrie de masse à plasma inductif (ICP-MS), sont significativement différentes entre des patients cirrhotiques et des patients sains. La diminution des capacités de liaison chez les patients cirrhotiques s'est accompagnée de la présence d'isoformes de l'HSA significativement plus élevées. Pour identifier et quantifier ces isoformes, une approche analytique par approche « top-down » était nécessaire par LC-QTOF. Cependant, cette approche « top-down » peut être discutable en raison de certains risques d'erreur d'identification, ce qui incite à utiliser des approches analytiques complémentaires et plus approfondies afin de valider et de justifier l'utilisation notre approche analytique.

II.2.2. Validation d'une approche analytique « top-down » des PTMs de l'HSA par une approche analytique « bottom-up »

II.2.2.1. Contexte

Une approche analytique simple, fiable et robuste est nécessaire pour caractériser les isoformes les plus pertinentes de l'HSA de manière rapide et complète dans les hépatopathies. Actuellement, il y a un intérêt croissant dans le développement de méthodes analytiques simples ; plusieurs équipes ont utilisé des méthodes descendantes (ou top-down) en spectrométrie de masse à haute résolution et ont démontré l'importance des isoformes de l'HSA comme candidats biomarqueurs prometteurs dans les atteintes hépatiques (4,6,151,160). Dans la majorité des études rapportées et mentionnées dans notre manuscrit, les isoformes de l'HSA sont identifiées grâce à la détermination de leur différence de masse entre les formes modifiées et non modifiées après « déconvolution » de leurs spectres MS haute résolution. Cette approche analytique, pouvant être considérée comme une analyse descendante (ou top-down) simplifiée, consiste en une injection directe de sérum dilué dans le système LC-QTOF (218). Elle présente l'avantage de conserver l'intégrité structurale et chimique de l'albumine. Néanmoins, celle-ci peut ne pas être spécifique à la nature de la modification, n'est pas informative sur le site de modification sur l'HSA, et que l'identification des isoformes soit réalisée sur la base de déplacements de masse caractéristiques après déconvolution du signal de l'HSA entraîne un risque d'erreur. Pour confirmer la présence d'isoformes d'intérêt, il était important d'utiliser une approche analytique complémentaire se basant sur une analyse ascendante (ou bottom-up) des modifications de l'HSA. Bien qu'elle nécessite une digestion enzymatique longue et fastidieuse et une longue optimisation des étapes de préparation des échantillons, elle permet une détermination plus efficace de la nature et du site des modifications structurales (219). À notre connaissance, la confrontation des 2 approches analytiques top-down et bottom-up réalisées sur les mêmes échantillons n'a jamais encore été rapportée notamment pour les PTMs de l'HSA. Sur la base de ces informations, nos travaux consistaient à évaluer la caractérisation des isoformes de l'HSA et la fiabilité de leur identification par une approche « top-down ». Pour cela, une approche « bottom-up » a été utilisée pour valider la caractérisation de toutes les PTMs de l'HSA chez des patients atteints d'une hépatopathie. L'étude été réalisée grâce à un quadripôle à haute résolution à ionisation par électrospray utilisé dans le cadre d'un couplage chromatographie liquide - spectrométrie de masse à temps de vol (ESI-QTOF). En parallèle, pour identifier et localiser les PTMs présumés, différentes analyses « bottom-up » ont été appliquées aux échantillons de sérum digérés avec un mode non ciblé d'acquisition de données (DDA). Ces approches combinées visaient à faire un inventaire exhaustif des PTMs de HSA pouvant être obtenu par chaque approche analytique et à valider la stratégie « top-down ».

II.2.2.2. Article 1: Posttranslational-modifications of human-serum-albumin analysis by a top-down approach validated by a comprehensive bottom-up analysis

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Posttranslational-modifications of human-serum-albumin analysis by a top-down approach validated by a comprehensive bottom-up analysis

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ABSTRACT

The posttranslational modifications (PTM) of human serum albumin (HSA) can result in the development of isoforms that have been identified as potential biomarkers for advanced hepatic diseases. However, previous approaches using top-down (TD) analysis to identify isoforms based on molecular weight may have resulted in misidentifications. The nature of the identified isoforms has never been confirmed in previous works. Here, we aimed to critically evaluate TD for the characterization and determination of HSA isoforms in patients and make an inventory of HSA-PTM.

Serum samples from control subjects and patients with liver dysfunctions were analyzed using both top-down (TD) and bottom-up (BU) approaches. TD analysis involved using a LC-TOF-MS system to obtain a multicharged spectrum of HSA, which was deconvoluted to identify isoforms. Spectra were then used for relative quantitation analysis of albumin isoform abundances based on trapezoidal integration. For BU analysis, serums were reduced +/- alkylated, digested with trypsin and analyzed in the Q-TOF, data-dependent acquisition (DDA) mode to generate a SWATH-MS high-resolution mass spectral library of all HSA peptides. Tryptic digests of another set of serum samples were then analyzed using data-independent acquisition (DIA) mode to confirm the presence of HSA isoforms and their modification sites.

TD detected 15 isoforms corresponding to various modifications, including glycation, cysteinylation, nitrosylation, and oxidation (di- and tri-). In BU, the spectral library containing 127 peptides allowed for the characterization of the important isoforms with their modified sites, including some modifications that were only characterized in BU (carbamylation, deamidation, and amino-acid substitution). The method used for determining isoforms offered acceptable reproducibility (intra-/inter-assay CVs < 15%) for all isoforms present at relative abundances higher than 2%.

Overall, the study found that several isoforms could be missed or misidentified by TD. However, all HSA isoforms identified by TD and reported to be relevant in liver dysfunctions were confirmed by BU. This critical evaluation of TD approach helped design an adequate and reliable method for the characterization of HSA isoforms in patients and offers the possibility to estimate isoform abundances within 3 min. These findings have significant implications for the diagnosis and treatment of liver dysfunctions.

1. Introduction

Human serum albumin (HSA) is the most abundant protein in blood serum representing more than half of the total protein content. In addition to its oncotic property, HSA exerts several physiological functions such as binding, transport and detoxification of endogenous and

exogenous molecules. HSA is also the main circulating antioxidant and it modulates immune and inflammatory responses [1]. Despite its highly conserved characteristics/features in humans, HSA undergoes several structural and chemical modifications including truncation [2,3], acetylation [4], cysteinylation [5,6], homocysteinylation [7], glycation [8], nitrosylation [9], oxidation [10] and dimerization [11,12]. These

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modifications, often called micro-heterogeneity or post-translational modifications (PTM), lead to the apparition of isoforms, also called proteoforms [13]. Among these, the most studied are those characterized based on the redox state of cysteine 34 (Cys34) where: (i) Human mercaptalbumin (HMA) is the reduced and most abundant form, representing 70–80% of total albumin in healthy subjects, (ii) Non-mercaptalbumin 1 (HNA1) is the reversibly oxidized form (20–30%) and (iii) Nonmercaptalbumin 2 (HNA2) is the irreversible oxidized form of albumin (<5%) [2].

The structural modifications of HSA have been proposed very recently as promising biomarker candidates for the diagnosis and the monitoring of advanced hepatic diseases [11,14–18]. Some studies have demonstrated that the determination of certain isoforms is of interest in diabetes and in chronic kidney disease [19–21], but there is now a bundle of proofs showing the growing interest of the identification and quantification of HSA isoforms for liver diseases. For example, a progressive increase in HNA1 and HNA2 was observed in patients with severe cirrhosis and was well correlated to short-term mortality [10,16]. Structural alterations involving other sites have also been reported in liver diseases. The N- or C-terminal truncated isoforms, as well as the glycated isoforms have been found to be increased in patients with acute decompensated cirrhosis or diagnosed with severe alcoholic hepatitis [16]. Very recently, in a large observational study, Baldassarre M. et al. provided evidence that “effective HSA” (the non-modified HSA) is more associated with disease severity and liver dysfunction and has greater prognostic power in patients with decompensated cirrhosis than “total albumin” measured with conventional methods [14]. Interestingly, the presence of certain isoforms seems to exert a pejorative role in the evolution of liver diseases. It is the case for HNA1 in patients with decompensated cirrhosis [22], while native HSA has probably a protective role by reducing the pro-inflammatory environment present in acute decompensated cirrhosis [10]. At present, it is not fully established whether other albumin isoforms are, either mostly inactive, or have biological properties not characterized yet.

In the above-mentioned works, HSA isoforms were identified through the determination of their molecular weight after “deconvolution” of their high-resolution MS spectra, acquired mostly using LC-quadrupole time-of-flight (QTOF) instruments. This analytical strategy, which can be seen as a simplified top-down analysis, consists in a direct injection of diluted serum into the LC-MS system [23]. It has the advantage of preserving the structural and chemical modifications of interest of the native protein form.

The identification of these modifications is based on characteristic mass shift(s) observed in the deconvoluted MS spectrum, between the modified and unmodified forms, corresponding to the mass of the specific modification (e.g., a 162-Da mass difference in case of glycation). However, this strategy is not perfectly specific to the nature of the modification, nor informative about its site on the protein. Moreover, deviations of 1–5 Da are often observed between the theoretical and the experimental mass of native HSA [24]. To better characterize the structural modifications and confirm the presence of isoforms of interest, it is crucial to perform a bottom-up analysis of HSA modifications. Although it requires a long and tedious enzymatic digestion and long optimization of the sample preparation steps, it allows a more efficient determination of the nature and the site of the structural modifications [25]. Yet, the top-down approach has been favored to study HSA modifications without precisely confirming the presence of these PTMs. Surprisingly, only very few studies have used both analytical approaches but focused exclusively on oxidative modifications or glycation [6,16,18].

Thus, the aim of this work was to critically evaluate the specificity of HSA isoforms characterization and the reliability of their determination by a top-down approach. Therefore, an inclusive bottom-up approach was used to validate the characterization of all albumin PTM in liver disease patients and intra/inter assays were performed for the determination of the detected isoforms. The study was performed using

electrospray ionization (ESI) high resolution quadrupole - time-of-flight mass spectrometry (QTOF). In parallel, to identify and localize putative PTM, different bottom-up analyses were applied to digested serum samples with untargeted data acquisition mode. These combined approaches aimed to comprehensively inventory the PTM of HSA that can be obtained by each analytical approach and to validate the top-down strategy.

2. Material and methods

2.1. Patients

Serum samples from two control subjects (without hepatic impairment) and four patients with different degrees of liver dysfunctions (**Supplemental Table I**), who did not object to the use of leftovers of their biological materials, were obtained from blood samples collected in dry tube and sent to the laboratory for routine care, after routine analyses had been carried out.

2.2. Proteomic analysis of the serum Samples

2.2.1. Top-down approach

For the top-down approach (Fig. 1A), 50-times diluted serum samples were analyzed by flow-injection into a Nexera LC40 system (Shimadzu, Noyiel, France) and acquisition in the positive TOF-MS mode, using a Sciex TripleTOF® 5600 + system.

The high-resolution spectra were then deconvoluted using PeakView® 2.2 software and its Bio Tool Kit 2.2.0 feature (Sciex) with the following parameters: input m/z range from 1,350 to 1,650 Da with a resolution of 5,000; output mass range from 1,000 to 200,000.

To clarify in details the deconvolution process, it is important to specify that mass spectrometry generates a complex multiple charge spectrum when a sample is ionized and the resulting ions are separated by their mass-to-charge ratio (m/z). This produces a signal with overlapping peaks that represent different ions with similar masses and different charges. The process of deconvolution involves applying a mathematical algorithm to the complex multi-charge spectrum, which separates the overlapping peaks and identifies the individual components. By converting the complex mass spectrum of all multiple charge states of the same protein form into a single mass value of the neutral molecule, deconvolution greatly simplifies the mass spectrum of larger proteins. In our study, we applied deconvolution to the complex multi-charged spectrum of albumin, which resulted in a zero charge mass spectrum representing the various isoforms present in albumin between 66,000 and 67500 Da. The mass difference between each peak corresponds to a distinct isoform.

2.2.2. Bottom-up approach

Serum extracts were obtained after reduction alone, alkylation alone or reduction and alkylation, followed by tryptic digestion and solid-phase extraction of the digest of 100 µg of serum sample.

Each sample was subjected to data-dependent acquisition (DDA) then compared by ProteinPilot 5.0.1 (Sciex) software using the Paragon algorithm to an in-house database containing HSA sequence without peptide signal and its known truncated variants with the following parameters: search effort, thorough; Cys alkylation: none or iodoacetamide; ID focus, biological modifications. The result of this search led to the building of a reference spectral library containing all the validated peptides, carrying or not PTM.

Then, the samples were subjected to Sequential Window Acquisition of all theoretical fragment ion spectra (SWATH)-MS, a label-free quantification approach based on a data-independent acquisition (DIA) strategy, using different SWATH windows over a range of 300 to 1,250 m/z . Spectral alignment and targeted data extraction from DIA samples was performed using MultiQuant 3.0.1 (Sciex) with a resolution of 40,000 (Fig. 1B).

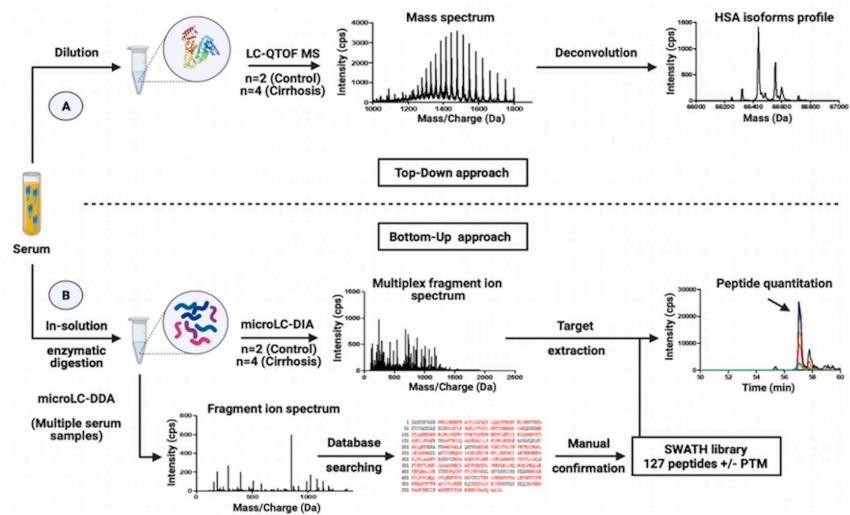


Fig. 1. Experimental workflow of proteomics strategies for the characterization of albumin isoforms (A) Diluted serum is injected directly to obtain the multicharged spectrum of HSA which is deconvoluted to identify the profile of the different HSA isoforms by LC-QTOF-MS. (B) Tryptic digests of multiple serum samples were analyzed by DDA, followed by database searching and manual confirmation, to generate a SWATH-MS HSA spectral library. Tryptic digests of 6 serum samples (2 controls and 4 patients) were analyzed by DIA to confirm the presence of HSA isoforms and their modification sites.

Detailed sample preparation, chromatographic separation and MS acquisition conditions for both top-down and bottom-up methods are described in the [supplementary materials](#).

2.2.3. Isoforms determination, reproducibility and replicability

After deconvolution of HR spectra, relative quantitation analysis of albumin isoform proportions by using a code developed on R software based on trapezoidal integration; the integrated peak area of each

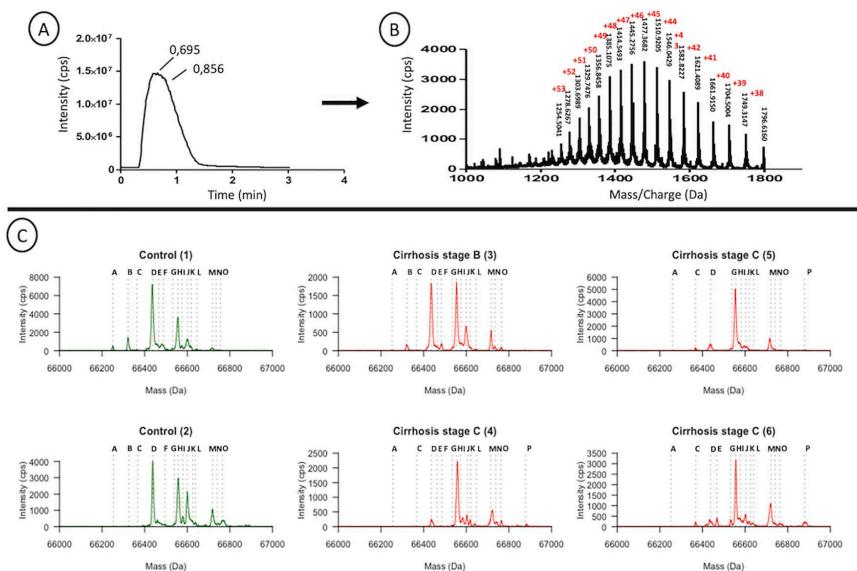


Fig. 2. (A) LC-ESI-MS total ion chromatogram of HSA. (B) Multi-charged mass spectrum acquired on peak apex eluting at 0.7 min and identified as HSA by LC-QTOF-MS. (C) Deconvoluted ESI-MS spectra of HSA and its isoforms from 2 control subjects (green) and 4 cirrhotic patients (red). (For interpretation of the references to colour in this figure legend, the reader is referred to the web version of this article.)

isoform was computed to determine its relative abundance. The abundance of each isoform was defined as the area of each isoform peak over the summed surface area of all the peaks present between 66000 and 67500 Da. HSA isoforms were determined to evaluate replicability and reproducibility in three different patient serums: a control patient (CT), a patient having Child-Pugh score B cirrhosis (CB) and a patient with a Child-Pugh C score cirrhosis (CC). The total albumin concentrations for these patients were 45.9, 28.9 and 24.7 g/L, respectively. The replicability of the method was evaluated by analyzing six different measurements of 6 different preparations of a same sample during the same day. As for the reproducibility, three different measurements of three different preparations of a same sample were measured on two different days. Data were expressed as mean and coefficient of variation ($n = 6$, day 1; $n = 3$, day 2; $n = 3$, day 3).

3. Results

3.1. Top-down strategy

Direct injection of diluted serum samples into the LC-QTOF-MS generates a peak corresponding to HSA and its isoforms in the positive mode (Fig. 2A). The ESI multicharged mass spectrum (Fig. 2B) showed an ion distribution from $[M + 53H]^{53+}$ to $[M + 38H]^{38+}$.

The deconvoluted mass spectrum of HSA, obtained using PeakView® 2.2 software (depicted in Fig. 2C), shows the presence of several isoforms of HSA between 66,000 and 67,000 Da. The peak at 66,438 Da (identified with the letter D in Fig. 2C and in Table 1) corresponds to the native HSA form with its 17 disulfide bonds (theoretical molecular weight of 66,437.94 Da). The other peaks (also coded by a letter in Fig. 2C) are characterized by their difference with the molecular weight of native HSA leading to potential identification of PTM (Table 1).

We identified 15 isoforms in addition to the native isoform. The main modifications corresponded to glycation, cysteinylation, nitrosylation and oxidation (di- and tri-) detected alone or in combination. We also identified truncated isoforms at the N-terminal end (peak A) and at the C-terminal end (peak B). The peaks identified covered more than 95% of the total area surface of the peaks in the HSA deconvolution spectrum over the considered mass range (Table 2).

3.2. Bottom-up strategy

A spectral library containing a total of 127 peptides, covering 84.1% of the HSA sequence, was built after DDA of multiple tryptic samples prepared in various conditions of reduction/alkylation, with the aim of generating a specific SWATH-MS acquisition method (Supplemental Table III). Among the 127 identified peptides, 35 were not carrying any PTM, 43 were identified only in reduction/alkylation conditions when disulfide bonds were cleaved (and blocked) and 66 peptides were carrying PTM other than cysteine carbamidomethylation (Supplemental Figure S1).

We were able to detect the presence of 12 PTM categories in HSA: (1) cysteinylation (addition of cysteine to Cys34), (2) di-oxidation (3), cysteine tri-oxidation (4) truncation of the protein end (loss of leucine at the C-terminal), (5) glycation, (6) acetylation, (7) conversion of a cysteine to dehydroalanine, (8) oxidation, (9) carbamylation, (10) deamidation, (11) nitration and (12) amino-acid substitution (Table 3).

3.3. Confrontation of results obtained with the two proteomics strategies

The 6 serum samples selected for the top-down approach were analyzed using the SWATH-MS method after tryptic digestion. Firstly, characteristic fragments of the selected peptides of HSA were extracted to confirm the presence of the different modifications in HSA, then to confirm the potential isoforms identified with the top-down approach (Table 4). From the detected HSA PTM, 10 out of the 15 potential isoforms identified with the top-down strategy were confirmed (Table 4). The relative proportion of the peak areas of these 10 confirmed isoforms in control and cirrhotic patients are reported in Fig. 3A.

The influence of cysteinylation on Cys34, proposed as a sensitive marker in advanced chronic liver disease [6], was investigated using SWATH-MS analysis. Characteristic fragments described in the SWATH library of the modifications observed on Cys34 (i.e. cysteinylation and carbamidomethylation), were monitored in control and cirrhotic patients and showed an important increase of cysteinylation over carbamidomethylation in patients with cirrhosis C (Fig. 3B).

3.4. Isoforms determination and method accuracy

The interday and intraday assays performed on a control patients and 2 other cirrhotic patients shown in tables 5, 6 and 7 indicate an

Table 1
HSA isoforms identified and quantified using the top-down strategy. *Calculation of the median of delta mass between the detected isoforms and native HSA for the 6 patient serum samples. Minimum and maximum mass difference values in brackets.

| Peak | Theoretical Mass | Theoretical delta mass | Experimental delta differences* | Potential modifications | Identified isoforms |
|------|------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------|--|---------------------|
| A | 66,252 | -186.0 | -183.9 [-186.0; -177.8] | Truncation at N-terminal end | HSA-DA |
| B | 66,325 | -113.0 | -114.5 [-114.7; -111.5] | Truncation at C-terminal end | HSA-L |
| C | 66,371 | -67.0 | -70.0 [-72.7; -68.5] | Cysteinylation with Truncation at N terminal end | HSA + Cys-DA |
| D | 66,438 | 0.0 | 0.0 | None | Native HSA |
| E | 66,467 | +29.0 | +29.1 [+28.8; +29.8] | Nitrosylation | HSA + NO |
| F | 66,486 | +48.0 | +50.1 [+36.8; +51.2] | Oxidation (x3) | HSA + 3Ox |
| G | 66,534 | +96.0 | +98.8 [+94.5; +101.0] | Oxidation (x6) | HSA + 2(3Ox) |
| H | 66,557 | +119.0 | +119.0 [+117.0; +120.0] | Cysteinylation | HSA + Cys |
| I | 66,573 | +135.0 | +139.8 [+136.5; +144.0] | Cysteinylation Oxidation | HSA + Cys + 1Ox |
| J | 66,600 | +162.0 | +164.6 [+161.8; +169.8] | Glycation | HSA + Glyc |
| K | 66,616 | +178.0 | +184.3 [+181.0; +188.0] | Glycation Oxidation | HSA + Glyc + 1Ox |
| L | 66,648 | +210.0 | +205.6 [+200.8; +211.0] | GlycationOxidation (x3) | HSA + Glyc + 3Ox |
| M | 66,719 | +281.0 | +281.5 [+278.8; +283.5] | Cysteinylation Glycation | HSA + Cys + Glyc |
| N | 66,743 | +305.0 | +302.6 [+298.3; +304.5] | Glutathionylation | HSA + GSH |
| O | 66,762 | +324.0 | +325.9 [318.8; 329.3] | Glycation (x2) | HSA + 2Glyc |
| P | 66,881 | +443.0 | +442.0 [440.8; 442.3] | CysteinylationGlycation (x2) | HSA + Cys + 2Glyc |

Table 2
Quantification of HSA isoforms by relative intensity in the top-down approach.

| Isoforms | Mass (Da) | Control (1) | | Control (2) | | Cirrhosis B (3) | | Cirrhosis C (4) | | Cirrhosis C (5) | | Cirrhosis C (6) | | |
|---------------------|-----------|-------------|-------|-------------|------|-----------------|------|-----------------|-------|-----------------|-------|-----------------|------|--------|
| | | MD | AUC | RI (%) | AUC | RI (%) | AUC | RI (%) | AUC | RI (%) | AUC | RI (%) | AUC | RI (%) |
| A HSA-DA | 66250.5 | -186 | 0.41 | 1.63 | 0.01 | 0.03 | 0.04 | 0.17 | 0.00 | 0.02 | 0.00 | 0.01 | 0.00 | 0.02 |
| B HSA-L | 66321.8 | -115 | 0.06 | 6.06 | 0.01 | 0.06 | 0.62 | 2.48 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.02 |
| C HSA + Cys-D | 66363.8 | -73 | 0.12 | 0.5 | 0.01 | 0.03 | 0.06 | 0.22 | 0.43 | 1.71 | 0.01 | 0.05 | 0.45 | 1.82 |
| D HSA Native | 66436.5 | 0 | 10.09 | 40.35 | 6.13 | 24.54 | 8.00 | 32.02 | 1.89 | 7.54 | 1.39 | 5.57 | 14.2 | 5.67 |
| E HSA + NO | 66465.3 | 29 | 1.06 | 4.24 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.69 | 2.76 | 0.07 | 0.28 | 0.07 | 1.09 | 4.38 | |
| F HSA + 30x | 66487.8 | 51 | 1.5 | 6.01 | 0.3 | 1.2 | 0.67 | 2.66 | 0.03 | 0.12 | 0.12 | 0.26 | 1.02 | 3.4 |
| G HSA + 2(3OS) | 66531.0 | 95 | 0.3 | 1.21 | 0.29 | 1.16 | 0.22 | 0.89 | 0.46 | 1.86 | 0.46 | 0.26 | 0.85 | 3.4 |
| H HSA + Cys | 66555.3 | 119 | 4.99 | 19.97 | 5.9 | 23.61 | 7.41 | 29.65 | 14.11 | 56.46 | 11.84 | 47.37 | 8.06 | 32.24 |
| I HSA + Cys + 10x | 66574.0 | 138 | 0.65 | 2.61 | 1.00 | 3.99 | 1.02 | 4.1 | 1.85 | 7.4 | 1.72 | 6.87 | 1.74 | 6.98 |
| J HSA + Glyc | 66600.8 | 164 | 2.44 | 9.75 | 4.38 | 17.52 | 3.29 | 13.16 | 0.94 | 3.77 | 1.73 | 6.93 | 2.2 | 8.81 |
| K HSA + Glyc + Ox1 | 66618.5 | 182 | 0.41 | 1.66 | 0.57 | 2.28 | 0.33 | 1.32 | 0.27 | 1.07 | 0.91 | 3.62 | 0.74 | 2.95 |
| L HSA + Cys + 30x | 66644.8 | 208 | 0.19 | 0.75 | 0.35 | 1.42 | 0.15 | 0.62 | 0.07 | 0.26 | 0.37 | 1.47 | 0.71 | 2.83 |
| M HSA + Cys + Glic | 66718.0 | 282 | 0.47 | 1.86 | 0.79 | 1.64 | 0.56 | 2.91 | 1.16 | 11.64 | 15.93 | 3.98 | 4.47 | 17.88 |
| N HSA + GSH | 66734.8 | 298 | 0.07 | 0.3 | 0.37 | 1.46 | 0.38 | 1.5 | 0.33 | 1.33 | 0.87 | 3.47 | 0.59 | 2.34 |
| O HSA + Glyc | 66755.3 | 319 | 0.05 | 0.21 | 1.36 | 5.46 | 0.34 | 1.34 | 0.16 | 0.66 | 0.84 | 3.35 | 0.48 | 1.94 |
| P HSA + Cys + 2Glyc | | 25 | 100 | 25 | 100 | 25 | 100 | 25 | 100 | 25 | 100 | 25 | 100 | 4.52 |
| Total spectrum | | 24 | 97 | 23 | 92 | 25 | 99 | 24 | 95 | 24 | 97 | 24 | 96 | |

MD: mass difference; AUC: peak area; RI: relative intensity.

Table 3

Categories of HSA chemical modification identified by DDA analysis. All MS/MS parameters used to characterize HSA PTM are available in Supplemental Data.

| Chemical modification | Modified site |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Acetylation | Lys199, Lys525 |
| C-terminal truncation | ΔLeu585 |
| Carbamylation | Lys12, Arg485, Lys525 |
| Cysteinylation | Cys34, Cys177 |
| Dehydroalanine (from cysteine) | Cys75, Cys168, Cys169, Cys177, Cys278, Cys392, Cys476, Cys477, Cys487 |
| Deamidation | Asn44, Gln170, Gln204, Gln268, Gln285, Asn286, Gln404, Asn205, Gln417, Asn458, Gln526, Gln580 |
| Di-oxidation | Cys169, Trp214, Cys279, Cys477, Met548 |
| Glycation | Lys233, Lys525 |
| Nitration | Tyr140 |
| Oxidation | Phe49, Met123, Tyr138, Tyr140, Trp214, Phe228, Met298, Met329, Tyr341, Phe403, Met548 |
| Tri-oxidation | Cys75, Cys487 |
| Amino-acid substitution | Gln94, Gln390, Gln526 |
| Gln->pyro-Glu | |

acceptable reproducibility of the method for isoforms present at relative abundances higher than 2.5%. The only exceptions were 2 glycated isoforms present in cirrhotic patients that are HSA + 2GLYC and HSA + CYS + 3GLYC.

4. Discussion

A simple, reliable and robust method is needed to characterize the most relevant isoforms of HSA in a timely and comprehensive manner, especially in liver diseases. There is currently a growing interest in developing simple analytical methods that can be implemented in routine lab settings; several teams used top-down high-resolution mass spectrometry methods and demonstrated the value of HSA isoforms as promising biomarker candidates in liver diseases [3,14,16,18]. The fact that the identification of isoforms is currently performed based on characteristic mass shifts after deconvolution of HSA signal entails a risk of misidentification. For instance, several peaks can be observed between the masses of native HSA and cysteinylated HSA (HSA + Cys). Their identification is challenging because they are present at low intensity and because peak resolution and mass precision associated with deconvolution process can give unsatisfactory results probably due to mass deviations (around 1–5 Da [24]). The existence of PTM with close masses, such as acetylation (+42.0 Da), carbamylation (+43.0 Da), nitrosylation (+29.0 Da) or tri-oxidation (+48.0 Da) adds to identification uncertainty. Moreover, the potential isoforms with a mass higher than HSA + Cys (66,555.3 Da) represent mostly combinations of 1 to 3 modifications, which also complicates the identification. To the best of our knowledge, the confrontation of top-down and bottom up approaches performed on the same samples has not been reported yet especially for HSA-PTMs. Dong Q. et al., have created a mass spectral library for identifiable HSA peptides but did not focus on PTMs [26]. More recently, Kannan S. et al. have listed all HAS-PTMs reported in literature but most of these PTMs are issue from in to vitro induced chemical reactions and may not exist in blood, at least at significant concentration [27]. Therefore, in this work, we have proposed to critically evaluate top-down analysis for the characterization of HSA isoforms in patients with or without liver dysfunctions. To confirm the existence of the identified isoforms, we have developed a bottom-up approach via SWATH-MS peptide analysis. To achieve exhaustive PTM identification, we have submitted our serum samples to either reduction, or alkylation, or reduction and alkylation, followed by tryptic digestion. Although this process is unusual, it has the advantage of uncovering PTM that may be masked by the reduction or alkylation process (such as carbamidomethylation) and it allows confirmation of PTM when detected in all three extract types. Our SWATH-MS library, containing 127 peptides, was generated after DDA analysis of these multiple tryptic

Table 4

Concordance of the results obtained between the top-down and bottom-up approaches in all patients. (+) confirmation; (empty) not identified.

| Isoforms | Chemical modification | Modified site | Top-down | Bottom-up | Reference(s) |
|------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------|-----------|---|
| HSA-DA | Truncation | Δ(Asp1-Ala2) | + | | Brennan <i>et al.</i> , 2000; Bar-Or <i>et al.</i> , 2006; Domenicali <i>et al.</i> , 2014 |
| HSA-L | Truncation | ΔLeu585 | + | + | Brennan <i>et al.</i> , 2000; Fanali <i>et al.</i> , 2012; Domenicali <i>et al.</i> , 2014 |
| HSA + Cys-DA | Truncation | Δ(Asp1-Ala2) | + | | Domenicali <i>et al.</i> , 2014; Alcaraz-Quiles <i>et al.</i> , 2018 |
| | Cysteinylation | Cys 34 | | | |
| HSA-DHA | Conversion in dehydroalanine | Cys487 | | + | Bar-Or <i>et al.</i> , 2008; Alcaraz-Quiles <i>et al.</i> , 2018 |
| HSA + NO | Nitrosylation | Cys34 or Cys410 | + | | Ishima <i>et al.</i> , 2008 |
| HSA + CRM | Carbamylation | Lys525 | | + | Berg <i>et al.</i> , 2013; Lenglet <i>et al.</i> , 2021 |
| HSA + 2Ox | Di-oxidation | Cys169, Cys279, Cys477 or Trp214 | | + | Fanali <i>et al.</i> , 2012; Bertozzi <i>et al.</i> , 2018 |
| HSA + 3Ox | Tri-oxidation | Cys487 | + | + | Paramasivan <i>et al.</i> , 2020 |
| HSA + Cys-DHA | Cysteinylation | Cys34 | | + | Bar-Or <i>et al.</i> , 2008; Alcaraz-Quiles <i>et al.</i> , 2018 |
| HSA + 2 (3Ox) | Tri-oxidation (x2) | Cys35 and Cys487 | | + | — |
| HSA + Cys | Cysteinylation | Cys34 | + | + | Kleinova <i>et al.</i> , 2005; Nagumo <i>et al.</i> , 2014; Domenicali <i>et al.</i> , 2014 |
| HSA + Cys + 1Ox | Cysteinylation Oxidation | Cys34 Cys169, Cys279, Cys477 | + | + | — |
| HSA + Glyc | Glycation | Lys233 or Lys525 | + | + | Rondeau <i>et al.</i> , 2011; Domenicali <i>et al.</i> , 2014; Kumari <i>et al.</i> , 2021 |
| HSA + Glyc + 1Ox | Oxidation | Cys169, Cys279, Cys477 | + | + | — |
| | Glycation | Lys233 or Lys525 | | | |
| HSA + Glyc + 3Ox | Tri-oxidation Glycation | Cys487 Lys233 or Lys525 | + | + | Alcaraz-Quiles <i>et al.</i> , 2018 |
| HSA + Cys + Glyc | Cysteinylation Glycation | Cys34 Lys233 or Lys525 | + | + | Alcaraz-Quiles <i>et al.</i> , 2018; Rondeau <i>et al.</i> , 2011 |
| HSA + GSH | Glutathionylation | — | + | | Turrell <i>et al.</i> , 2014 |
| HSA + 2Glyc | Glycation (x2) | Lys233 or Lys525 | + | + | Alcaraz-Quiles <i>et al.</i> , |

Table 4 (continued)

| Isoforms | Chemical modification | Modified site | Top-down | Bottom-up | Reference(s) |
|-------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|----------|-----------|--|
| HSA + Cys + 2Glyc | Cysteinylation Glycation (x2) | Cys34 Lys233 and Lys525 | + | + | 2018; Kumari <i>et al.</i> , 2021; Alcaraz-Quiles <i>et al.</i> , 2018 |
| | Conversion in dehydroalanine | Cys487 | | | |

digested serum samples from healthy subjects and from patients with various liver pathologies in order to cover the most common PTMs of albumin in liver diseases patients (Fig. 2A and Table 3).

The analysis of HSA by a top-down approach to identify its isoforms as described here is feasible thanks to its physiological and physico-chemical properties. The HSA concentration is so large (around 40 g/L) that a minor fraction change of only 0.1% gives an isoform at a concentration of 40 mg/L, which is more than enough to be detected by high resolution mass spectrometry. HSA represents 60% to 65% of total plasma proteins, which greatly reduces potential interference from other proteins. HSA has a long half-life (about 20 days) allowing relatively long-term follow-up. Large amounts are synthesized in the liver (10–15 g/day: 3.5% of the total HSA pool) and released into the intravascular space (30% to 40% of the total HSA). The rate of transfer of HSA from the intravascular space to the interstitial space is 4% to 5% per hour, and about the same percentage is returned to the intravascular space via the lymphatic system. Since changes in HSA contribute to the micro-heterogeneity of circulating HSA and can alter its biological activity under pathological conditions, it is now clear that not only its quantitative variation but also HSA PTMs serve as an indicator [28].

With our top-down analysis, we were able to identify 15 potential HSA isoforms, listed in Table 1 and 2. Most of these were identified by a similar top-down approaches (Table 4) [2,5,6,9,16,19,29–38]. Among these isoforms, several were reported to be of clinical relevance in advanced chronic liver diseases. The native HSA level in chronic hepatitis and cirrhosis was associated with disease progression and was found to be significantly correlated with the model for end-stage liver disease [14]. The increase of HSA + Cys (HNA1) was associated with chronic liver disease severity, in correlation to Child-Pugh classification [5]. HSA irreversibly oxidized isoforms (HNA2) were proposed as novel biomarkers of advanced chronic liver diseases such as acute liver failure [39]. The degree of oxidation of HSA (HSA + 2Ox and HSA + 3Ox) increased with severity of liver failure, whereas native HSA was significantly decreased in cirrhosis and acute-on-chronic liver failure [10,40]. Finally, in addition to decreased native HSA and increased HNA1 in cirrhosis, Domenicali *et al.* showed that HSA + Cys-DA, HSA + Cys + Glyc and glycosylated HSA + Glyc forms were increased. Other isoforms with unknown links with liver functions were also detected using top-down analysis, such as HSA-L and HSA + GSH [38,41].

Among the 15 isoforms identified by TD, bottom-up analysis enabled us to confirm the existence of 10 isoforms with specifications on the modification sites: HSA + Cys, HSA + 3Ox, HSA + Glyc, HSA + Cys + 1Ox, HSA + 1Ox + Glyc, HSA + 3Ox + Glyc, HSA + Cys + Glyc, HSA + 2Glyc, HSA + Cys + 2Glyc, HSA-L (Table 4). The confrontation of these results shows that all the isoforms identified with top-down, and reported to have a clinical interest, are confirmed by bottom-up analysis and are not likely to be artefacts.

However, the top-down approach did not detect any isoform due to carbamylation, conversion of cysteine into dehydroalanine or HSA dimerization, all of which were well characterized by bottom-up analysis. Several modifications can lead to close mass shifts, which renders the identification of carbamylation difficult. The characterization of this modification, resulting from an excess of urea and proposed as a death risk indicator in end-stage renal disease [19], can only be observed after

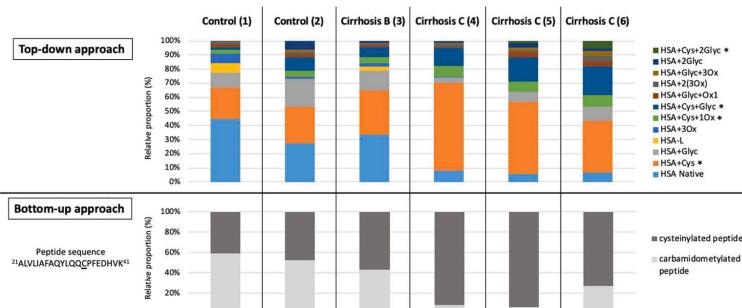


Fig. 3. Relative proportions of the peak areas of: (A) the isoforms confirmed in control patients and cirrhotic patients by top-down analysis. (B) the cysteinylated and carbamidomethylated peptides corresponding to all HSA + Cys isoforms labelled with * in (A) in control patients and cirrhotic patients after tryptic digestion.

Table 5
Inter and intraday assays performed in a serum of a control patient.

| Isoforms | Isoform mass range | Interday | | Intraday | |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|------------|--------------------------|------------|
| | | Mean relative abundance% | CV | Mean relative abundance% | CV |
| HSA-DA | [66251.75-66254.75] | 0,06 | 80% | 0,11 | 69% |
| HSA-DHA | [66412.25-66417.25] | 0,78 | 20% | 0,65 | 21% |
| Native | [66436.25-66437.75] | 27,27 | 4% | 26,73 | 7% |
| HSA + NO | [66462.5-66463] | 2,26 | 33% | 2,30 | 16% |
| HSA + 3OX | [66477.25-66487.25] | 4,11 | 10% | 3,85 | 13% |
| HSA + CYS | [66554.5-66557.25] | 15,86 | 9% | 15,81 | 9% |
| HSA + CYS + 1OX | [66572-66576.25] | 3,83 | 18% | 3,58 | 18% |
| HSA + GLYC | [66598.75-66600.5] | 16,83 | 5% | 16,66 | 6% |
| HSA + GLYC + 1OX | [66617.25-66624.75] | 3,84 | 20% | 4,62 | 18% |
| HSA + Glyc + SO ₃ H | [66638-66652.25] | 1,75 | 27% | 1,99 | 32% |
| HSA + CYS + GLYC | [66716.75-66720.55] | 9,19 | 8% | 8,99 | 12% |
| HSA + 2GLYC | [66759.5-66763.25] | 5,15 | 9% | 4,72 | 15% |
| HSA + CYS + 2GLYC | [66878.25-66884.5] | 0,46 | 64% | 0,74 | 47% |

Control patient: Protein: 74.4 mg/mL; Albumin: 45.9 mg/mL. Bold are isoforms that are present at percentages higher than 2.5%. CVs are lower than 20% for these also.

Table 6
Inter and intraday assays performed in a serum of a patient with cirrhosis classified as a Child B.

| | isoform mass range | Interday n = 6 | | Intraday n = 6 | |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|--------------|--------------------------|------------|
| | | Mean relative abundance% | CV | Mean relative abundance% | CV |
| Native | [66438.5-66441] | 2,87 | 8,0% | 3,22 | 7% |
| HSA + NO/SO ₂ H | [66462.25-66475.75] | 0,04 | 80,1% | 0,07 | 45% |
| HSA + 3OX | [66478.5-66485.5] | 0,08 | 66,1% | 0,09 | 46% |
| HSA + 2(3OX)/Cys-DHA | [66531.75-66536] | 1,62 | 24,0% | 1,53 | 17% |
| HSA + CYS | [66555.5-66557] | 26,42 | 6,8% | 26,65 | 5% |
| HSA + CYS + 1OX | [66573.5-66579.5] | 4,85 | 16,9% | 5,06 | 19% |
| HSA + GLYC | [66597-66603.5] | 8,21 | 25,3% | 8,19 | 13% |
| HSA + Glyc + 2Ox | [66618.5-66629.75] | 2,31 | 14,2% | 2,43 | 35% |
| HSA + Glyc + 3Ox | [66631-66643.25] | 1,05 | 19,7% | 1,39 | 31% |
| HSA + Cys + GLYC-DHA | [66692.75-66699.25] | 1,54 | 32,4% | 1,68 | 26% |
| HSA + CYS + GLYC | [66718-66721] | 20,48 | 4,3% | 19,44 | 5% |
| HSA + GSH | [66733.5-66739.75] | 4,63 | 19,1% | 4,43 | 12% |
| [*] HSA + 2GLYC | [66761.5-66771] | 3,99 | 20,9% | 2,99 | 41% |
| HSA + SO ₂ H + 2GLYC | [66791.25-66800] | 0,82 | 51,2% | 1,13 | 40% |
| HSA + Cys + 2GLYC-DHA | [66850.75-66860.5] | 1,43 | 28,0% | 2,56 | 23% |
| HSA + Cys + 2Glyc | [66877-66883.25] | 8,29 | 15,6% | 7,28 | 17% |
| HSA + 3GLYC | [66915-66927.75] | 1,09 | 42,2% | 1,13 | 35% |
| HSA + CYS + 3GLYC | [67039.25-67047.75] | 0,21 | 39,7% | 0,21 | 88% |

Protein: 73.4 mg/mL; Albumin: 28.9 mg/mL. Bold are isoforms that are present at percentages higher than 2.5%. CVs are lower than 20% for these also.

^{**} HAS-2GLYC relative abundance was higher than 2.5% but CVs were high.

digestion of the protein [35]. Conversion of Cys487 to DHA was first identified in healthy patients by Bar-Or *et al.*, and has not shown any clinical relevance so far [31]. Nonetheless, it is very unlikely to observe this PTM without enzymatic digestion because it is involved in a disulphide bond with Cys476. According to Naldi *et al.*, the dimerization of

HSA would be of clinical interest in the diagnosis of cirrhosis [12]. However, great care must be taken when interpreting the data related to dimerization due to the very low intensity of the dimers and the potential artefactual dimers generated by the deconvolution process. A separation by size-exclusion chromatography (SEC) would be necessary

Table 7

Inter and intraday assays performed in a serum of a patient with cirrhosis classified as a Child C.

| Isoforms | Isoform mass range | Interday Mean relative abundance% | CV | Intraday Mean relative abundance% | CV |
|-----------------------|---------------------|--------------------------------------|-----|--------------------------------------|-----|
| Native | [66438.25–66440.25] | 4.82 | 10% | 5.31 | 17% |
| HSA + 3OX | [66481–66485.75] | 0.30 | 24% | 0.50 | 40% |
| HSA + 2(3OX) | [66531–66536.75] | 0.59 | 35% | 0.67 | 48% |
| HSA + CYS | [66555.25–66559] | 9.60 | 7% | 10.90 | 15% |
| HSA + GLYC | [66599.5–66601.75] | 13.19 | 7% | 13.38 | 8% |
| HSA + Glyc + 2Ox | [66617.75–66630] | 2.50 | 30% | 3.13 | 17% |
| HSA + Cys + GLYC-DHA | [66685.75–66699.5] | 1.40 | 21% | 1.77 | 38% |
| HSA + CYS + GLYC | [66718–66719.75] | 16.99 | 11% | 16.50 | 9% |
| HSA + 2GLYC | [66760.25–66764.75] | 9.93 | 10% | 11.62 | 11% |
| HSA + S02H + 2GLYC | [66788.25–66801.25] | 2.53 | 33% | 2.55 | 33% |
| HSA + Cys + 2GLYC-DHA | [66837.5–66852.75] | 0.72 | 40% | 1.21 | 27% |
| HSA + Cys + 2Glyc | [66879.75–66883.5] | 11.01 | 13% | 10.88 | 16% |
| HSA + 3GLYC | [66921–66929] | 4.13 | 13% | 3.95 | 19% |
| ** HSA + CYS + 3GLYC | [67040.25–67045.5] | 2.93 | 22% | 2.98 | 27% |

Child C patient: Protein: 62.8 mg/mL; Albumin: 24.7 mg/mL. Bold are isoforms that are present at percentages higher than 2.5%. CVs are lower than 20% for these also.

** HSA + CYS + 3GLYC relative abundance was higher than 2.5% but CVs were high.

to properly discriminate them [42]. There are also other analytical methods such as two-dimensional electrophoresis under non-reducing conditions that could be used to verify the presence of dimers in patient samples.

Using bottom-up analysis, we could not confirm certain modifications related to the structure of the HSA, namely, truncations at the N-terminal level (HSA-DA and HSA + Cys-DA). The choice of the proteolytic enzyme to cleave HSA is key as the digested peptides are too small to be chromatographically separated after the loss of DA with trypsin (trypsin cuts at lysine 4). Yet, to the best of our knowledge, no paper has described this truncation using bottom-up analysis so far. Other enzymes with different cleavage sites could help to detect this truncation. However, attempts to use Glu-C that cleaves at either aspartic or glutamic acid residues were not successful because of lack of reproducibility (data not shown). Glutathionylation, detected in top-down analysis, is also difficult to separate chromatographically using the bottom-up strategy due to its physico-chemical properties.

The top-down method offers a significant advantage in characterizing intact isoforms of HSA and determining their relative proportions (Fig. 3) within a short analytical run of only 3 min and with minimal sample preparation. Moreover, the method shows acceptable inter- and intraday reproducibility for relative quantification of isoforms present at relative abundances lower than 2%. However, caution should be taken when quantifying isoforms in patients with very low concentrations of HSA, as the accuracy may be compromised. Bottom-up HRMS analysis of HSA is informative, but is losing ground due to the time and labor needed for protein digestion, sample preparation and data reprocessing. The need for reducing and alkylating agents that affect the integrity of HSA is another drawback. Data interpretation after bottom-up analysis is also delicate since artefactual chemical modifications may be produced during the procedure, such as methionine oxidation or the conversion of a cysteine into dehydroalanine [31]. Additionally, the variability in the ionization of each peptide (modified or not) greatly impacts the MS information and the same PTM can be carried by several isoforms (Fig. 3). These two last phenomena renders very tricky the characterization of the most complex and diverse HSA profiles. Our SWATH library constitutes an important database that can be completed with supplementary data obtained after HSA digestion by enzymes other than trypsin in order to cover the N-terminal end of the HSA sequence and to detect other PTM [23]. This could also allow detecting PTM on lysine, such as acetylation, carbamylation and glycation that cannot be efficiently cleaved with trypsin.

5. Conclusion

Top-down analysis can be considered as an “all-in-one” approach where all isoforms can be observed in a single 3-minute run with their relative proportions, provided they are correctly identified. However, several isoforms could be missed or misidentified by TD but as the most clinically significant isoforms known to date are detected with this simple and rapid approach, the simpler could be the better in clinical settings. To the best of our knowledge, the confrontation of top-down and bottom up approaches performed on the same samples has not been reported yet especially for HSA-PTMs. We believe that after optimization of several features, top-down can compete with bottom-up HRMS analysis and will be a method of choice for the investigation of PTM on proteins such as HSA in the context of clinical research.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jchromb.2023.123740>.

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II.2.2.3. Discussion

Nos travaux sur les modifications de l'HSA par approche top-down a permis d'identifier 15 isoformes potentielles de l'HSA (**Article 1 : Tableaux 1 et 2**) dont la méthodologie est illustrée par la **figure 1 de l'article 1** et décrite plus précisément dans l'article 1 (**Article 1 : Figure 1, Partie « matériel et méthodes »**). La plupart des isoformes identifiées ont déjà été rapportés dans la littérature par une approche « top-down » similaire (**Article 1 : Tableau 4**) (6,132,139,149,161,162,198,220–227). Parmi ces isoformes, plusieurs se sont révélées avoir une pertinence clinique dans les hépatopathies chroniques avancées. Le niveau de l'isoforme native de l'HSA dans l'hépatite chronique et la cirrhose était associé à la progression de la maladie et s'est avéré significativement corrélé au modèle de maladie hépatique terminale (4). L'augmentation de l'isoforme HNA1 était associée à la gravité de la maladie hépatique chronique, en corrélation avec la classification de Child-Pugh (139). Les isoformes HNA2 ont été proposées comme nouveaux biomarqueurs de maladies hépatiques chroniques avancées telles que l'insuffisance hépatique aiguë (10). Le degré d'oxydation de l'HSA (HSA+2Ox et HSA+3Ox) augmenterait avec la sévérité de l'insuffisance hépatique, alors que l'isoforme HSA native était significativement diminuée dans la cirrhose et les insuffisances hépatiques aiguës ou chroniques (9,190). Enfin, en plus de la diminution de l'isoforme HSA native et de l'augmentation de l'isoforme HNA1 dans la cirrhose, il a été montré que les isoformes HSA+Cys-DA, HSA+Cys+Glyc et HSA+Glyc étaient augmentées (6). Il existe d'autres isoformes identifiées par analyse « top-down » ayant des liens inconnus avec les fonctions hépatiques, comme HSA-L et HSA+GSH (149,228).

Parmi les 15 isoformes observées par approche « top-down », l'analyse « bottom-up » a confirmé l'identification de 10 isoformes avec des spécifications sur les sites de modification : HSA+Cys, HSA+3Ox, HSA+Glyc, HSA+Cys+1Ox, HSA+1Ox+Glyc, HSA+3Ox+Glyc, HSA+Cys+Glyc, HSA+2Glyc, HSA+Cys+2Glyc, HSA-L (**Article 1 : Tableau 4**). La confrontation de ces résultats montre que toutes les isoformes identifiées par analyse « top-down », et rapportées comme ayant un intérêt clinique, sont confirmées par une analyse « bottom-up » et ne sont pas susceptibles d'être des artefacts. Par contre, l'approche « top-down » n'a pas permis de détecter certaines isoformes caractérisées par analyse « bottom-up » : la carbamylation, la conversion de la cystéine en déhydroalanine ou la dimérisation de l'HSA. La carbamylation, résultant d'un excès d'urée et proposée comme indicateur de risque de décès dans l'insuffisance rénale terminale, ne peut être observée qu'après digestion de la protéine (221,225). La conversion de la Cys487 en DHA a été identifiée pour la première fois chez des patients sains et n'a montré aucune pertinence clinique jusqu'à présent (162). Néanmoins, il est très peu probable d'observer cette PTM sans digestion enzymatique, car elle est impliquée dans un pont disulfure avec la Cys476. Enfin, la dimérisation de l'HSA

aurait un intérêt clinique dans le diagnostic de la cirrhose (3,8). Cependant, une grande prudence doit être prise en compte lors de l'interprétation des données liées à la dimérisation en raison de la très faible intensité des dimères et de la génération possible de dimères « artéfacts » par le processus de déconvolution. Par exemple, seule une séparation par chromatographie d'exclusion stérique (SEC) serait nécessaire pour bien les discriminer (192).

Par contre, l'approche bottom-up n'a pas confirmé l'existence de certaines PTMs de l'HSA, à savoir les troncatures N-terminales (HSA-DA et HSA+Cys-DA). Le choix de l'enzyme pour cliver l'HSA est primordial car les peptides digérés sont trop petits pour être séparés par chromatographie après la perte de DA (Asp-Ala) avec la trypsine (la trypsine coupe au niveau de la lysine 4). Or, aucun article n'a décrit cette troncature à l'aide d'une analyse bottom-up à notre connaissance. Il existe d'autres enzymes protéolytiques avec des sites de clivage différents qui pourraient aider à détecter cette troncature, comme la Glu-C. Néanmoins, l'utilisation de la Glu-C, coupant au niveau des résidus d'acide aspartique ou glutamique, n'a été concluante en raison d'un manque de reproductibilité. Une dernière modification identifiée en analyse top-down, la glutathionylation, est difficile à séparer par chromatographie en utilisant la stratégie bottom-up en raison de ses propriétés physico-chimiques.

II.2.2.4. Conclusion

L'approche analytique « top-down » offre ainsi un avantage primordial pour caractériser les isoformes de l'HSA tout en gardant l'intégrité structurale et chimique de la protéine et pour déterminer leurs abondances relatives dans un temps d'analyse très rapide d'à peine 3 minutes et avec une préparation simple des échantillons, avec des résultats reproductibles. Malgré que l'analyse « bottom-up » de l'HSA reste informative et essentielle, elle perd du terrain en raison du temps et du travail nécessaires à la digestion des protéines, à la préparation des échantillons, à l'utilisation d'agents réducteurs et alkylants affectant l'intégrité de l'HSA et au retraitement et à l'interprétation complexe des données nécessitant des analystes qualifiés. De plus, l'élaboration de notre bibliothèque SWATH constitue une base de données majeure et peut être complétée par des données supplémentaires afin de détecter d'autres PTMs. Ainsi, nos travaux montrent que l'approche analytique « top-down » pourrait rivaliser avec l'approche analytique « bottom-up » pour l'investigation des PTMs de l'HSA dans le cadre de la recherche, notamment dans des modèles expérimentaux *in vivo* d'hépatotoxicité chez l'animal.

II.2.3. Utilisation des isoformes de l'albumine pour caractériser l'atteinte hépatique : approche expérimentale animale et étude clinique

II.2.3.1. Contexte

Une approche expérimentale *in vivo* chez l'animal avec différents types d'hépatotoxicité est nécessaire pour comprendre au mieux l'environnement chimique, cellulaire et moléculaire à l'origine des lésions hépatiques, mais également pour évaluer de façon plus approfondie les PTMs de l'albumine, évaluer leur spécificité en fonction de l'atteinte hépatique et déterminer leur stade d'apparition à l'apparition de l'atteinte hépatique. Pour cela, nos travaux consistaient à étudier les capacités de fixation de l'albumine ainsi que le profil des isoformes d'albumine chez des rats intoxiqués au paracétamol (APAP), à l'éthanol (EtOH) et au tétrachlorure de carbone (CCl₄), mais également d'explorer le potentiel des modifications observées en tant que biomarqueurs potentiels précoce de lésions spécifiques du foie, en utilisant les méthodes analytiques développées précédemment dans nos travaux de thèse. Un dernier modèle expérimental par ligature du canal biliaire a été également élaboré pour provoquer une atteinte hépatique plus chronique afin de développer une cirrhose biliaire chez le rat.

II.2.3.2. Brevet 2: Use of albumin isoforms profiles for the characterization of the etiology and severity of liver injury (publication prévue le 07/04/2024)

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USE OF ALBUMIN ISOFORMS PROFILES FOR THE CHARACTERIZATION OF THE ETIOLOGY AND SEVERITY OF LIVER INJURIES

5 FIELD OF THE INVENTION:

The present invention is in the field of medicine, in particular hepatology.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION:

The pathogenesis of liver injuries is complex and involves numerous cellular, molecular, 10 immune and hormonal disturbances (1). This makes the diagnosis of liver diseases a challenging process. The intricacy of these disturbances has led to the examination of a multitude of potential serum biomarkers that reflect underlying disease through cellular pathways, including hepatocellular apoptosis, inflammation or oxidative stress. However, despite the utility of these serum biomarkers (called ‘conventional liver biomarkers’ thereafter) in the assessment of liver 15 injuries and chronic liver diseases, they have limited usefulness in the early stages of liver injuries (2-4).

The use of process-related biomarkers has evolved to the use of panels of biomarkers in order to reflect a bigger picture of events occurring in the hepatocytes and/or in the organ tissues. 20 Currently, because of their lack of sensitivity and specificity when taken individually, serum markers are now gathered in panel tests, sometimes together with interpretation algorithms (Fib4, FibroMeter, FibroTest, FIBROspect, Hepascore...) or with imaging tests (FibroMeter-VCTE algorithm) to help diagnosing and staging fibrosis and/or cirrhosis. However, it has been recently argued that these tests “show limited accuracy in individual patients and do not reflect 25 disease progression or treatment response and do not provide a mechanistic understanding of injury patterns”(3). Other biomarkers, such as molecules involved in the fibrosis process including protein-based biomarkers, microRNA or collagens, have been extensively studied. Although some are promising, they have not yet demonstrated the diagnostic or predictive performances required for early dysfunctions or for mid- or long-term liver injuries (5). 30 Therefore, noninvasive (or less invasive), simple, sensitive and specific biomarkers for the early detection of dysfunctions able to lead to liver failure are still needed.

Recently, human serum albumin (HSA) isoforms have gained great interest as biomarkers of advanced liver diseases (6-16). Due to the exclusive synthesis of HSA by liver cells, its great chemical reactivity and its abundance (60% of all plasma proteins), it is now clear that not only the quantity, but also the quality of HSA may reflect liver dys/functions. HSA may undergo several posttranslational modifications including truncations, acetylation, cysteinylation, homocysteinylation, glutathionylation, glycation, nitrosylation, nitration, phosphorylation and oxidation (17). The clinical relevance of some of these modifications has been recently investigated in advanced liver diseases (15, 17). The oxidation of the Cys34 residue has been the most studied. It was characterized on the basis of the redox state of Cys34 as follows: (i) Human mercaptalbumin (HMA), the reduced HSA (70 - 80% of total HSA in healthy subjects), (ii) Nonmercaptalbumin 1 (HNA1), a reversibly oxidized form (20 – 30%) and (iii) Nonmercaptalbumin 2 (HNA2) the irreversible oxidized form of albumin (< 5%) (17). The increase in HNA1 and HNA2 has been well documented in end-stage liver pathologies, with a progressive increase of these isoforms in severe cirrhosis correlated to a very high short-term mortality (9, 14, 15). Interestingly, it has been reported that HNA1 plays a pejorative role in decompensated cirrhosis (18) while native HSA has a protective role by reducing the proinflammatory environment present in patients with acutely decompensated cirrhosis (19). At present, it is not fully established whether other albumin isoforms are mostly inactive or possess some not yet characterized biological properties. Structural alterations involving sites others than Cys34 were reported. Indeed, N- or C-terminal truncated as well as glycated forms were found in plasma samples from patients with acutely decompensated cirrhosis or severe alcoholic hepatitis (9). Most importantly, these findings suggest that HSA modifications are directly related to liver injuries and that HSA isoforms are very likely produced because of the chemical environment into the hepatocytes.

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This bundle of arguments strongly suggest that albumin modifications detected in blood may reflect the dys/function of hepatocytes and represent a versatile tool for the diagnosis and the prognosis of liver injuries and/or diseases.

30 **SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION:**

The present invention is defined by the claims. In particular, the present invention relates to the use of albumin isoforms profiles for the characterization of the etiology and severity of liver injuries.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION:

The inventors hypothesized that each type of liver injury can be revealed by a specific profile of HSA posttranslational modifications. Since the cellular chemical environment at the origin of liver injuries is different, this logically should lead to the apparition of specific HSA isoform patterns in blood. Since HSA is continuously synthesized in hepatocytes and secreted into the bloodstream, the second hypothesis is that HSA modifications occur at early stages of cell injuries. Therefore, the aim of inventors was to study the pattern of albumin isoforms in rats intoxicated with acetaminophen (APAP), ethanol, and CCl₄. The second objective was to explore the potential of these isoforms as biomarkers of liver specific injuries. The results demonstrate that albumin posttranslational modifications (Alb-PTM) occur very early during the course of liver injuries induced by hepatotoxic substances. In 3 animal models, native albumin started to decrease in favor of other isoforms 24 hours after the administration of APAP, ethanol or CCl₄. Interestingly, the nature and the intensity of isoforms were different depending on the hepatotoxic substance. In a cohort of cirrhotic patients, the inventors were able to identify up to 14 albumin isoforms, all of which were also present in control patients. However, the inventors observed that the increase in the HSA-DA isoform was specific to patients with cirrhosis due to alcohol abuse, HSA+SGGS and HSA+2Glyc were increased specifically in NASH patients, and HSA-DA+Cys with HSA+SO₂H were increased only in patients with the mixed form. In addition, we did not observe a specific isoform able to clearly discriminate the different stages of liver disease (data not shown), but principal component analysis of the MS dataset perfectly separated cirrhosis patients with different Child-Pugh scores and control patients.

Main definitions:

25

As used herein, the term “**subject**” as used herein refers to any mammal organism. The term subject includes, but is not limited to, humans, nonhuman primates such as chimpanzees and other apes and monkey species; farm animals such as cattle, sheep, pigs, goats and horses; domestic mammals such as dogs and cats; laboratory animals including rodents such as mice, rats and guinea pigs, and the like. The term does not denote a particular age or sex. Thus, adult and newborn subjects, as well as fetuses, whether male or female, are intended to be covered.

As used herein, the term "**injury**" refers to any damage that directly or indirectly affects the normal functioning. An insult may have a variety of causes including, but not limited to physiological injuries, chemical injuries or physical injuries. The term encompasses acute and chronic injuries. As used herein, the term "**acute injury**" includes injuries that have recently occurred. For example, an acute injury may have very recently occurred, may have occurred within an hour or less, may have occurred within a day or less, may have occurred within a week or less, or may have occurred within two weeks or less. As used herein, the term "**chronic injury**" is an injury that has persisted for a period of time. For example, a chronic injury may have occurred more than two weeks ago, may have occurred more than three weeks ago, may have occurred more than two months ago, or may have occurred more than three months ago.

As used herein, the term "**liver injury**" refers to a state in which the liver function is decreased relative to a normal state. Hepatic dysfunction is characteristic of liver diseases. A number of acute or chronic pathological conditions leads to liver injury. These include, but are not limited to liver abscess, liver cancer, either primary or metastatic, cirrhosis, such as cirrhosis caused by the alcohol consumption or primary biliary cirrhosis, amebic liver abscess, autoimmune hepatitis, biliary atresia, coccidioidomycosis disseminated, portal hypertension hepatic infections (such as hepatitis A virus, hepatitis B virus, hepatitis C virus, hepatitis D virus, or hepatitis E virus), hemochromatosis, hepatocellular carcinoma, pyogenic liver abscess, Reye's syndrome, sclerosing cholangitis, Wilson's disease, drug induced hepatotoxicity, or fulminant or acute liver failure.

As used herein, the term "**non-alcoholic fatty liver disease**" has its general meaning in the art and is intended to refer to the spectrum of disorders resulting from an accumulation of fat in liver cells in individuals with no history of excessive alcohol consumption. In the mildest form, NAFLD refers to hepatic steatosis. The term NAFLD is also intended to encompass the more severe and advanced form non-alcoholic steatohepatitis (NASH), cirrhosis, hepatocellular carcinoma, and virus- induced (e.g., HIV, hepatitis) fatty liver disease.

As used herein, the term "**NASH**" collectively refers to the state where the liver develops a hepatic disorder (e.g., inflammation, ballooning, fibrosis, cirrhosis, or cancer), or the state where the liver may induce such a pathological condition, and "NASH" is distinguished from "simple steatosis"; i.e., a condition in which fat is simply accumulated in the liver, and which does not progress to another hepatic-disorder-developing condition.

As used herein, the term "**cirrhosis**" refers to a consequence of chronic liver disease characterized by replacement of liver tissue by fibrosis, scar tissue and regenerative nodules (lumps that occur as a result of a process in which damaged tissue is regenerated), leading to loss of liver function. The term "**alcohol-related cirrhosis**" indicates that cirrhosis is mostly caused by excessive alcohol consumption.

- As used herein, the term "**etiology**" refers to the causes or origins, of diseases or abnormal physiological conditions.
- 10 As used herein, the term "**severity**" refers to the degree of symptom intensity experienced, ascertained, formally assessed or reported by a symptomatic subject with a liver injury. Typically, the severity correlates with the Child-Pugh score.

As used herein, the term the "**Child-Pugh score**" has its general meaning in the art and refers 15 to the score used to assess the prognosis of chronic liver disease, mainly cirrhosis as described by Child CG, Turcotte JG (1964). "Surgery and portal hypertension". In Child CG (ed.). The liver and portal hypertension. Philadelphia: Saunders. pp. 50–64. Although it was originally used to predict mortality during surgery, it is now used to determine the prognosis, as well as the required strength of treatment and the necessity of liver transplantation. The score employs 20 five clinical measures of liver disease including total bilirubin, serum albumin, prothrombin time prolongation (or INR), ascites and hepatic encephalopathy. Each measure is scored 1–3, with 3 indicating most severe derangement. Chronic liver disease is classified into Child-Pugh class A to C, as depicted in Table A.

| Points | Class | One-year survival | Two-year survival |
|--------------|-------|-------------------|-------------------|
| 5–6 | A | 100% | 85% |
| 7–9 | B | 80% | 60% |
| 10–15 | C | 45% | 35% |

25 **Table A: Child-Pugh score and significance.**

As used herein, the term "**albumin**" has its general meaning in the art and refers to a globular protein that in humans is encoded by the *ALB* gene. Serum albumin is the most abundant plasma protein in mammals. Serum albumin is essential for maintaining the oncotic pressure needed

for proper distribution of body fluids between intravascular compartments and body tissues. It also acts as a plasma carrier by non-specifically binding several hydrophobic steroid hormones and as a transport protein for hemin and fatty acids. Furthermore, serum albumin has a very long half-life of about 19 days, and its metabolism is well-known. Albumin has also been 5 widely used as a protein stabilizer in commercial pharmaceuticals (Sangastino et al. (2012), Blood, 120(12) 2405-2411). An exemplary amino acid sequence for human serum albumin (HSA) is represented by SEQ D NO:1 (UniProtKB/Swiss-Prot primary accession number P02768).

10 SEQ_ID NO:1 >sp|P02768|ALBU_HUMAN Serum albumin OS=Homo sapiens OX=9606
GN=ALB PE=1 SV=2
MKWTFISLLFLFSSAYSRGVFRDAHKSEVAHRFKDLGEENFKALVLIAFAQYLQQCPF
EDHVKLVNEVTEFAKTCVADESACDKSLHTLFGDKLCTVATLRETYGEMADCCAKQEP
ERNECFLQHKDDNPNLPRLVPEVDVMCTAFHDNEETFLKKYLYEIARRHPFYAPELLF
15 FAKRYKAACFECQAAADKAACLLPKLDELRDEGKASSAKQLRKCASLQKGERAFKAWAV
ARLSQRFPKAEEFAEVSKLVTDLTKVHTECCCHGDLLECADDRADLAKYICENQDSISSKLK
ECCEKPLLEKSHCIAEVENDEMPADLPSLAADFVESKDVKKNYAEAKDVFGLGMFLYEYAR
RHPDYSVVLRLAKTYETTLEKCAAADPHECYAKVFDFKPLVEEPQNLIKQNCELFE
QLGEYKFQNALLVRYTKKVPQVSTPTLVEVSRNLGKVGSKCKHPEAKRMPCAEDYLSVV
20 LNQLCVLHEKTPVSDRVTKCCTESLVNRRPCFSALEVDETYVPKEFNAETFTFHADICTL
SEKERQIKKQTALVELVKHKPKATKEQLKAVMDDFAAFVEKCCKADDKETCFAEEGKKLV
AASQAALGL

As used herein, the term “**isoform**” has its general meaning in the art and refers to the multiple 25 molecular forms of a given protein, and includes proteins differing at the level of (1) primary structure (such as due to alternate RNA splicing, or polymorphisms); (2) secondary structure (such as due to different co- or posttranslational modifications); and/or (3) tertiary or quaternary structure (such as due to different sub-unit interactions, homo- or hetero- oligomeric multimerization). According to the present, invention the term “**isoform**” preferably refers to 30 the multiple molecular forms of a given protein, and includes proteins secondary structure due to different co- or post translational modifications. Said post translational modifications include cysteinylation, homocysteinylation, glutathionylation, glycation, nitrosylation, nitration, oxidation and carbonylation.

35 As used herein, the term “**native albumin**” refers to the form of albumin that was not subjected to a modification, more particularly a post translational modification.

As used herein, the term ”**Alb-DA**” refers to an albumin isoform characterized by a truncation of the N-terminus end.

40

As used herein, the term “**Alb-DA+Cys**” refers to an albumin isoform characterized by a truncation of the N-terminus end and a cysteinylolation of the Cys34.

As used herein, the term “**Alb+SO2H**” refers to an albumin isoform characterized a
5 deoxidation.

As used herein, the term “**Alb+SO3H**” or “**Alb-CysO3**” refers to an albumin isoform characterized by a trioxidation.

10 As used herein, the term “**Alb+Cys-DHA**” refers an albumin isoform characterized by a cysteinylolation of the Cys34 and a transformation of a free cysteine to a dehydroalanine.

As used herein, the term “**Alb+Cys+SNO**” refers to an albumin isoform characterized by a cysteinylolation of the Cys34 and a nitrosylation.

15 As used herein, the term “**Alb+Glyc**” refers to an albumin isoform characterized by a glycation/

As used herein, the term “**Alb+SO2H+Glyc**” refers to an albumin isoform characterized by a dioxidation and a glycation.

20 As used herein, the term “**Alb+SO3H+Glyc**” refers to an albumin isoform characterized by a trioxidation and a glycation.

25 As used herein, the term “**Alb+Cys+Glyc-DHA**” refer to an albumin isoform characterized by a cysteinylolation of the Cys34, a glycation and a transformation of a free cysteine to a dehydroalanine.

As used herein, the term “**Alb+Cys+Glyc**” refers to an albumin isoform characterized by a cysteinylolation of the Cys34 and a glycation.

30 As used herein, the term “**Alb-SGGS**” refers to an albumin isoform characterized by a glutathionylation.

As used herein, the term “**Alb+2Glyc**” refers to an albumin isoform characterized by two glycations.

As used herein, the term “**Alb+SO3H+2Glyc**” refers to an albumin isoform characterized by a
5 trioxidation and two glycations.

As used herein, the term “**Alb+Cys+2Glyc**” refers to an albumin isoform characterized by a cysteinylation of the Cys34 and two glycations.

10 As used herein, the term “**profile**” means a pattern and relates to the magnitude and direction of change of a number of features. The profile may be interpreted stringently, i.e., where the variation in the magnitude and/or number of features within the profile displaying the characteristic is substantially similar to a reference profile or it may be interpreted less stringently, for example, by requiring a trend rather than an absolute match of all or a subset of
15 feature characteristics.

As used herein, the term “**mass spectrometry**” or “**MS**” refers to an analytical technique to identify compounds by their mass. MS refers to methods of filtering, detecting, and measuring ions based on their m/z. MS technology generally includes (1) ionizing the compounds to form
20 charged species (e.g., ions); and (2) detecting the molecular weight of the ions and calculating their m/z. The compounds may be ionized and detected by any suitable means. A “**mass spectrometer**” generally includes an ionizer and an ion detector. In general, one or more molecules of interest are ionized, and the ions are subsequently introduced into a mass spectrometric instrument where, due to a combination of magnetic and electric fields, the ions
25 follow a path in space that is dependent upon mass (“m”) and charge (“z”). See, e.g., U.S. Pat. No. 6,204,500, entitled “Mass Spectrometry From Surfaces;” U.S. Pat. No. 6,107,623, entitled “Methods and Apparatus for Tandem Mass Spectrometry;” U.S. Pat. No. 6,268,144, entitled “DNA Diagnostics Based On Mass Spectrometry;” U.S. Pat. No. 6,124,137, entitled “Surface-Enhanced Photolabile Attachment And Release For Desorption And Detection Of Analytes;”
30 Wright et al., Prostate Cancer and Prostatic Diseases 2:264-76 (1999); and Merchant and Weinberger, Electrophoresis 21:1164-67 (2000).

As used herein, the term “**blood sample**” means a whole blood, serum, or plasma sample obtained from the patient or the animal.

Methods of the present invention:

- The first object of the present invention relates to a method of determining the etiology and severity of a liver injury in a subject comprising determining the profile of albumin isoforms in
- 5 a blood sample obtained from the subject wherein the profile indicates the etiology and severity of the liver injury.

More particularly, the method of the present invention comprises the step of detecting a plurality of albumin isoforms. Even, more particularly, the method of the present invention

10 comprises the step of detecting a plurality of albumin isoforms selected from **Table 4**. In some embodiments, the method of the present invention comprises the step of detecting a plurality of isoforms selected from the group consisting of Alb+SO₂H, HSA-CysO₃, Alb+Cys-DHA, Alb+Cys, Alb+Cys+SNO, Alb+SO₂H+Glyc, Alb+SO₃H+Glyc, HAS-SGGS, Alb+2Glyc, Alb+SO₃H+2Glyc, and Alb+Cys+2Glyc.

15

In some embodiments, the method of the present invention comprises the steps of i) determining the profile of albumin isoforms in the blood sample obtained from the patient, and ii) comparing the profile to one or more reference profiles associated with various liver injuries.

20 The method of the present invention is particularly suitable for detecting any kind of liver injury. In some embodiments, the method of the present invention is particularly suitable for detecting chemical liver injuries. In some embodiments, the method of the present invention is particularly suitable for detecting physical liver injuries. In some embodiments, the method of the present invention is particularly suitable for detecting ischemic liver injuries.

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The method of the present invention is particularly suitable for the early detection of a liver injury, i.e. the detection of a liver injury before the observation of a symptom.

30 The method of the present invention is particularly suitable for the early detection of early graft dysfunction or non-function in liver transplanted patients.

In particular, the method of the present invention is particularly suitable for detecting a chemical liver injury induced by a toxicant selected from the group consisting of alcohol, 2,2',4,4',5,5' -hexachlorobiphenyl (PCB-153), 2,3,7,8-tetrachlorodibenzo-p-dioxin

- (TCDD), 2-bromoethylamine (BEA), 3-methylcholanthrene, 4-aminophenol (PAP), acetaminophen (APAP), adriamycin, allyl alcohol, amiodarone, amphotericin B, Aroclor 1254, Aroclor 1260, arsenic, aspirin, astemizole, benzene, cadmium, carbamezipine, carbon tetrachloride (CCl₄), ciprofibrate (cipro), clofibrate, cobalt chloride, corvastatin, cyclosporin A, diethylnitrosamine, dimethylformamide, dimethylhydrazine (DMH), diquat, ethosuximide, etoposide, famotidine, fluconazole, gemfibrozil, ganciclovir, hexachloro-1,3-butadiene (HCBD), HIV protease inhibitors, hydrazine, indomethacin, ketoconazole, lead acetate (PbAc), lipopolysaccharide (LPS), mercury(II) chloride (HgCl₂), methanol, methapyrilene, methotrexate, metronidazole, miconazole, monocrotaline, nitric oxide, ondansetron, pentamidine, phenobarbital, phenylhydrazine (phenylhyrzn), phenytoin, pravastatin, propulsid, puromycin aminonucleoside (PAN), quinolones, simvastatin, sodium fluoride (NaF), statins, thioacetamide, tocainidine, tricyclic antidepressants, troglitazone, tumor necrosis factor α (TNF α), uranyl nitrate, valproic acid, vincristine, Wy-16,463, zidovudine (AZT), α -naphthyl isothiocyanate (ANIT), β -naphthoflavone (BNF), asbestos, radon, cigarette smoke, glues, dioxin, nickel, arsenic, mercury, cement (chromium), polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), carbon tetrachloride, methylene chloride, vinyl chloride, mercury, chlorinated hydrocarbon solvents, carbon disulfide, cadmium, ozone, tobacco smoke, nitrates, methylene chloride, ethylene dibromide, and polychlorinated biphenyls.
- The method of the present invention is particularly suitable for detecting a liver injury selected from the group consisting of liver abscess, liver cancer, either primary or metastatic, cirrhosis, such as cirrhosis caused by the alcohol consumption or primary biliary cirrhosis, amebic liver abscess, autoimmune hepatitis, biliary atresia, coccidioidomycosis disseminated, portal hypertension hepatic infections (such as hepatitis A virus, hepatitis B virus, hepatitis C virus, hepatitis D virus, or hepatitis E virus), hemochromatosis, hepatocellular carcinoma, pyogenic liver abscess, Reye's syndrome, sclerosing cholangitis, Wilson's disease, drug induced hepatotoxicity, or fulminant or acute liver failure.

The method of the present invention is particularly suitable for detecting a non-alcoholic fatty liver disease, and in particular for detecting NASH.

The method of the present invention is particularly suitable for detecting liver fibrosis. The method of the present invention is particularly suitable for detecting cirrhosis.

In some embodiments, the method of diagnosing described herein is applied to a subject who presents symptoms of liver injury without having undergone the routine screening to rule out all possible causes for liver injury. The methods described herein can be part of the routine set of tests performed on a subject who presents symptoms of liver injury such as jaundice,

5 abdominal pain and swelling, swelling in the legs and ankles, itchy skin, dark urine color, pale stool color, bloody color stool, tar-colored stool, chronic fatigue, nausea or vomiting, loss of appetite, tendency to bruise easily... The method of the present invention can be carried out in addition of other diagnostic tools that include ultrasound evaluation (e.g. elastography), biopsy and/or quantification of at least one further biomarkers such as levels of blood AST, ALT, ALP,

10 TTT, ZTT, total bilirubin, total protein, albumin, lactate dehydrogenase, choline esterase and the like.

A further object to the present invention relates to a method of predicting the worsening of a liver injury comprising the steps of determining the evolution of the profile of albumin isoforms

15 in the blood sample obtained from the patient wherein said evolution predicts the worsening of the liver injury.

A further object of the present invention relates to a method of predicting an early allograft liver dysfunction or liver non-function in a liver-transplanted patient comprising the steps of

20 determining the evolution of the profile of albumin isoforms in the blood sample obtained from the patient wherein said evolution predicts the early allograft dysfunction or non-function.

In some embodiments, the isoforms are detected by mass spectrometry. In some embodiments, the isoform is identified visually by its mass shift with respect to native albumin and by taking

25 the maximum intensity in a mass interval of 10 Da around the observed peak of each isoform. Table 4 indicates the different mass shifts that are associated with Alb+SO₂H, HSA-CysO₃, Alb+Cys-DHA, Alb+Cys, Alb+Cys+SNO, Alb+SO₂H+Glyc, Alb+SO₃H+Glyc, HSA-SGGS, Alb+2Glyc, Alb+SO₃H+2Glyc, and Alb+Cys+2Glyc.

30 Mass spectrometry is performed using a mass spectrometer, which includes an ion source for ionizing the fractionated sample and creating charged molecules for further analysis. Ionization sources used in various MS techniques include, but are not limited to, electron ionization, chemical ionization, electrospray ionization (ESI), photon ionization, atmospheric pressure chemical ionization (APCI), photoionization, atmospheric pressure photoionization (APPI),

fast atom bombardment (FAB)/liquid secondary ionization (LSIMS), matrix assisted laser desorption ionization (MALDI), field ionization, field desorption, thermospray/plasmaspray ionization, surface enhanced laser desorption ionization (SELDI), inductively coupled plasma (ICP) and particle beam ionization. The skilled artisan will understand that the choice of 5 ionization method may be determined based on the analyte to be measured, type of sample, the type of detector, the choice of positive versus negative mode, etc. After the sample has been ionized, the positively charged ions thereby created may be analyzed to determine m/z. Suitable analyzers for determining m/z include quadrupole analyzers, ion trap analyzers, and time-of-flight analyzers. The ions may be detected using one of several detection modes. For example, 10 only selected ions may be detected using a selective ion monitoring mode (SIM), or alternatively, multiple ions may be detected using a scanning mode, e.g., multiple reaction monitoring (MRM) or selected reaction monitoring (SRM). One may enhance the resolution of the MS technique by employing “tandem mass spectrometry,” or “MS/MS.” In this technique, a precursor ion (also called a parent ion) generated from a molecule of interest can be filtered 15 in an MS instrument, and the precursor ion subsequently fragmented to yield one or more fragment ions (also called daughter ions or product ions) that are then analyzed in a second MS procedure. By careful selection of precursor ions, only ions produced by certain analytes are passed to the fragmentation chamber, where collision with atoms of an inert gas produce the fragment ions. Because both the precursor and fragment ions are produced in a reproducible 20 fashion under a given set of ionization/fragmentation conditions, the MS/MS technique may provide an extremely powerful analytical tool. For example, the combination of filtration/fragmentation may be used to eliminate interfering substances, and may be particularly useful in complex samples, such as biological samples. Additionally, recent advances in technology, such as matrix-assisted laser desorption ionization coupled with time-of-flight analyzers (“MALDI-TOF”) permit the analysis of analytes at femtomole levels in very 25 short ion pulses. Mass spectrometers that combine time-of-flight analyzers with tandem MS are also well known to the artisan. Additionally, multiple mass spectrometry steps may be combined in methods known as “MS/MS”. Various other combinations may be employed, such as MS/MS/TOF, MALDI/MS/MS/TOF, or SELDI/MS/MS/TOF mass spectrometry.

30

Typically the blood samples are processed to obtain preparations that are suitable for analysis by mass spectrometry. Such purification will usually include chromatography, such as liquid chromatography or capillary electrophoresis, and may also often involve an additional purification procedure that is performed prior to chromatography. Various procedures may be

used for this purpose depending on the type of sample or the type of chromatography. Examples include filtration, centrifugation, combinations thereof and the like. The pH of the serum sample may then be adjusted. The sample may be purified with a filtration. The filtrate from this filtration can then be purified by liquid chromatography and subsequently subjected to mass spectrometry analysis. Various methods have been described involving the use of high-performance liquid chromatography (HPLC) for sample clean-up prior to mass spectrometry analysis. See, e.g., Taylor et al., Therapeutic Drug Monitoring 22:608-12 (2000) (manual precipitation of blood samples, followed by manual C18 solid phase extraction, injection into an HPLC for chromatography on a C18 analytical column, and MS/MS analysis); and Salm et al., Clin. Therapeutics 22 Supl. B:B71-B85 (2000). Commercially available HPLC columns include, but are not limited to, polar, ion exchange (both cation and anion), hydrophobic interaction, phenyl, C-2, C-8, C-18, and polar coating on porous polymer columns. During chromatography, the separation of materials is effected by variables such as choice of eluent (also known as a "mobile phase"), choice of gradient elution and the gradient conditions, temperature, etc.

One or more steps of the methods may be performed using automated machines. In some embodiments, one or more purification steps are performed on-line, and more preferably all of the LC purification and mass spectrometry steps may be performed in an on-line fashion.

20

In some embodiments, the method of the invention comprises the use of an algorithm. More particularly, the method of the present invention is a computer-implemented method comprising applying, on a set of values for each detected isoforms relative to the subject, a trained model configured to determine the etiology and severity of the liver injury based on the set of values. Typically, the set of values comprises the relative abundance of the different detected isoforms. In some embodiments, the model is preliminary trained by supervised learning on a training dataset comprising, for a plurality of individuals of a population, the etiologies and the severities of a liver injury. In some embodiments, the method of the invention thus comprises the use of a classification algorithm typically selected from Linear Discriminant Analysis (LDA), Topological Data Analysis (TDA), Neural Networks, Support Vector Machine (SVM) algorithm and Random Forests algorithm (RF). As used herein, the term "**classification algorithm**" has its general meaning in the art and refers to classification and regression tree methods and multivariate classification well known in the art such as described in US 8,126,690; WO2008/156617. Thus, in some embodiments, the method of the present invention

comprises a) detecting the plurality of albumin isoforms; b) implementing a classification algorithm on data relative to the detected isoforms so as to obtain an algorithm output; c) determining the liver injury and severity. The algorithm of the present invention can be performed by one or more programmable processors executing one or more computer programs

5 to perform functions by operating on input data and generating output. The algorithm can also be performed by, and apparatus can also be implemented as, special purpose logic circuitry, e.g., an FPGA (field programmable gate array) or an ASIC (application-specific integrated circuit). Processors suitable for the execution of a computer program include, by way of example, both general and special purpose microprocessors, and any one or more processors of

10 any kind of digital computer. Generally, a processor will receive instructions and data from a read-only memory or a random access memory or both. The essential elements of a computer are a processor for performing instructions and one or more memory devices for storing instructions and data. Generally, a computer will also include, or be operatively coupled to receive data from or transfer data to, or both, one or more mass storage devices for storing data,

15 e.g., magnetic, magneto-optical disks, or optical disks. In some embodiments, the algorithm can be implemented in a computing system that includes a back-end component, e.g., as a data server, or that includes a middleware component, e.g., an application server, or that includes a front-end component, e.g., a client computer having a graphical user interface or a Web browser through which a user can interact with an implementation of the invention, or any combination

20 of one or more such back-end, middleware, or front-end components.

The result given by the methods of the invention may be used as a guide in selecting a therapy or treatment regimen for the subject. Typically, the patient can be then eligible for intensive surveillance (e.g., referral to tertiary care centers; intensive control of risk factors), for a selected

25 therapy or transplantation and for inclusion in clinical trials testing new drugs. According to the present invention, the treatment consists in any method or drug that could be suitable for the treatment of a liver injury. Some liver problems can be treated with lifestyle modifications, such as stopping alcohol use or losing weight, typically as part of a medical program that includes careful monitoring of liver function. Each liver disease will have its own specific treatment

30 regimen. For example, hepatitis A requires supportive care to maintain hydration while the body's immune system fights and resolves the infection. Patients with gallstones may require surgery to remove the gallbladder. Other diseases may need long-term medical care to control and minimize the consequences of their disease. In patients with cirrhosis and end-stage liver disease, medications may be required to control the amount of protein absorbed in the diet.

Other examples include operations required to treat portal hypertension. The patient can also be eligible for administration of corticosteroids, pentoxifylline, or N-acetylcysteine; antiapoptotics, or vasoactive drugs) or even for liver transplantation.

- 5 The method of the present invention can also be useful for monitoring the subject. In some embodiments, the method of the present invention is also particularly suitable for determining whether a subject suffering from a liver injury achieves a response to a therapy. The method is thus particularly suitable for discriminating responder from non-responder. As used herein the term “**responder**” in the context of the present disclosure refers to a subject that will achieve a
10 response, i.e. a subject who is under remission and more particularly a subject who does not suffer from liver injury. A “**non-responder**” subject includes subjects for whom the disease does not show reduction or improvement after the treatment (e.g. the liver injury remains stable or decreases). For instance, the nature and the abundance of the different isoforms can indeed be monitored during the treatment of the subject and thus can indicate whether the subject
15 achieves a response to the therapy.

The invention will be further illustrated by the following figures and examples. However, these examples and figures should not be interpreted in any way as limiting the scope of the present invention.

20

FIGURES:

Figure 1. Evolution of albumin isoforms in the different groups of rats exposed to ethanol for different time durations. Native albumin is expressed as percent of the sum of all detected
25 isoforms. Other isoforms are expressed in relative abundance to that of native albumin.

Figure 2. Evolution of albumin isoforms in the different groups of rats exposed to CCl₄ for different time durations. Native albumin is expressed as percent of the sum of all detected isoforms. Other isoforms are expressed in relative abundances of the native albumin.

30

Figure 3. Evolution of albumin isoforms in the different groups of rats exposed to APAP at different doses and for different durations. Native albumin is expressed as percent of the sum of all detected isoforms. Other isoforms are expressed in relative abundances of the native albumin.

Figure 4: A. median albumin profiles of rats intoxicated with CCl₄; B. median albumin profiles of rats intoxicated with Ethanol; C. median profiles of rats intoxicated with APAP. The different lines represent the control group for each model; the profiles of groups in which biochemistry tests started to be altered and the groups where albumin profiles were the most disturbed.

5

Figure 5. PCA-DA plot of the 3 animal models. Each dot represents the whole information of the albumin isoform profile for one rat. The different dots represent rats exposed to ethanol, rats exposed to APAP and are rats exposed to CCl₄.

10 **Figure 6. Histograms of albumin isoforms in cirrhotic patients.**

Figure 7. A. PCA-DA plot of the 4 groups of patients. Each dot represents the whole information of the albumin profile for one patient. Square dots are control patients, orange dots represent patients with ALD, circle dots are NASH patients and triangle dots patients with
15 cirrhosis of mixed origin. **B.** PCA-DA plot of 3 groups of patients: Controls, NASH and mixed origin.

Figure 8. A. PCA-DA plot of the 4 groups of patients. Each dot represents the whole information of the albumin profile for one patient. Square dots are control patients, circle dots represent stage A, circles dots stage B, triangle dots represent stage C cirrhosis patients. **B.** PCA-DA plot of 3 groups of patients: stage A, B and C.

Figure 9.PLS-DA plot of 2 groups of patients. EAD+ are patients in whom early allograft dysfunction has been diagnosed based on the LGrAFT10 or the EAD scores. EAD- are patients
25 with no graft dysfunction detected. Each dot represents the whole information of the albumin profile for one patient at V1 (24 hours before transplantation) subtracted from the whole information of the albumin profile at V6 (7 days after transplantation).

Figure 10. PLS-DA plot of 2 groups of patients. EAD+ are patients in whom early allograft dysfunction has been diagnosed based on the LGrAFT10 or the EAD scores. EAD- are patients
30 with no graft dysfunction detected. Each dot represents the whole information of the albumin profile for one patient at V1 (24 hours before transplantation) subtracted from the whole information of the albumin profile at V3 (72 hours after transplantation).

EXAMPLE:**Methods****5 Materials and methods*****1. Animals***

All of the experimental procedures were performed in male, adult (6 weeks old) albino Wistar rats (Janvier Labs, France) weighing an average of 250 grams and maintained under normal temperature (21 ° C) and humidity and a 12-hour light-dark cycle with unrestricted access to food and water. Rats were acclimatized to the conditions of our animal facility for 1 week before the start of the investigations.

All animal experiments had been approved by the Ethics Committee for experiments at the University of Limoges and by the French Ministry of National Education, Higher Education and Research (APAFiS # 20354-2019042414581742 v1).

15

2. Experimental procedure***2.1. Model of ethanol (EtOH) hepatotoxicity:***

In the EtOH model, hepatotoxicity was induced by oral administration (gavage) of 2 mL of a 50% EtOH solution prepared in physiological saline (0.9% NaCl) to evaluate the time-dependent changes in biochemical markers and histological liver injuries. Six different groups of 6 to 9 rats were followed for 1, 3, 7, 10, or 14 days, respectively. All rats received the daily dose of EtOH. The animals were sacrificed 24 hours after their last intake of EtOH. “Control” rats were followed throughout the duration of the protocol, ie 14 days, and received by gavage only physiological serum (0.9% NaCl).

25

2.2. Model of carbon tetrachloride (CCl₄) hepatotoxicity:

In the CCl₄ model, hepatotoxicity was induced by oral administration (gavage) of 1 mL / kg body weight of a 30% solution of CCl₄ diluted in olive oil. Five groups of rats were followed for 1, 3, 7, 10 days after daily administration of CCl₄, respectively. The animals were sacrificed 24 hours after their last intake of CCl₄. “Control” rats were followed for 10 days and received by gavage only olive oil.

2.3. Model of paracetamol (APAP) hepatotoxicity:

In the APAP model, rats were randomly divided into eleven groups, each group containing six rats. Depending on the group, the animals received APAP suspensions prepared in 1% carboxymethylcellulose at doses D1 = 1 g/kg, D2= 2g/kg, D3= 3 g/kg or D4= 4g/kg. APAP
5 was administrated for either 1 day or 3 days. “Control” rats were followed for 3 days and received by gavage only a single dose of 1% carboxymethylcellulose. The animals were sacrificed 24h after the last dose of APAP.

During the experimental period, body weight was recorded daily until sacrifice. For each
10 experimental model, the animals were sacrificed by intraperitoneal injection of pentobarbital (150 mg/kg).

Blood samples were collected in Vacutainer® lithium heparin tube for trace elements (Beckton Dickinson, France) and then centrifuged at 3000 rpm for 10 minutes. The plasma samples were
15 then stored at -80 ° C until analysis. Rat livers were quickly removed and fixed in formalin for histological analysis.

3. Analytical procedures

3.1. Biochemistry analyzes

20 From the collected plasma, measurements of classic biochemistry parameters such as albumin (ALB), total (BILIT) and conjugated (BILID) bilirubin, aspartate aminotransferases (ASAT), alanine aminotransferases (ALAT) and alkaline phosphatases (PAL) were evaluated in the Biochemistry and Molecular Genetics laboratory of Limoges University Hospital using a COBAS® 8000 automaton (Roche, Germany).

25

3.2. Pathological analysis of the liver

At the end of each sacrifice, the livers were cut into sections of 1 to 1.5 cm perpendicular to the major axis to allow homogeneous fixation in a 4% formalin solution for a maximum of 7 days. Samples were stained for light microscopy with hematoxylin and eosin staining and Masson's
30 trichrome stain. The pathologist performed histological analysis blindly, with no knowledge of the different experimental groups.

3.3. Proteomic analysis of the plasma samples (identification-quantification of the different isoforms of albumin)

Standards and reagents

Organic solvents and reagents were of analytical grade. Acetonitrile was obtained from Merck (Molsheim, France), ammonium formate and formic acid from Sigma (Saint-Quentin-Fallavier, France). Deionized water was prepared on a Direct-Q laboratory plant (Millipore, Molsheim, France).

Sample preparation

A volume of 20 µL of plasma was diluted with 980 µL of an aqueous 20mM ammonium formate solution with 0.1 % formic acid, and then vortex-mixed. The mixture was centrifuged at 10°C and 14 000 g, and 300 µl of the supernatant was then filtered on a 0.22 µm cellulose acetate filter before injection.

Liquid chromatography - mass spectrometry

Chromatographic separation was performed using a Nexera LC40 system (Shimadzu, Noisiel, France) equipped with a thermostated column compartment and a thermostated autosampler with a six-port switching valve. Samples were analyzed without chromatographic separation under isocratic conditions using a 2mM aqueous ammonium formate solution containing 0.1% formic acid as mobile phase A and a mixture of acetonitrile/mobile phase A (90:10, by volume) as mobile phase B, programmed as follows: 0–3 min, 50% B.

Mass spectrometric detection was performed using a Q-TOF mass spectrometer (TripleTOF® 5600+, Sciex, Concord, Canada) equipped with a DuoSpray ion source and operated in the positive ionization mode. A beta-galactosidase solution was used for internal calibration. The source conditions were as follows: temperature, 200 °C; declustering potential (DP), 250 eV; curtain gas (CUR), 40 units; ion source gas (GS1, GS2), respectively 70 and 10 units; and ionspray voltage floating, 5.5 kV. All MS parameters were controlled by Analyst® TF 1.7 (Sciex). Data were processed with PeakView® 2.2 software (Sciex). m/z ratios were scanned using a TOF MS scan from m/z 900 and 1800 with an accumulation time of 500 ms.

30 *Spectra deconvolution*

The LC-MS data were processed using PeakView® 2.2 software and its Bio Tool Kit 2.2.0 feature (Sciex). The input MS spectra selected from 1300 to 1600 was then deconvolved using a low resolution (5000) from m/z 1000 to 200000. Deconvolution spectra (or profiles) are expressed as intensity versus mass in Da.

Estimation of the relative abundance of isoforms.

The relative abundance of each isoform was determined after calculating the ratio between each centroided peak and the total area represented by the sum of the centroid peaks between 65500 and 67000 for rat serum albumin or 66000 to 67500 for human serum albumin.

5 Identification and quantification (intensity and relative abundance) of isoforms

Each isoform was identified visually by its mass shift with respect to native albumin and by taking the maximum intensity in a mass interval of 10 Da around the observed peak of each isoform.

10 The relative proportion of the intensity of each isoform was calculated by dividing the intensity or area obtained from its deconvoluted spectrum by the summed intensity of all isoforms (between 65500 and 67000) and multiplying it by 100. Data were gathered in an Excel file then analyzed using GraphPad® for the potential isoforms.

Relative abundance was calculated as the ratio between the maximum intensity of each identified isoform compared that of the native isoform.

15

4. Patients and samples

Patient plasma samples were all leftovers after biochemistry laboratory tests prescribed according to the standard of care. In accordance with French regulations and Good Clinical Practice for biomedical studies, patients were informed of, and were able to oppose to, the use 20 of the leftovers of their blood samples at any time (CSP article L1211-2).

The cohort was composed of cirrhotic patients and of patients with no liver dysfunction as controls. Patients were considered as free from liver dysfunction on the basis of their clinical diagnosis and their liver function biochemical tests, namely, aspartate transaminase, alanine 25 transaminase, alkaline phosphatase, γ -glutamyltransferase, free and total bilirubin, and albumin levels.

Cirrhotic patients were included based on an hepatologist's diagnosis, their liver function biochemical tests and their Child-Pugh scores.

30

Patient plasma samples were prepared as previously described and albumin isoforms were analyzed and identified as previously described for rat plasma samples.

5. Statistical analyses

The results of the biochemical analyses are presented as the median [min-max].

Statistical probabilities of $p < 0.01$ (*) and $p < 0.05$ (**) were considered significant. All analyses and figures were performed using GraphPad Prism 7.0a software (GraphPad Software, San

5 Diego, USA).

Results

Precocity of albumin modifications

10

SEB test in acute models (EtOH and CCl₄):

In rats exposed to EtOH and CCl₄, hepatic cytolysis was observed starting at D7. In the EtOH model, it was further increased, together with a significant increase in ALT levels, on D10 and D14. In this model, a significant increase in AST level was observed at D7, D10 and D14 (**Table**

15

1). In the CCl₄ model, a significant increase in AST and ALT levels at all time points and a significant increase in bilirubin (BILIT & BILD) at D7 and D10 were detected (**Table 2**), suggesting hepatic cytolysis and cholestasis. Histologically, only minor inflammation was detected in some of the rats receiving ethanol. Rats exposed to CCl₄ showed steatosis starting at D3 and only 2 rats had a fibrotic liver tissue (1 in the D3 group and 1 in the D10 group).

20

SEB test and albumin isoforms in the acute hepatotoxicity models:

Most ligands of the SEB test increased starting D1 in both models except for Cd that increased only in EtOH model at D14 (**Figure 1**). A normalization of Au, L-Thyroxine was observed at D7 in both models followed by secondary increase at D10 or D14 for Au and dansylsarcosine.

25

In the EtOH model, In addition to the native albumin with a mass of 65870, 12 potential isoforms were identified, namely Alb+SO₂H, Alb-CysO₃, Alb+Cys-DHA, Alb+Cys, Alb+Cys+SNO, Alb+Glyc, Alb+SO₂H+Glyc, Alb+SO₃H+Glyc, Alb+Cys+Glyc+DHA, Alb+Cys+Glyc, Alb+2Glyc and, Alb+Cys+2Glyc. All isoforms except Alb+CysO₃ and

30

Alb+Cys+Glyc were also detected in the CCl₄ model, in addition to another isoform, Alb+SO₃H+2Glyc (isoforms and corresponding mass shifts are listed in **Table 4**).

In both models, native albumin decreased rapidly after the administration of the hepatotoxic compound, as soon as D1 for some. It increased again at D3 in the CCl₄ model and at D7 in the EtOH model then dropped again. These modifications were paralleled by the increase of several isoforms as shown in **Figures 1 and 2**.

5 Gradual acute model (APAP):

In rats acutely intoxicated with APAP for 2 (D2), 3 (D3) or 4 (D4) days (with doses of 2, 3 and 4g/kg per day, respectively), classical biochemistry markers were not different from those in the control groups (**Table 3**) except a transient increase of AST in the D2g-D1 group due to an outlier and a slight but significant decrease of total albumin. Histological examination of liver 10 tissues revealed inflammation in some rats, mostly those sacrificed 72h after receiving 4g/kg of APAP (D4g-D3). Necrosis was observed only in the group D4g-D1 (5 rats out of 6) but was not visible in the group D4g-D3.

Albumin isoforms analysis of APAP exposed rats:

In addition to native albumin, we have identified 11 isoforms in the serum of rats exposed to 15 APAP, namely, Alb+SO₂H, HSA-CysO₃, Alb+Cys-DHA, Alb+Cys, Alb+Cys+SNO, Alb+SO₂H+Glyc, Alb+SO₃H+Glyc, HSA+SGGS, Alb+2Glyc, Alb+SO₃H+2Glyc, Alb+Cys+2Glyc. All the isoforms were also present in the control group. However, native albumin decreased dramatically in all groups in respect to control group, particularly in the groups sacrificed 3 days after APAP initiation, namely, groups D2gD3, D3gD3 and D4gD3 20 (**Figure 3**). Albumin in all rats was intensely modified. The percentage of native albumin gradually dropped from 12% in the control group to less than 1% in the groups sacrificed at D3. In parallel, several isoforms increased dramatically, up to 10³-fold, in some groups (**Figure 3**). This is principally due to the huge decrease of native albumin in this model. For example, 25 Alb+Cys intensities were 2-fold higher than native Alb in the control group; after 3 days of daily APAP administration, this isoform increased to more than 200-times the concentration of native Alb.

Albumin isoform profiles as a signature of the nature and the intensity of liver injuries

Animal experiments:

As shown in the previous paragraphs, the decrease of native albumin concentration was 30 associated with the increase of certain isoforms, varying with the toxicant (**Table 4**) and resulting in profiles of albumin isoforms that were visually different (**Figure 4**).

Therefore, we then considered the whole MS profile for each model. A supervised principal component analysis (PCA-DA) revealed a clear clustering of the 3 different groups (**Figure 5**).

Albumin isoform profiles in cirrhotic patients:

- 5 Albumin isoforms were characterized for 38 cirrhotic patients and 52 control patients (with no liver injuries). Among the cirrhotic patients, 18 were diagnosed with alcoholic liver disease (ALD), 5 had a nonalcoholic steatosis (NASH) and 16 were diagnosed with a mixed origin of ALD and NASH. The isoforms detected are depicted in **Figure 6** where we can observe a decrease of native albumin in all cirrhotic patients. This decrease was the most important in
- 10 NASH patients. Generally, the increase of the different isoforms was not homogenous among the three groups of patients (**Table 5**). HSA-DA+Cys and HSA+SO₂H were only significantly increased in patients with cirrhosis of mixed origin. HSA+SGGS and HSA+2Glyc were increased only in NASH patients. When considering the whole profile for each patient, PCA-DA showed a clear clustering between the 4 groups, namely, control patients, NASH patients,
- 15 ALD patients and the mixed-cirrhosis patients (**Figure 7**).

Among the recruited patients, 11 were diagnosed with stage A (calculated on the basis of Child-Pugh score), 12 stage B and 14 stage C cirrhosis. Interestingly, PCA-DA showed a clear clustering of the different stages of cirrhosis and the control patients (**Figure 8**).

20

Prediction of early allograft dysfunction by the evolution of the profiles of albumin isoforms:

- 25 Albumin isoforms were characterized in 38 liver-transplanted patients at different times: V1 (24h before the transplantation), V2 (during the transplantation), V3 (24h after the transplantation), V4 (48h after the transplantation), V5 (72h after the transplantation), V6 (7 days after the transplantation). Among the 38 patients, 3 experienced an early allograft dysfunction, diagnosed clinically and objectivized by the LGrAFT10 or the EAD scores. Although, albumin isoforms profiles, when taken individually at each time, were not able to
- 30 discriminate patients with an early allograft dysfunction, the subtraction of the profiles obtained at V6 –V1 or V6-V3 allowed a clear clustering of these patients as shown in figure 9 and figure 10 respectively.

Discussion:**Precocity of albumin modifications:**

- Our results demonstrate that albumin posttranslational modifications (Alb-PTM) occur very early during the course of liver injuries induced by hepatotoxic substances. In 3 animal models, native albumin started to decrease in favor of other isoforms 24 hours after the administration of APAP, ethanol or CCl₄. Interestingly, the nature and the intensity of isoforms were different depending on the hepatotoxic substance.
- Concerning ethanol, it was already known that the daily dose chosen (50% w/v, a very high daily dose) induces inflammation, focal necrosis and finally perivenular fibrosis, within 4 to 29 weeks- depending on the animal model and the experimental protocol (20, 21). In our experimental conditions, inflammation was detected in a few rats (2 out of 7) 24 h after the first administration of ethanol and no more than 33% of rats had inflammation after 2 weeks of daily administration. However, AST and ALT started to increase significantly at D10. The pathogenesis of alcoholic liver disease (ALD) remains poorly understood but is likely a multihit pathophysiological process (22). Ethanol is mostly metabolized into acetaldehyde by ADH, and to a lesser extent, by CYP2E1. A tertiary pathway for the oxidation of ethanol involves catalase, a peroxisomal enzyme that also catalyses the removal of reactive oxygen species (e.g. H₂O₂).
- Acute exposure to EtOH leads to an adaptive increase in EtOH metabolism within 2 to 3 hours, in both rodent and human livers. This involves the so-called swift increase in alcohol metabolism (SIAM), defined experimentally as a rapid increase in hepatic alcohol metabolism and mitochondrial respiration after a single high dose of alcohol. High demand for O₂ during SIAM leads to zones of hypoxia, especially in pericentral (centrilobular) regions of liver lobules, which may contribute to liver injury. Interestingly, the very rapid posttranslational modifications of albumin in our EtOH model are consistent with the rapid onset liver injury described here.

- Other mechanisms are at play in longer-term EtOH induced liver injury. EtOH changes the gut microbiome, causing bacterial overgrowth and increasing formation of toxic/proinflammatory products. EtOH consumption also promotes hepatic ROS and RNS formation. EtOH increases CYP2E1, largely by a posttranscriptional mechanism involving stabilization against proteolysis. CYP2E1 generates superoxide (O₂⁻), which then forms highly reactive peroxynitrite (ONOO⁻) by reaction with NO, and hydroxyl radical ('OH) by the Fenton

reaction. In the presence of EtOH, the 1-hydroxyethyl radical is also formed. Therefore, ROS, RNS and other radical species increase after EtOH ingestion. These radicals attack and damage proteins, lipids, and DNA, induce mitochondrial permeability transition (MPT), cause cell death, and trigger inflammatory processes.

5

Since albumin is the most abundant protein produced in hepatocytes and due to its great reactivity, it is naturally the most prone to posttranslational modifications due to the above-described reactions, which leads to the increase of albumin isoforms as observed in our ethanol model. However, it is still difficult to explain the increase of each isoform individually, since
10 the chemical environment and the reactions at stake are not yet fully understood.

CCl₄ is metabolized in the liver by CYP2E1 and CYP2B1 enzymes and is converted into a highly reactive trichloromethyl (CCl₃[·]) radical, ultimately leading to hepatotoxic damage, inflammation and fibrosis within 6 to 12 weeks. In our CCl₄ model, steatosis was detected in
15 all rats after 3 days of daily administration. AST and ALT were significantly increased as soon as D1, and BILID after 7 days. The CCl₃[·] radical, produced after exposure to CCl₄, can bind to cellular molecules (nucleic acid, protein, lipid), impairing crucial cellular processes such as lipid metabolism, with the potential outcome of fatty degeneration leading to steatosis. CCl₃[·] reacts with oxygen to form the trichloromethylperoxy radical CCl₃OO[·]; another highly reactive
20 species. CCl₃OO[·] initiates a chain reaction of lipid peroxidation, which attacks and destroys polyunsaturated fatty acids, in particular those associated with phospholipids. These affect the permeability of mitochondrial, endoplasmic reticulum, and plasma membranes. At the molecular level, CCl₄ activates tumor necrosis factor (TNF)alpha, nitric oxide (NO), and transforming growth factors (TGF)-alpha and -beta in the cell, processes that appear to direct
25 the cell primarily toward (self-)destruction or fibrosis (23).

Despite differences in cellular chemical reactions and environment involved in the mechanism of toxicity of EtOH and CCl₄, the albumin isoforms that we were able to identify in both models were the same with only 3 exceptions: Alb+SO₃H+2Glyc was specific of CCl₄ and Alb+CysO₃
30 and Alb+Cys+Glyc were specific of EtOH model.

In both models, after a decrease, native albumin increased to reach the level of the control groups at D7, before dropping again. This could be explained by a short regeneration phase, which has been extensively reported for CCl₄ animal models but much less for EtOH (24).

Paracetamol is metabolized by CYP2E1 and 1A2 to form -acetyl-p-benzoquinone imine (NAPQI). High concentrations of NAPQI deplete cellular glutathione stores and subsequently form APAP protein adducts, especially with mitochondrial proteins. NAPQI is very reactive and enhances the generation of free radicals such as superoxide. This reacts with nitric oxide (NO) within the mitochondria to produce highly reactive peroxynitrite, which nitrates mitochondrial proteins such as manganese superoxide dismutase (MnSOD). This alters mitochondrial antioxidant defenses, causing mitochondrial oxidant stress and oxidation of proteins such as mitochondrial thioredoxin. In the cytosol, oxidation of thioredoxin results in its detachment from its binding partner apoptosis signal-regulating kinase 1 (ASK1), which is then activated. ASK1, along with activated mixed-lineage kinase 3 (MLK3) then activate c-jun N-terminal kinase (JNK) to its phosphorylated form through MKK4 phosphorylation. Phosphorylated JNK translocates to the mitochondria and binds to Sab on the outer mitochondrial membrane, which, through a Src-mediated pathway, further inhibits mitochondrial electron transport. This amplifies mitochondrial oxidant stress, which is further exacerbated by translocation of Bax and glycogen synthase kinase-3 β (GSK-3 β) from the cytosol to the mitochondria. These events activate the mitochondrial permeability transition, which releases mitochondrial intermembrane proteins such as endonuclease G and apoptosis-inducing factor (AIF), along with cytochrome c and Smac. Translocation of AIF and endonuclease G to the nucleus then induces nuclear DNA fragmentation, which, along with activation of receptor-interacting protein kinases 3/1 (RIP3/RIP1), finally induce programmed necrosis. The extensive cell necrosis after an APAP overdose leads to release of damage-associated molecular patterns (DAMPs) including mitochondrial DNA, nuclear DNA fragments, high-mobility group box 1 (HMGB1) protein, and many others. DAMPs bind to pattern recognition receptors such as toll-like receptors (TLRs) on inflammatory cells and transcriptionally activate cytokine formation in inflammatory cells (25). APAP hepatotoxicity is a time-dependent event involving a number of different phases critical for the injury and recovery process: i) the metabolism phase that includes NAPQI production and glutathione depletion occurs within 0 to 3 hours after APAP administration; ii) the early injury phase that includes JNK activation and mitochondrial translocation, mitochondrial BAX translocation, mitochondrial superoxide formation, MPT, glutathione recovery and ALT/AST increase in plasma occurs within 2 to 6 h; iii) the late injury/early recovery phase that includes ALT/AST increase in plasma, necrosis, innate immune response occurs within 12 to 24h; and finally iv) the regeneration phase where resolution of necrosis could be encountered occurs within 24 to

96 h (26). In our APAP model, necrosis was mainly observed in rats given 4 g/kg APAP, and inflammation was noted for all doses. Native albumin in this model did not decrease 24 hours post APAP and was even barely detectable at 72h , which is consistent with the mechanism of APAP toxicity described here. The sharp decrease of native albumin was associated with an
5 increase in other isoforms. Among them, Alb+SGGS was specific to this APAP model. As we did not observe any normalization of native albumin, we can assume that the regeneration phase was not reached in our experimental conditions.

Overall, these preliminary results support the hypothesis that albumin posttranslational
10 modifications (Alb-PTM) occur early in the course of induced liver injury, suggesting that the use of Alb-PTM as an early biomarker to characterize drug-induced injury would be relevant.

Albumin profile as a signature

Although most of the isoforms characterized in this research are the result of oxidative
15 reactions, albumin can undergo several chemical modifications on several sites of its amino acids chain, including: cysteinylation, homocysteinylation, glutathionylation, glycation, nitrosylation, nitration, oxidation and carbonylation. With our analytical method, we were able to characterize, after the deconvolution of the MS spectra, up to 17 isoforms (Table 4). Our analytical strategy, which could be seen as a simplified top-down analysis, is based on the
20 simple injection of diluted serum into the LC-MS instrument. It has the advantage of preserving the structural and chemical modifications of interest in the native form of the protein. Theoretically, the deconvoluted MS spectrum is capable of identifying unknown modifications because the addition or subtraction of a structural modification result in a characteristic mass shift, equal to the mass of the specific modification (for example, a mass difference of 163 Da
25 for a glycation). However, the 17 isoforms identified had to be “visually detectable” to be included, increasing the risk of leaving behind minor isoforms with low signals. Therefore, to investigate the differences in isoform distribution among the 3 animal models, we decided to integrate the whole information from each spectrum in PCA-DA. The profiles obtained with the 3 models were nicely separated (Figure 5), suggesting that the Alb profile of each model
30 depends on the different chemical environment and mechanisms of intracellular reactions generated by each substance, as previously explained.

Interestingly, the same approach allowed us to demonstrate that the albumin profiles observed in cirrhotic patients were able to discriminate them from control patients and to discriminate the origins and stages of liver injury among them (**Figures 7 and 8**). This suggests that these isoform profiles may be used as a very valuable tool in the diagnosis and monitoring of liver diseases. In the clinical arena, it is frequently of paramount importance to know whether steatohepatitic liver injury is related to alcohol or NAFLD because this distinction may influence patient management and candidacy for liver transplantation (27).

- In our cohort of cirrhotic patients, we could identify up to 14 albumin isoforms, all of which were also present in control patients. However, we observed that the increase in the HSA-DA isoform was specific to patients with cirrhosis due to alcohol abuse, HSA+SGGS and HSA+2Glyc were increased specifically in NASH patients, and HSA-DA+Cys with HSA-SO₂H were increased only in patients with the mixed form. Despite these specificities, the use of the whole information from the MS spectra should increase the discrimination performance of our tool as described above. In addition, we did not observe a specific isoform able to clearly discriminate the different stages of liver disease (data not shown), but principal component analysis of the MS dataset perfectly separated cirrhosis patients with different Child-Pugh scores and control patients.
- Overall, albumin isoform profiles represent rich data that could help diagnosing liver diseases, staging them and sorting out their origin.

Prediction of early allograft dysfunction by the evolution of the profiles of albumin isoforms:

- The rationale for using the albumin isoforms profiles at 2 different times was to compare the evolution and distribution of isoforms between V6 and V3 or V1. The evolutionary nature of this criterion in relation to a baseline situation was intended to use albumin isoform analysis as a functional test, with changes in isoform proportions increasing as the risk of allograft dysfunction increased and graft function was compromised. This is consistent with the fact that the production of less modified albumin after transplantation reflects good graft function. However, because of the low number of patients experiencing an early allograft dysfunction, this observation has to be confirmed in a larger cohort of liver transplanted patients.

TABLES:

Table 1: Effect of EtOH on biochemical markers expressed as the median [min-max] (* p < 0,05).

| Biomarkers | Controls | D1 | D3 | D7 | D10 | D14 |
|------------------|---------------------|---------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| ALB (g/L) | 14,4 [12,7-17,6] | 13,8 [13,2-14,1] | 12,4* [11,8-14,2] | 12,2* [11,0-13,8] | 16,35 [12,4-17,7] | 12,9* [10,2-13,5] |
| AST (UI/L) | 70,8 [61-75] | 78 [70-85] | 80 [52-144] | 96* [75-157] | 92* [81-157] | 90* [85-294] |
| ALT (UI/L) | 57 [46-61] | 63 [52-71] | 62 [46-123] | 69 [52-97] | 78* [68-98] | 82* [65-104] |
| PAL (UI/L) | 196 [101-325] | 232 [153-304] | 180 [121-329] | 159 [84-263] | 172 [100-222] | 230 [110-327] |
| BILID (μ M) | 0,75 [0,6-1] | 0,7 [0,3-1] | 0,7 [0,5-1,3] | 0,7 [0,4-4,4] | 0,8 [0,5-1,1] | 0,6 [0,4-0,7] |
| BILIT (μ M) | 0,75 [0,4-1,3] | 0,8 [0,4-1,6] | 0,8 [0,2-1,7] | 1,0 [0,2-1,9] | 1,0 [0,8-1,6] | 0,9 [0,5-1,8] |
| Histology | | 2/7 Inflammation | 1/6 inflammation | 4/7 inflammation | 2/8 inflammation | 3/9 inflammation |

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Table 3: Effect of CCl₄ on administration on biochemical markers expressed as the median [min-max] (* p < 0,05; ** p < 0,01).

| Biomarkers | Controls | D1 | D3 | D7 | D10 |
|------------------|---------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------|
| ALB (g/L) | 14,4 [12,7-17,6] | 14,2 [12,9-14,5] | 13,0* [11,8-14,2] | 12,9* [10,4-14,5] | 16,0 [15,9-16,7] |
| AST (UI/L) | 70,8 [61-75] | 123* [90-251] | 151* [82-214] | 232** [168-305] | 337** [192-473] |
| ALT (UI/L) | 57 [46-61] | 77* [67-181] | 90* [78-208] | 200** [107-638] | 355** [166-538] |
| PAL (UI/L) | 196 [101-325] | 232 [192-270] | 237 [174-329] | 248 [117-341] | 205 [149-250] |
| BILID (μ M) | 0,75 [0,6-1,0] | 1,1 [0,7-1,5] | 1,2 [0,3-1,3] | 1,6** [1,2-2,0] | 2,5** [1,8-2,9] |
| BILIT (μ M) | 0,75 [0,4-1,3] | 1,4 [0,4-2,0] | 1,3 [0,6-3,5] | 2,3** [1,8-4,5] | 3,5** [2,4-5,3] |
| Histology | | | Steatosis 5/5 1/5 fibrosis | Steatosis 6/6 | 6/6 steatosis 1/6 fibrosis |

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Table 3: Effect of APAP administration on biochemical markers expressed as the median [min-max] (* p < 0,05; ** p < 0,01) and histology examination. D2g-D1 is the group of rats that were sacrificed 24h after receiving a dose of 2 g/kg of APAP. D2g-D3 is the group of rats that were sacrificed 72h after receiving a dose of a dose of 2g/kg. D3g-D1 is the group of rats that were sacrificed 24h after receiving 3g/kg of APAP.

| Biomarkers | Controls | D2g-D1 | D2g-D3 | D3g-D1 | D3g-D3 | D4g-D1 | D4g-D3 |
|------------------|--------------------|----------------------|---|---|------------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------------------|
| ALB (g/L) | 13,3 [12,6-14] | 12,65 [10,6-14,3] | 11,2* [8,3-12,3] | 10,4** [9,6-11,8] | 11,1* [9,9-11,4] | 10,9* [10,4-12] | 10,95* [10,2-12,0] |
| AST (UI/L) | 54,35 [49,5-58] | 205,2* [113-803] | 75,95 [31,8-259] | 87,1 [67-100,2] | 44,3 [38-95] | 198,8 [49,1-600] | 62,9 [56-103] |
| ALT (UI/L) | 34 [30-36] | 53 [41-376] | 24 [6-89] | 31 [28-51] | 32,5 [18-44] | 44,5 [26-134] | 25 [17-28] |
| PAL (UI/L) | 101 [82-113] | 134 [89-243] | 122,5 [90-157] | 106 [72-167] | 103,5 [73-142] | 149 [109-241] | 96 [88-111] |
| BILID (μ M) | 0,6 [0,04-1,2] | 0,5 [0,2-1,1] | 0,34 [0,1-0,99] | 0,1 [0,1-1,5] | 0,2 [0,15-0,6] | 0,18 [0,08-0,5] | 0,3 [0,13-0,35] |
| BILIT (μ M) | 0,7 [0,1-1,8] | 0,75 [0,3-1,4] | 0,4 [0,1-1,8] | 0,3 [0,2-2,5] | 0,5 [0,3-0,9] | 0,3 [0,2-0,9] | 0,5 [0,4-3] |
| Histology | | 1/ necrosis | 1/6 necrosis 1/6 inflammation 2/6 F1 | 3/6 portal dilatation 2/6 inflammation | 1/6 portal dilatation 1/6 F1 | 5/6 necrosis | 4/6 portal inflammation 3/6 F1 |

Table 4. Isoforms of albumin and mass shifts of native albumin in rats and humans.

| Isoformes ID | Rats | Humans | Mass shift | ISOFORMES | APAP | EtOH | CCl4 |
|--------------|-------|--------|------------|------------------|------|------|------|
| A | 65685 | 66253 | -185 | HSA-DA | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| B | 65803 | 66371 | -67 | HSA-DA+Cys | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| C | 65870 | 66438 | 0 | HSA Native | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| D | 65901 | 66469 | 31 | HSA+SO2H | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| E | 65918 | 66486 | 48 | HSA+CysO3 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| F | 65966 | 66534 | 96 | HSA+Cys-DHA | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| G | 65989 | 66557 | 119 | HSA+Cys | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| H | 66018 | 66586 | 148 | HSA+Cys+SNO | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| I | 66033 | 66601 | 163 | HSA+Glyc | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| J | 66065 | 66633 | 195 | HSA+SO2H+Glyc | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| K | 66081 | 66649 | 211 | HSA+SO3H+Glyc | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| L | 66118 | 66686 | 248 | HSA+Cys+Glyc-DHA | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| M | 66152 | 66720 | 282 | HSA+Cys+Glyc | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| N | 66175 | 66743 | 305 | HSA+GGGS | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| O | 66196 | 66764 | 326 | HSA+2Glyc | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| P | 66242 | 66810 | 372 | HSA+SO3H+2Glyc | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Q | 66310 | 66878 | 440 | HSA+Cys+2Glyc | 1 | 1 | 0 |

Table 5. Variations of the different albumin isoforms in the different groups of patients as compared to the control group.

| | Controls | EtOH | NASH | EtOH-NASH |
|---------------|----------|-------------|-------------|--------------|
| HSA-DA | 0,1 % | ↗ 0,4 % | - 0,07 % | ↘ 0,03 % |
| HSA-DA+Cys | 0,14 % | - 0,14 % | - 0,08 % | ↗↗↗ 0,5 % |
| HSA Native | 37 % | ↘ 26 % | ↘↘ 14 % | ↘ 29 % |
| HSA SO2H | 0,3 % | ✗ | ✗ | ↗↗↗ 2 % |
| HSA SO3H | 3 % | - 1,6 % | ✗ 0,2 % | - 3,5 % |
| HSA+Cys-DHA | 1 % | - 1 % | ↘* 0,5 % | - 0,8 % |
| HSA+Cys | 27 % | ↗↗ 42 % | ↗↗ 47 % | ↗↗ 47 % |
| HSA+Cys+SNO | 4,7 % | ↗ 6,8 % | ↗ 6,7 % | ↗ 8,4 % |
| HSA+Glyc | 10 % | - 10 % | - 10 % | - 10 % |
| HSA+SO2H+Glyc | 1 % | ↘* 0,7 % | ↘* 0,6 % | - 1 % |
| HSA+Cys+Glyc | 8 % | - 7 % | ↗↗ 18 % | - 8 % |
| HSA+SGGS | 5 % | 5 % | ↗* 8,5 % | 5 % |
| HSA+2Glyc | 0,4 % | ↘ 0,15 % | ↗ 0,7 % | ↘ 0,14 |
| HSA+Cys+2Glyc | 0,13 % | ↗↗ 0,4 % | ↗↗↗ 2 % | ↗↗ 0,3 |

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CLAIMS:

1. A method of determining the etiology and severity of a liver injury in a subject comprising determining the profile of albumin isoforms in a blood sample obtained from the subject wherein the profile indicates the etiology and severity of the liver
5 injury.
2. The method of claim 1 that comprises the step of detecting a plurality of albumin isoforms.
3. The method of claim 1 that comprises the step of detecting a plurality of albumin isoforms selected from Table 4.
- 10 4. The method of claim 1 that comprises the step of detecting a plurality of isoforms selected from the group consisting of Alb+SO₂H, HSA-CysO₃, Alb+Cys-DHA, Alb+Cys, Alb+Cys+SNO, Alb+SO₂H+Glyc, Alb+SO₃H+Glyc, HAS-SGGS, Alb+2Glyc, Alb+SO₃H+2Glyc, and Alb+Cys+2Glyc.
- 15 5. The method of claim 1 that comprises the steps of i) determining the profile of albumin isoforms in the blood sample obtained from the patient, and ii) comparing the profile to one or more reference profiles associated with various liver injuries.
6. The method of the present invention of claim 1 for detecting chemical liver injuries, for detecting physical liver injuries, for detecting ischemic liver injuries, for the early detection of a liver injury, and/or for the early detection of early graft dysfunction or
20 non-function in liver transplanted patients.
7. The method of claim 6 for detecting a non-alcoholic fatty liver disease, and in particular for detecting NASH.
8. The method of claim 6 for detecting liver fibrosis, and in particular for detecting cirrhosis.
- 25 9. A method of predicting the worsening of a liver injury comprising the steps of determining the evolution of the profile of albumin isoforms in the blood sample obtained from the patient wherein said evolution predicts the worsening of the liver injury.

10. A method of predicting an early allograft liver dysfunction or liver non-function in a liver-transplanted patient comprising the steps of determining the evolution of the profile of albumin isoforms in the blood sample obtained from the patient wherein said evolution predicts the early allograft dysfunction or non-function.
- 5 11. The method according to any one of claims 1 to 10 wherein the isoforms are detected by mass spectrometry.
12. The method according to any one of claims 1 to 11 that comprises the use of an algorithm.
13. The method of claim 12 that is a computer-implemented method comprising applying, 10 on a set of values for each detected isoforms relative to the subject, a trained model configured to determine the etiology and severity of the liver injury based on the set of values.
14. The method of claim 12 that the set of values comprises the relative abundance of the different detected isoforms.
- 15 15. The method of claim 12 wherein the model is preliminary trained by supervised learning on a training dataset comprising, for a plurality of individuals of a population, the etiologies and the severities of a liver injury.
16. The method of claim 12 wherein that comprises the use of a classification algorithm.
17. The method according to any one of claim 1 to 16 for determining whether a subject 20 suffering from a liver injury achieves a response to a therapy.

ABSTRACT OF THE INVENTION**USE OF ALBUMIN ISOFORMS PROFILES FOR THE CHARACTERIZATION OF
5 THE ETIOLOGY AND SEVERITY OF LIVER INJURIES**

The inventors hypothesized that each type of liver injury can be revealed by a specific profile of HSA posttranslational modifications. Therefore, the aim of inventors was to study the pattern of albumin isoforms in rats intoxicated with acetaminophen (APAP), ethanol, and CCl₄. The 10 second objective was to explore the potential of these isoforms as biomarkers of liver specific injuries. The results demonstrate that albumin posttranslational modifications (Alb-PTM) occur very early during the course of liver injuries induced by hepatotoxic substances. In 3 animal models, native albumin started to decrease in favor of other isoforms 24 hours after the administration of APAP, ethanol or CCl₄. Interestingly, the nature and the intensity of isoforms 15 were different depending on the hepatotoxic substance. In a cohort of cirrhotic patients, the inventors were able to identify up to 14 albumin isoforms, all of which were also present in control patients. However, the inventors observed that the increase in the HSA-DA isoform was specific to patients with cirrhosis due to alcohol abuse, HSA+SGGS and HSA+2Glyc were increased specifically in NASH patients, and HSA-DA+Cys with HSA+SO₂H were increased 20 only in patients with the mixed form. In addition, we did not observe a specific isoform able to clearly discriminate the different stages of liver disease, but principal component analysis of the MS dataset perfectly separated cirrhosis patients with different Child-Pugh scores and control patients. The present invention thus relates to the use of albumin isoforms profiles for the characterization of the etiology and severity of liver injuries.

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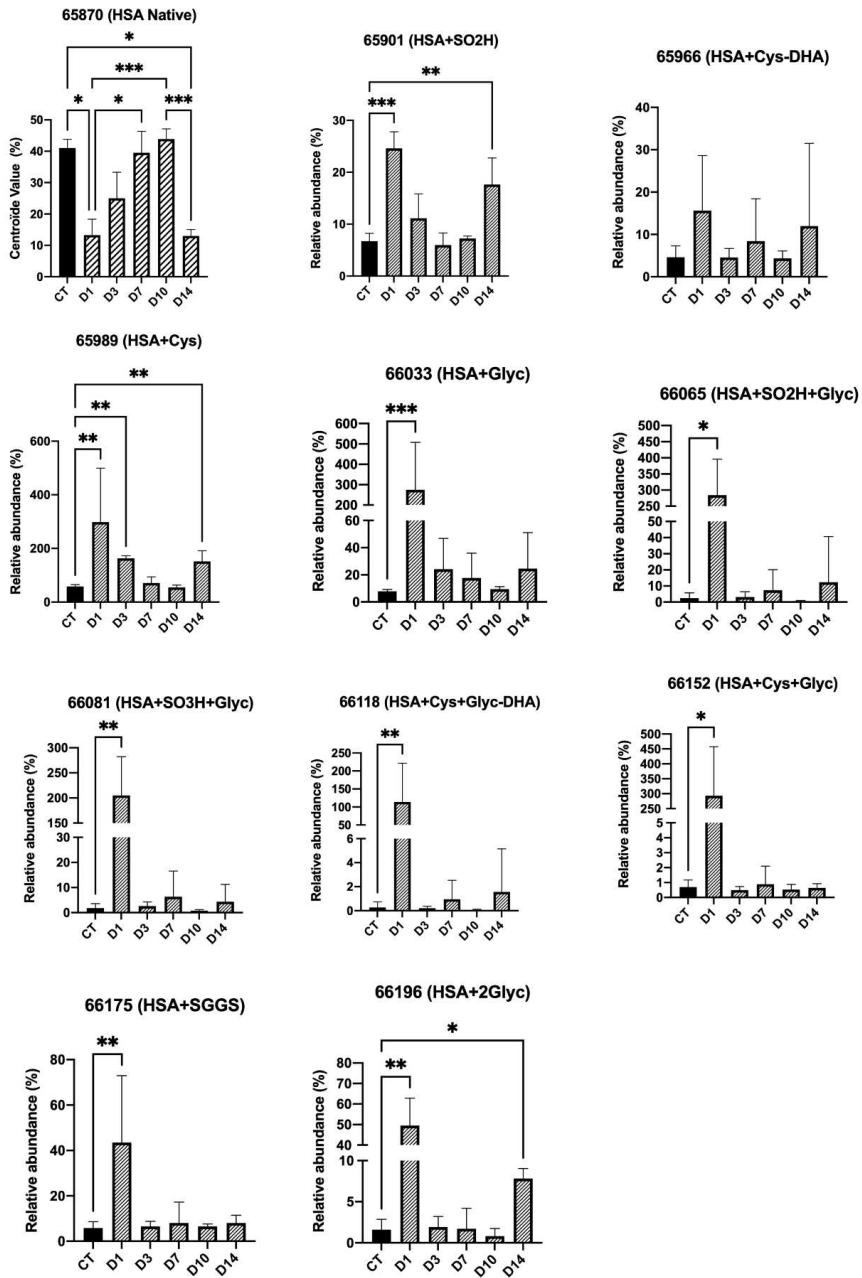


Figure 1

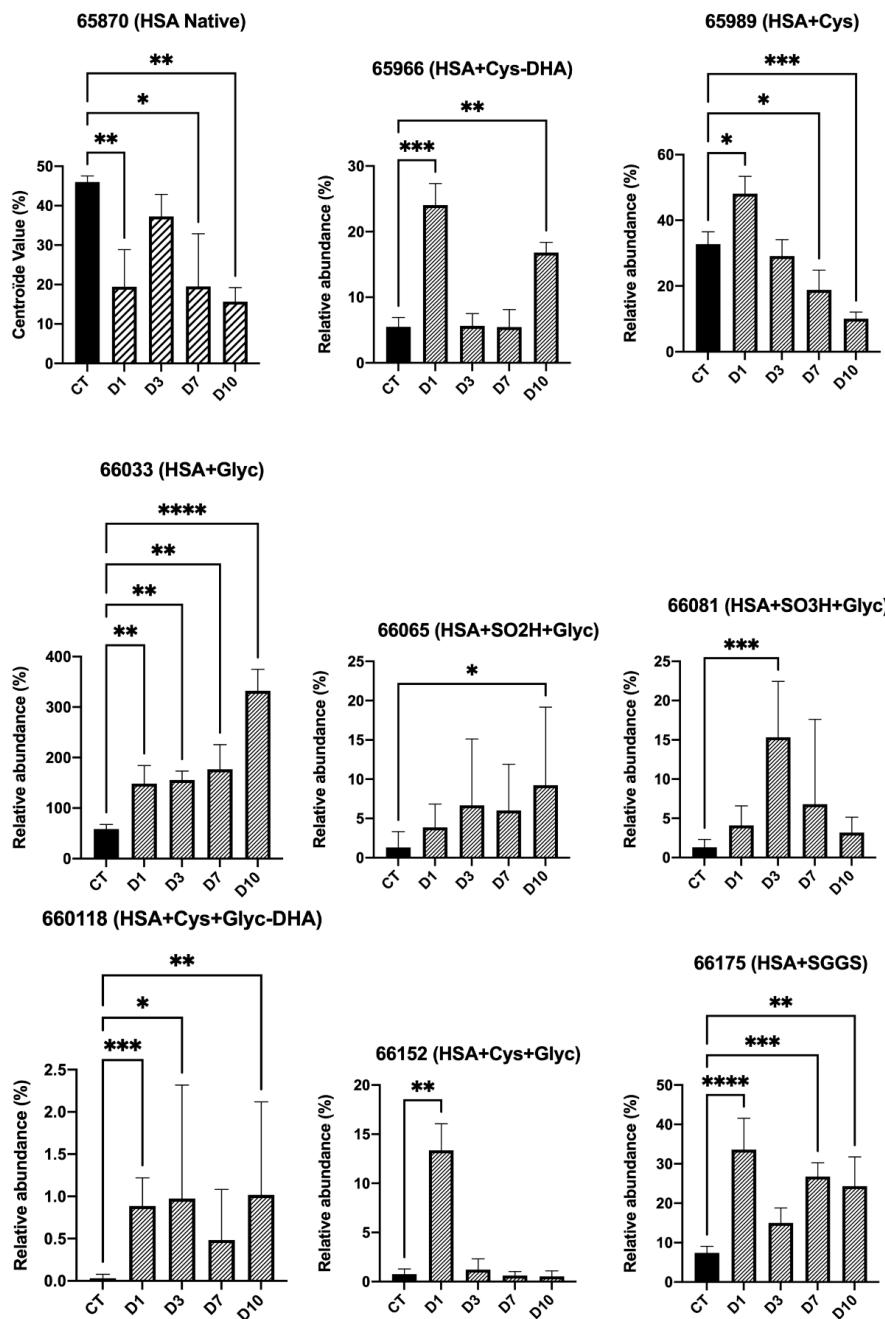


Figure 2

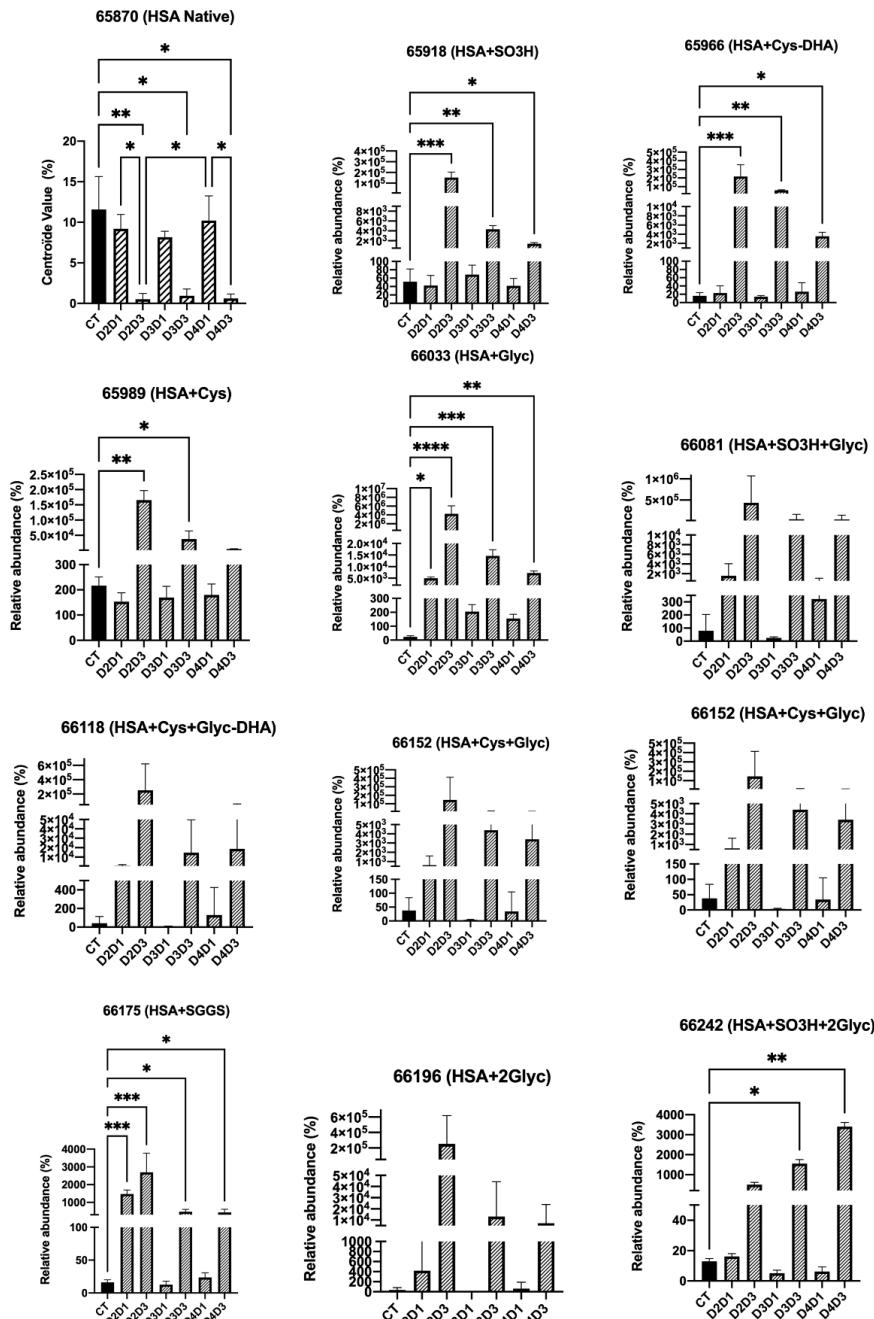


Figure 3

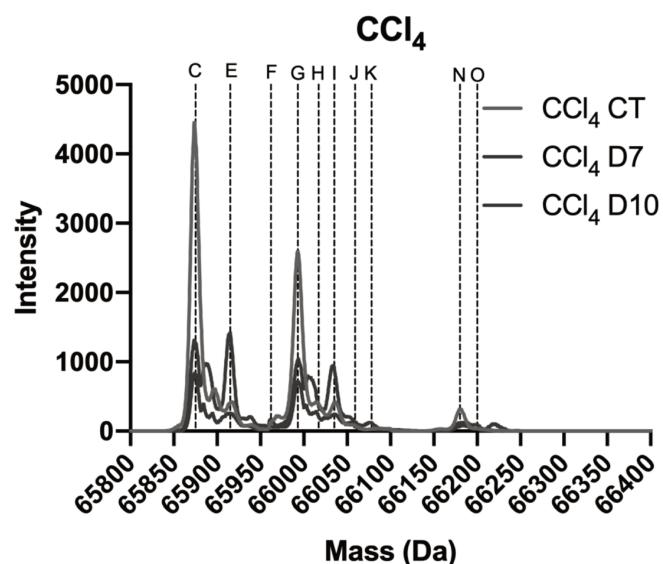


Figure 4A

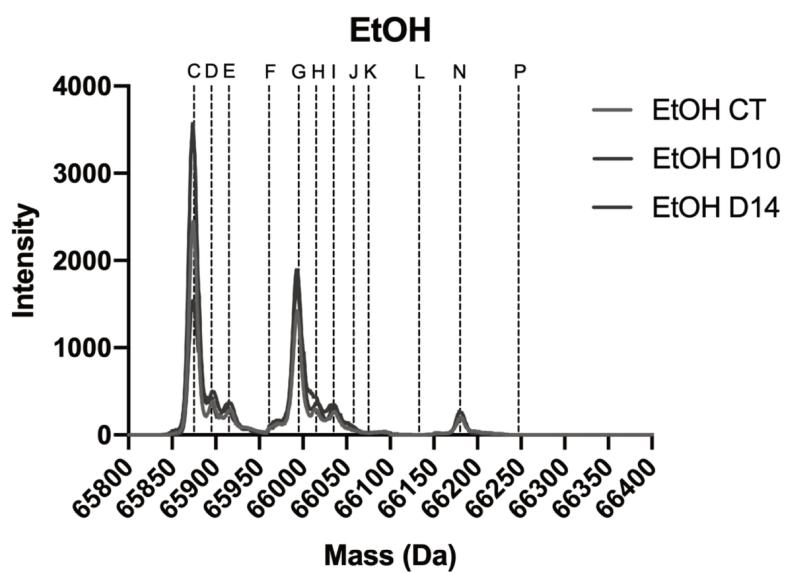


Figure 4B

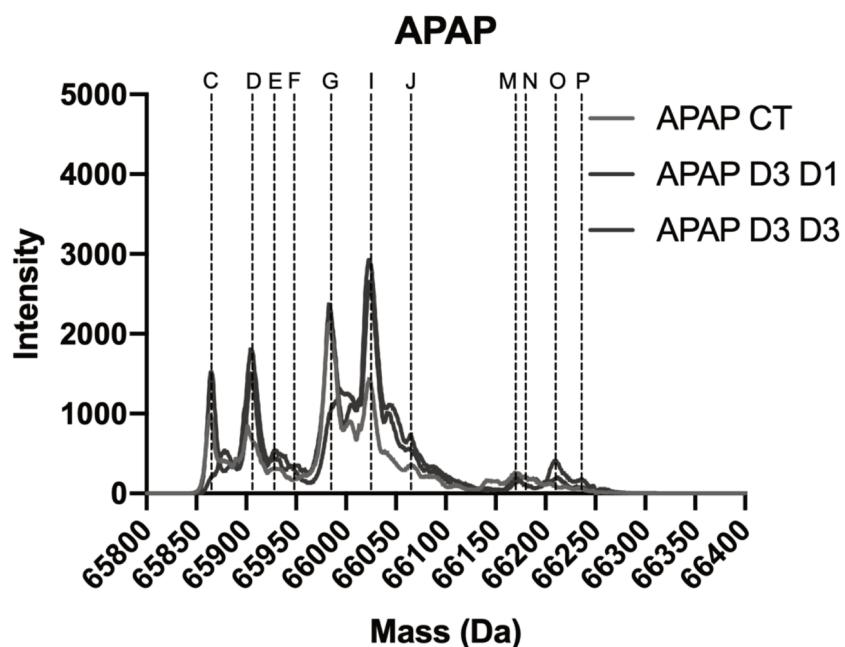


Figure 4C

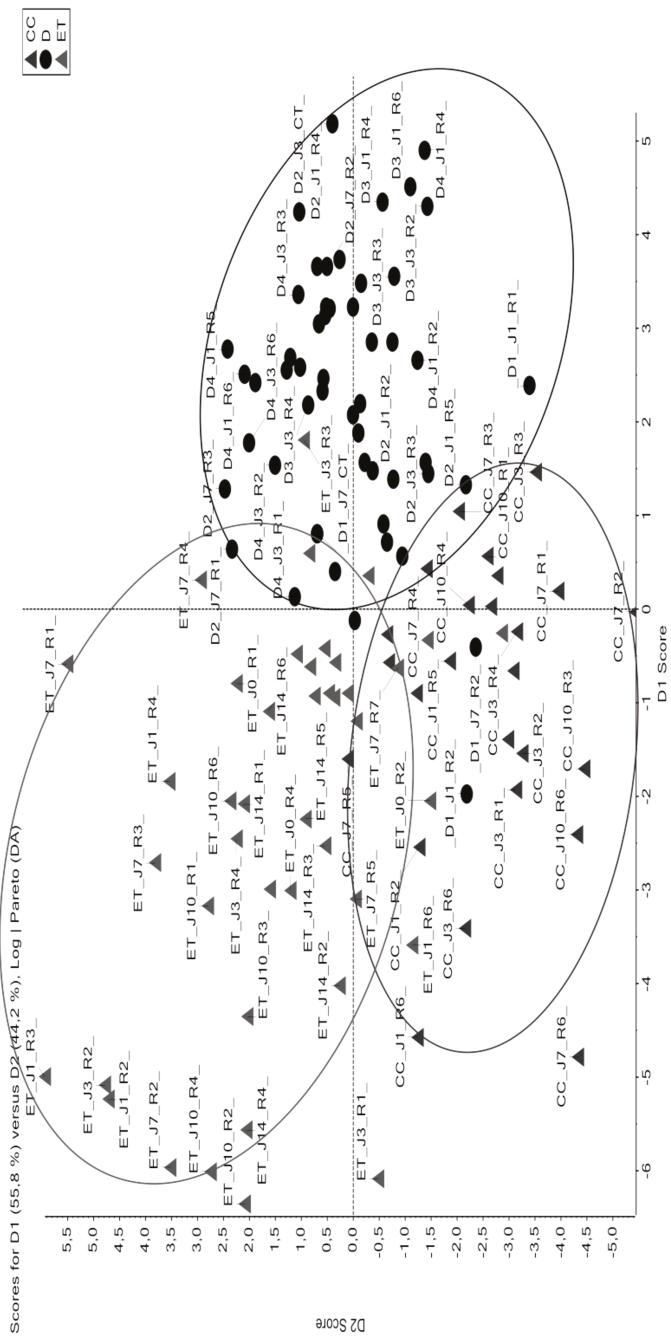


Figure 5

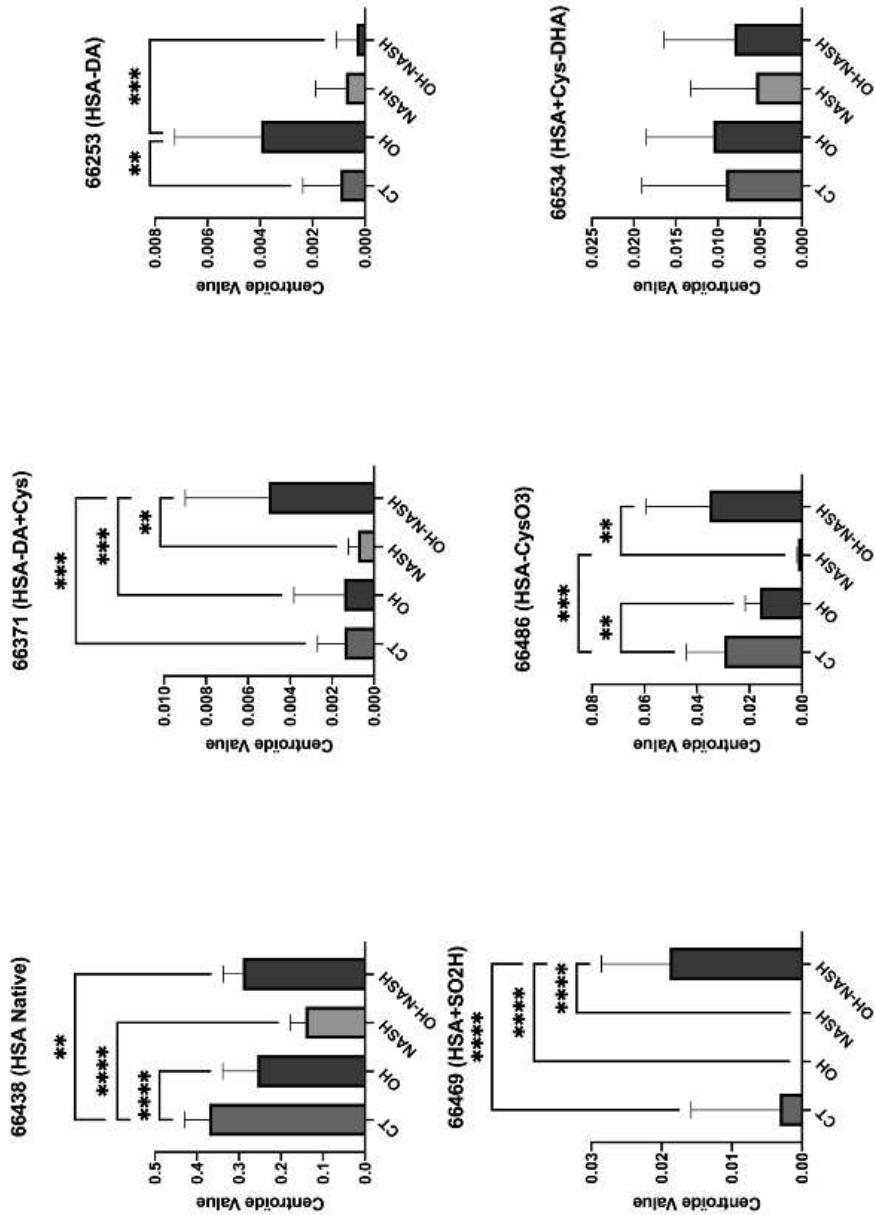


Figure 6 (part 1/3)

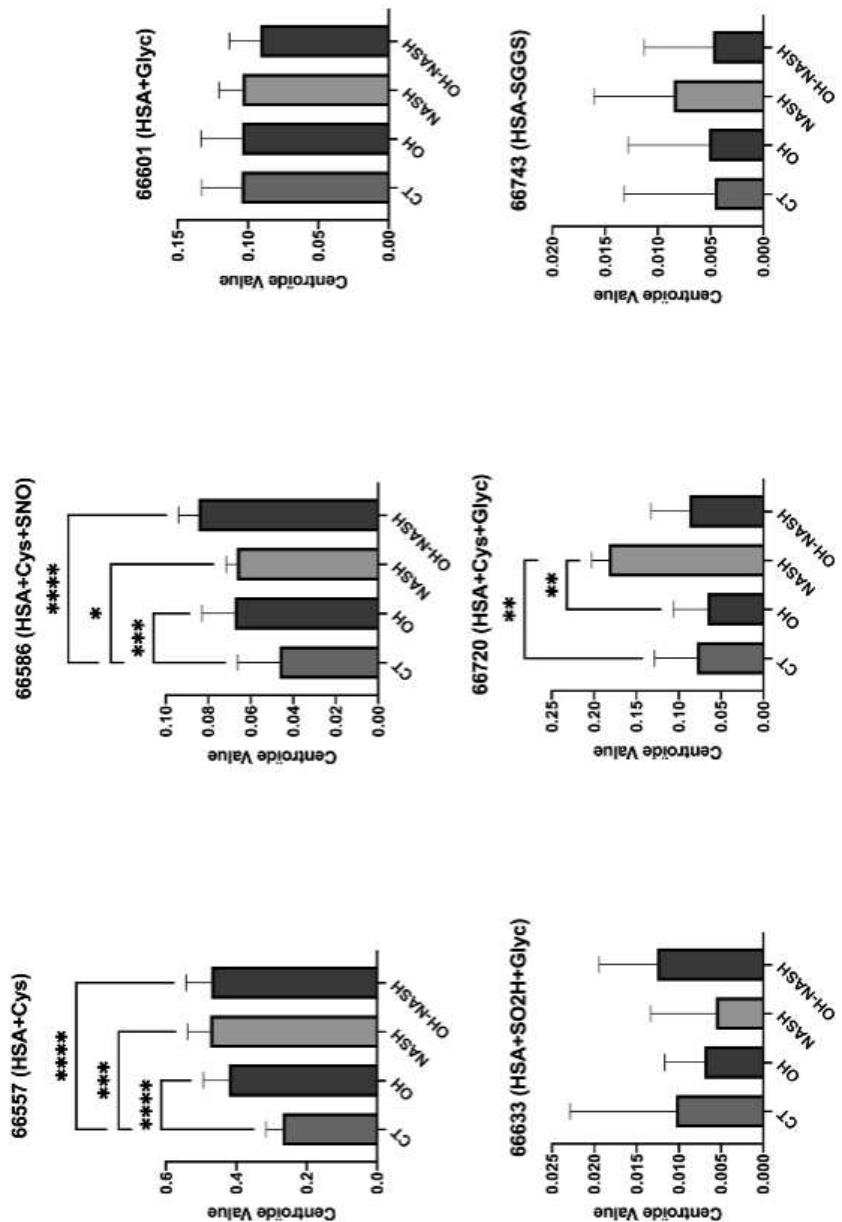


Figure 6 (part 2/3)

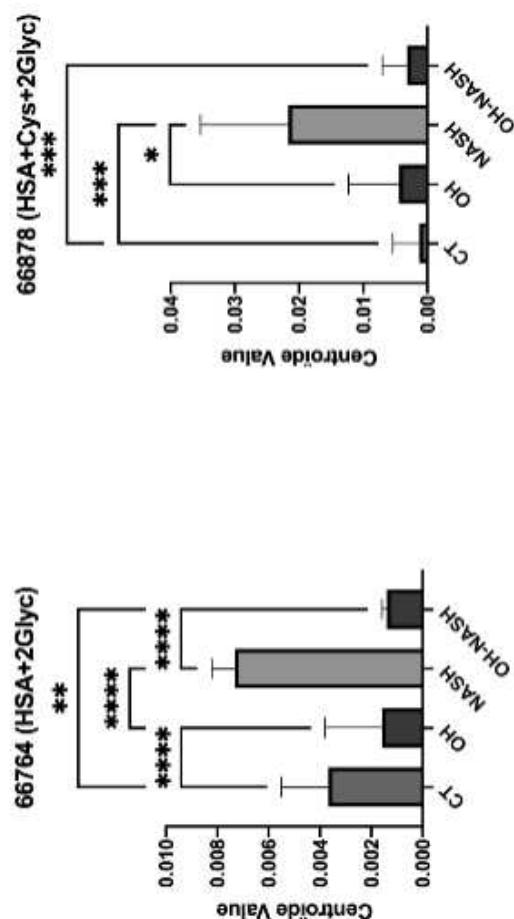


Figure 6 (part 3/3)

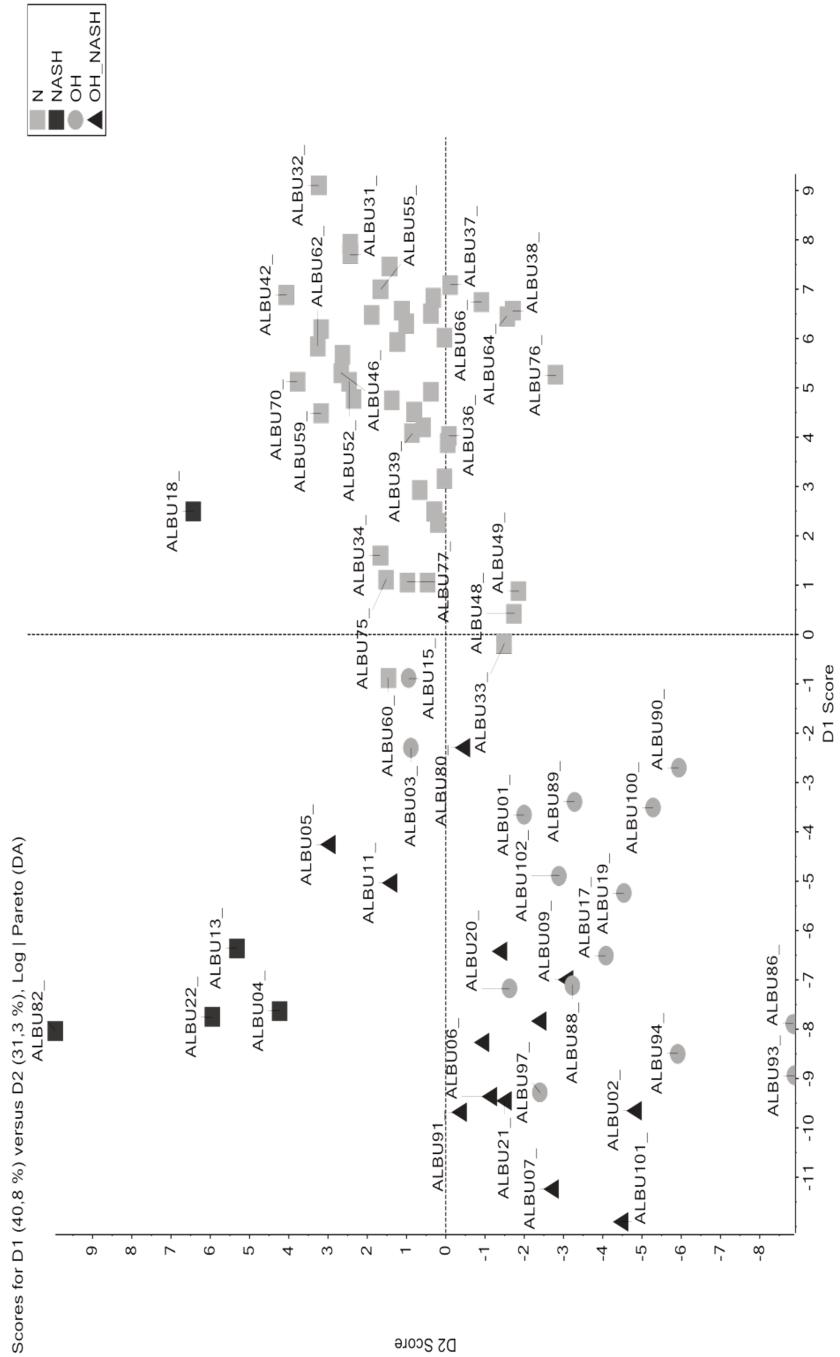


Figure 7A

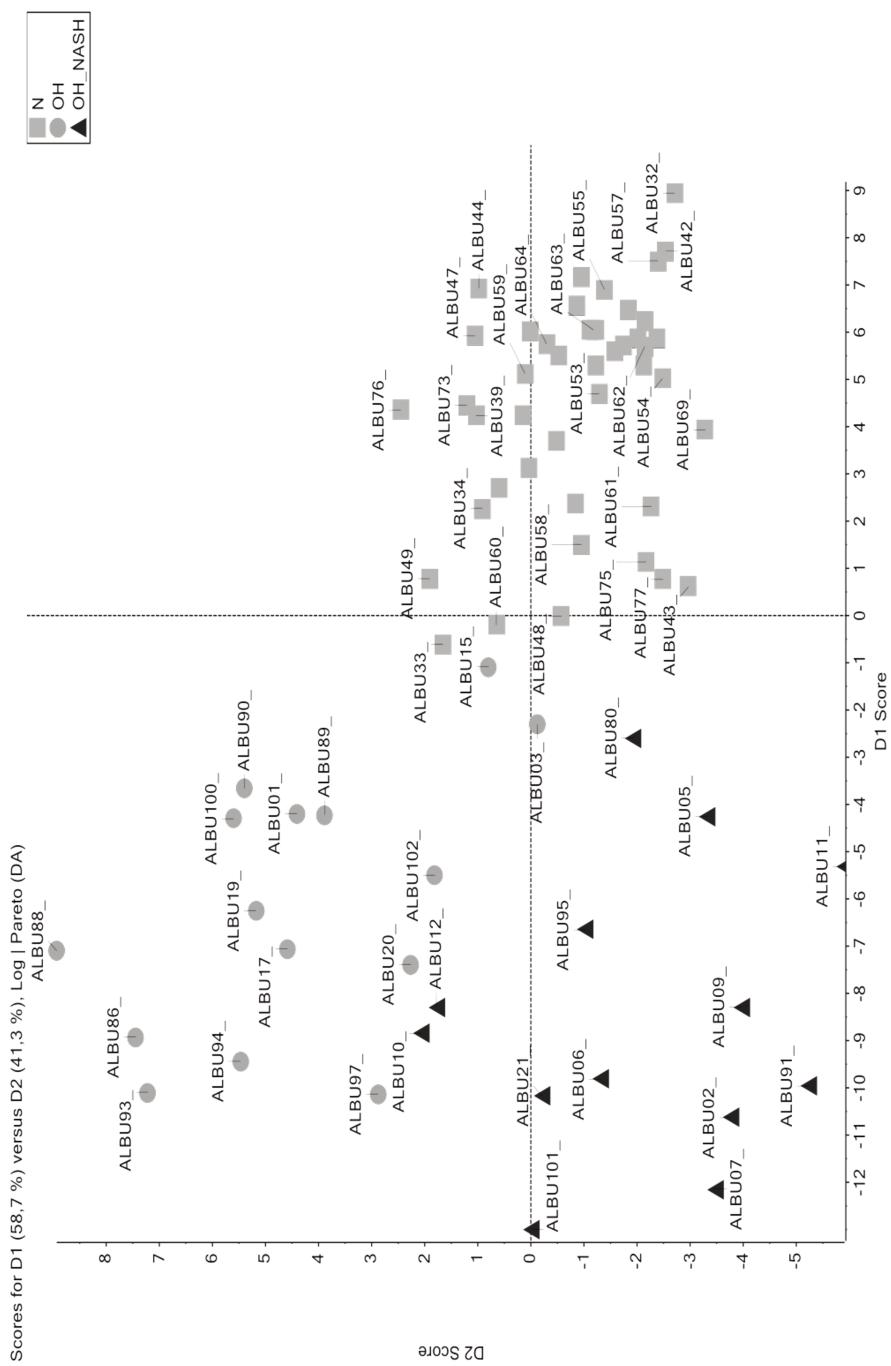


Figure 7B

12/15

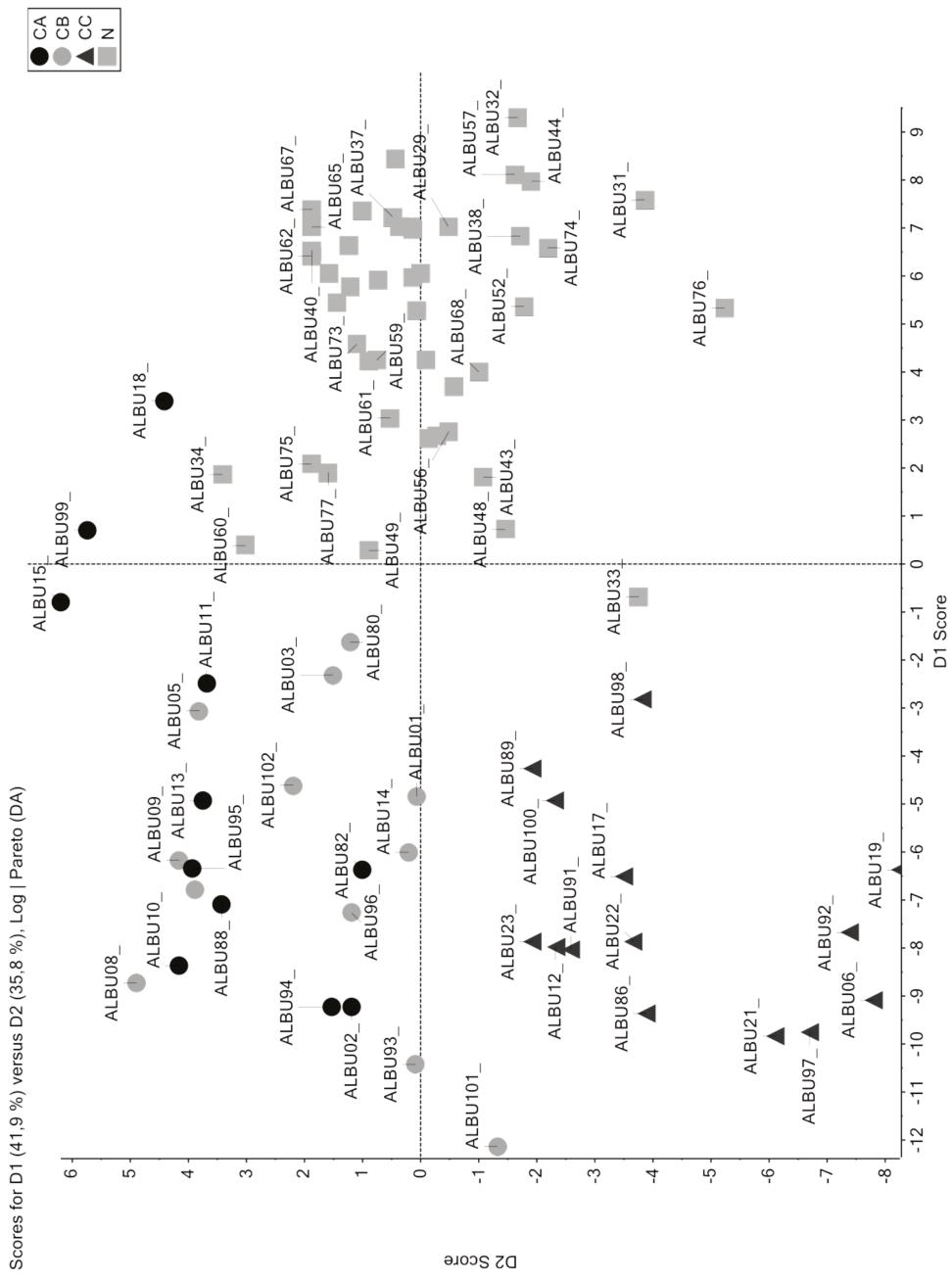
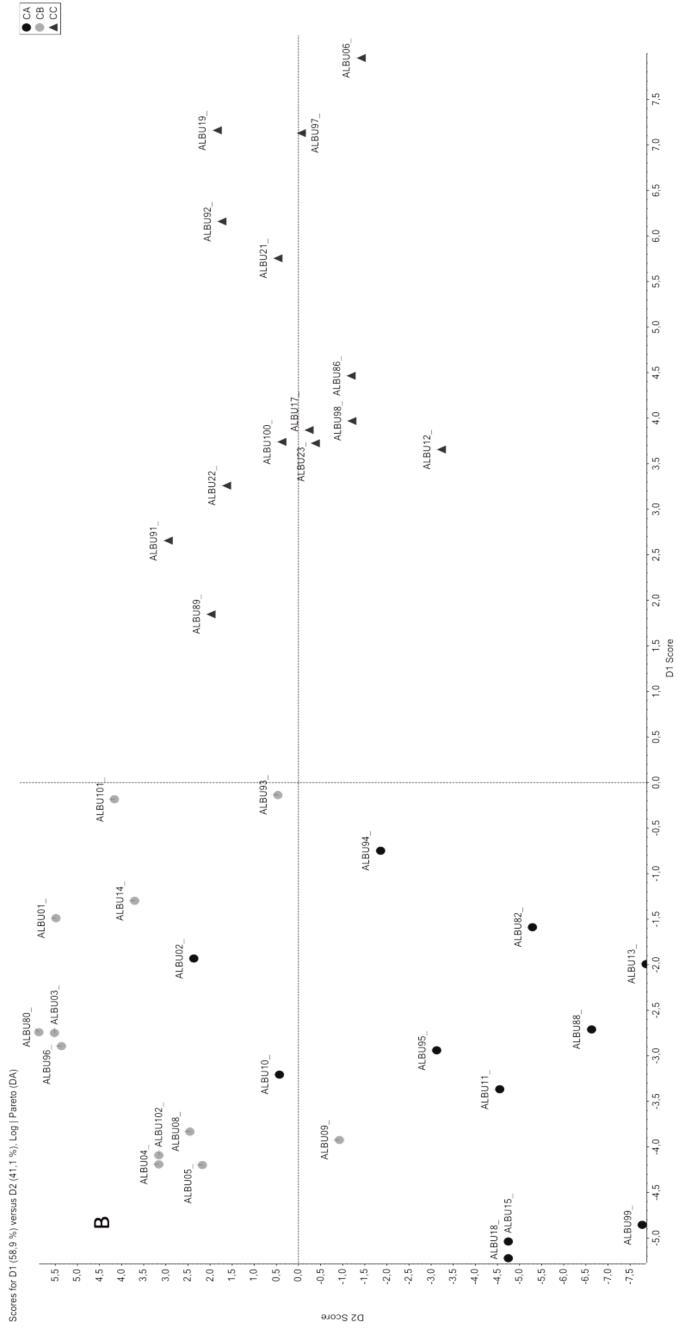


Figure 8A

**Figure 8B**

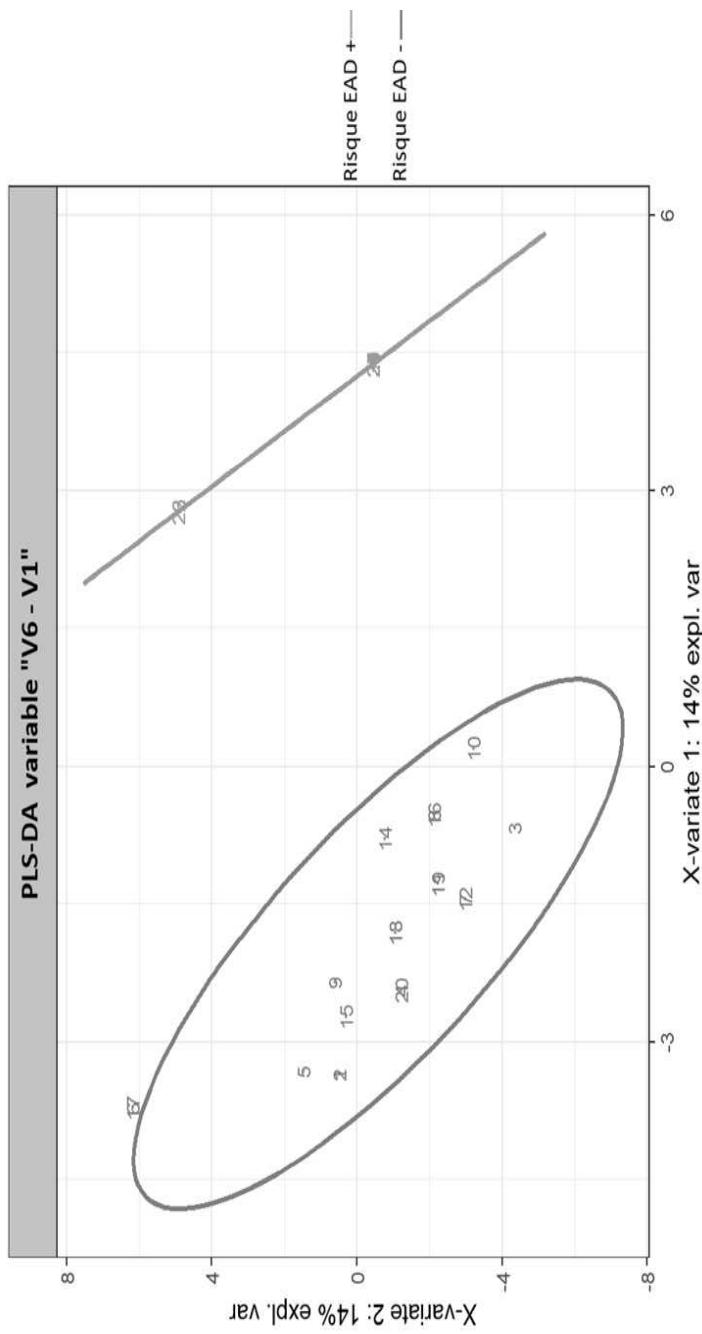
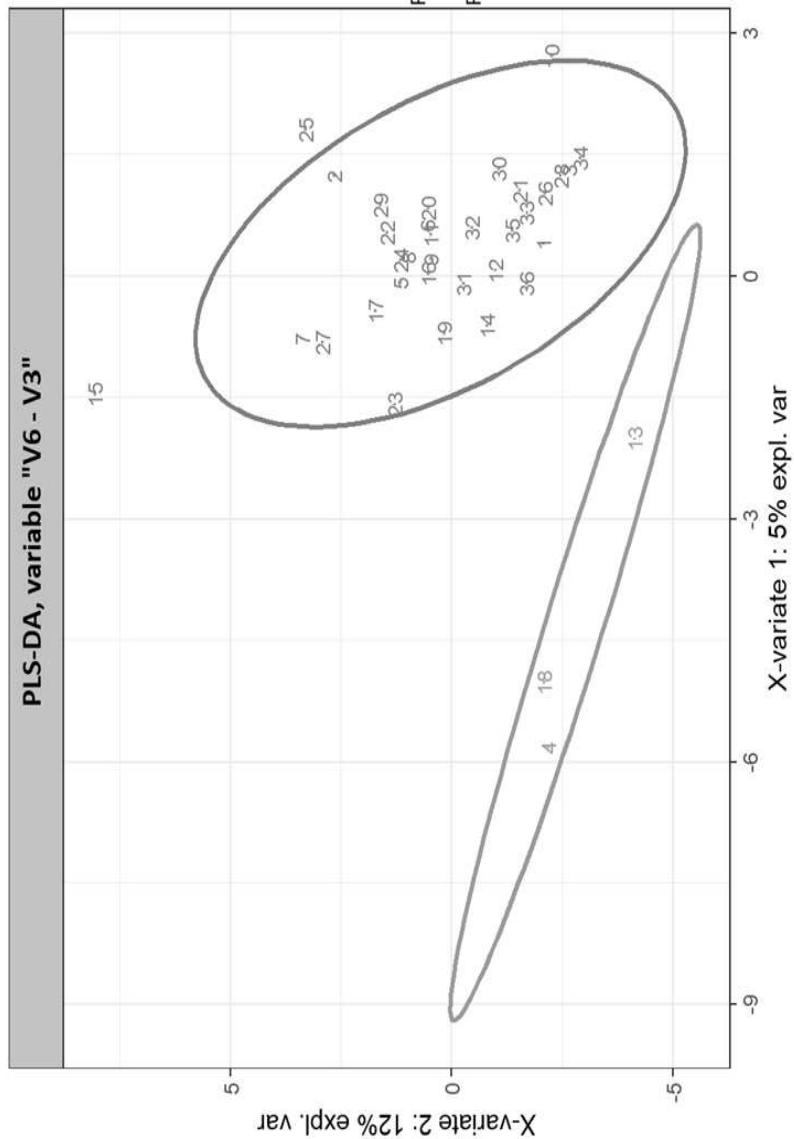


Figure 9

**Figure 10**

II.2.3.3. Discussion

II.2.3.3.1. Précocité des PTMs de l'albumine

Dans les différents modèles animaux d'hépatotoxicité élaborés, les modifications de l'albumine sont apparues très tôt au cours des lésions hépatiques induites par les substances hépatotoxiques et il est intéressant de noter que la nature et l'intensité des isoformes étaient différentes selon la substance hépatotoxique. La diminution des capacités de liaison des ligands du SEB Test a été corrélée à la diminution de l'isoforme native de l'albumine au bénéfice des autres isoformes dès 24h après l'administration des différents hépatotoxiques. Bien que la diminution de l'isoforme native de l'albumine puisse expliquer les comportements de certains ligands, cela mérite un regard plus approfondi. D'abord, l'oxydation de l'albumine sur la Cys34 a entraîné une perturbation de la liaison à l'or (Au), entraînant une diminution des capacités de liaison avec l'Au chez les rats intoxiqués. Ensuite, les capacités de liaison normales pour Au, Cu et dansylsarcosine observées à J3 et/ou J7 dans les modèles EtOH et CCl₄ sont cohérentes avec les niveaux normaux d'albumine native observés. Cela est probablement dû à une courte phase de régénération hépatique, qui a été largement rapportée au moins chez les animaux intoxiqués au CCl₄ (229–231). De plus, le Cu aurait une forte affinité pour le site de liaison N-terminal et le site de liaison métallique B (MBS-B). Cependant, nous n'avons identifié aucune isoforme présentant une troncature du fragment N-terminal, ce qui suggère que les modifications du MBS-B sont seules responsables d'une diminution de la liaison au Cu. Nous avons également détecté la N-Glycation et émis l'hypothèse qu'elles se produisaient sur Lys199, Lys281, Lys439 et Lys525 (217), toutes situées à proximité des sites de L-thyroxine. Ces modifications modifieraient la dynamique locale et affecteraient à leur tour la capacité de liaison de la L-thyroxine. Enfin, la capacité de liaison au Cu a montré la première diminution dans tous les modèles. Par conséquent, le Cu pourrait être considéré comme un marqueur sensible très précoce d'une PTMs de l'albumine. En revanche, une diminution de la capacité de liaison au Cd n'a été observée qu'à des stades ultérieurs, ce qui suggère qu'elle pourrait être utilisée comme biomarqueur de PTMs d'albumine d'atteintes plus intenses ou différentes.

Dans le modèle d'hépatotoxicité induite par EtOH, une inflammation ainsi qu'une cytolysé hépatique ont été observées (**Brevet 2 : Tableau 1**) objectivant d'une atteinte hépatique en accord avec la littérature (232,233). La pathogenèse de la maladie alcoolique du foie reste incomprise à l'heure actuelle en raison d'un processus physiopathologique complexe (234). Une exposition aiguë à l'EtOH entraîne une forte demande en oxygène pendant le métabolisme de l'EtOH entraîne des zones d'hypoxie, en particulier dans les zones centrales

des lobules hépatiques, pouvant ainsi contribuer à des lésions hépatiques. Il est intéressant de noter que l'apparition très rapide des PTMs de l'albumine observées dans notre modèle EtOH concordent avec les lésions hépatiques à apparition rapide décrites (**Brevet 2 : Figure 1, Tableau 1**). La formation excessive d'ERO par le métabolisme de l'EtOH attaque et endommage les protéines, les lipides et l'ADN, induit une transition de perméabilité mitochondriale, provoque la mort cellulaire et déclenche des processus inflammatoires. En raison de l'abondance prédominante de l'albumine dans les hépatocytes et en raison de sa grande réactivité, elle est par conséquent sujette aux modifications post-traductionnelles dues aux réactions décrites ci-dessus, ce qui conduit à l'augmentation des isoformes de l'albumine comme observé dans notre modèle éthanol (**Brevet 2 : Figure 1, Figure 4A**). Il est cependant encore difficile d'expliquer à l'heure actuelle l'augmentation de chaque isoforme individuellement, car l'environnement chimique du métabolisme de l'EtOH est complexe et les réactions en jeu sont encore mal comprises.

Dans le modèle d'hépatotoxicité induit par CCl₄, une stéatose, une cytolysé hépatique ainsi qu'une cholestase ont été observées (**Brevet 2 : Tableau 2**). Au niveau cellulaire, nous savons que le radical trichlorométhyle (CCl₃•), produit après exposition au CCl₄, peut se lier à des molécules cellulaires (acides nucléiques, protéines, lipides), altérant des processus cellulaires comme le métabolisme lipidique, avec dégénérescence graisseuse conduisant à la stéatose. Le radical peroxyde de trichlorométhyle (CCl₃O₂•), produit de la réaction du radical trichlorométhyle (CCl₃•) avec l'oxygène, induit une réaction en chaîne de peroxydation lipidique, qui attaque et détruit les acides gras polyinsaturés et qui affecte la perméabilité des membranes mitochondrielles, endoplasmiques et plasmiques. Au niveau moléculaire, le CCl₄ active le TNFα, le NO et les TGF α et β dans la cellule hépatique, processus qui semblent diriger la cellule principalement vers une fibrose (231).

Malgré les différences dans les réactions chimiques cellulaires dans le mécanisme de toxicité de EtOH et CCl₄, les isoformes d'albumine que nous avons pu identifier dans les 2 modèles étaient les mêmes à seulement 3 exceptions près : Alb+SO3H+2Glyc était spécifique du modèle CCl₄ et Alb +CysO3 et Alb+Cys+Glyc étaient spécifiques du modèle EtOH (**Brevet 2 : Figures 1, 2, 4A, 4B**). Dans les 2 modèles précédents d'hépatotoxicité (EtOH, CCl₄), après une diminution, l'albumine native a augmenté pour atteindre le niveau du groupe témoin à J7, avant de redescendre. Cela pourrait s'expliquer par une phase de régénération courte, largement rapportée pour les modèles animaux CCl₄ mais beaucoup moins pour EtOH (230).

Dans le modèle d'hépatotoxicité induite par paracétamol (APAP), une nécrose a été principalement observée chez les rats ayant reçu une forte dose d'APAP (4g/kg), et une inflammation a été notée pour toutes les doses (**Brevet 2 : Tableau 3**). L'hépatotoxicité de

l'APAP est un phénomène temps-dépendant impliquant des phases différentes pour le processus de toxicité et de récupération : **(1)** une phase métabolique comprenant la production de NAPQI et un déficit en GSH qui se produit dans les 3 heures après administration de l'APAP ; **(2)** une phase précoce de lésion cellulaire comprenant l'activation de JNK et la translocation mitochondriale, la translocation mitochondriale de BAX, la formation de superoxyde mitochondrial, la perméabilité membranaire mitochondriale (MPT), la récupération du GSH et la cytolysé hépatique se produisant dans un délai de 2 à 6 heures ; **(3)** une phase tardive de toxicité/récupération précoce qui comprend une cytolysé hépatique, une nécrose et une réponse immunitaire innée se produisant dans les 12 à 24 heures ; enfin **(4)** une phase de régénération où la guérison de la nécrose pourrait se produire dans un délai de 24 à 96 heures (235). L'isoforme native de l'albumine dans ce modèle n'a pas diminué 24 heures après administration d'APAP, alors qu'il était à peine détectable à 72 heures, ce qui est cohérent avec le mécanisme de toxicité de l'APAP décrit ci-dessus. La forte diminution de l'isoforme native était associée à une augmentation des autres isoformes (**Brevet 2 : Figures 3, 4C**). Parmi elles, l'isoforme Alb+SGGS était spécifique au modèle APAP (**Brevet 2 : Tableau 4**). Comme nous n'avons observé aucun retour à la normale de l'albumine native, nous pouvons supposer que la phase de régénération n'a pas été atteinte dans nos conditions expérimentales (**Brevet 2 : Figures 3, 4C**).

II.2.3.3.2. Utilisation des profils « signature » des isoformes de l'albumine

Nous avons pu caractériser chez l'homme et chez l'animal, après déconvolution des spectres MS, jusqu'à 17 isoformes « visuellement détectables » (**Brevet 2 : Tableau 4**). Cependant, afin de ne pas négliger des isoformes minoritaires et pour étudier les différences de distribution des isoformes entre les modèles animaux, nous avons intégré l'ensemble des informations de chaque spectre par analyse en composantes principales-analyses discriminantes (ou PCA-DA) (**Figure 14 - A droite en haut ; Brevet 2 : Figure 5**). Les profils obtenus avec les modèles étaient bien séparés, suggérant que le profil des isoformes de l'albumine de chaque modèle dépend des différents environnements chimiques et des mécanismes de réactions intracellulaires générés par chaque substance, comme expliqué ci-dessus (**Brevet 2 : Figure 5**).

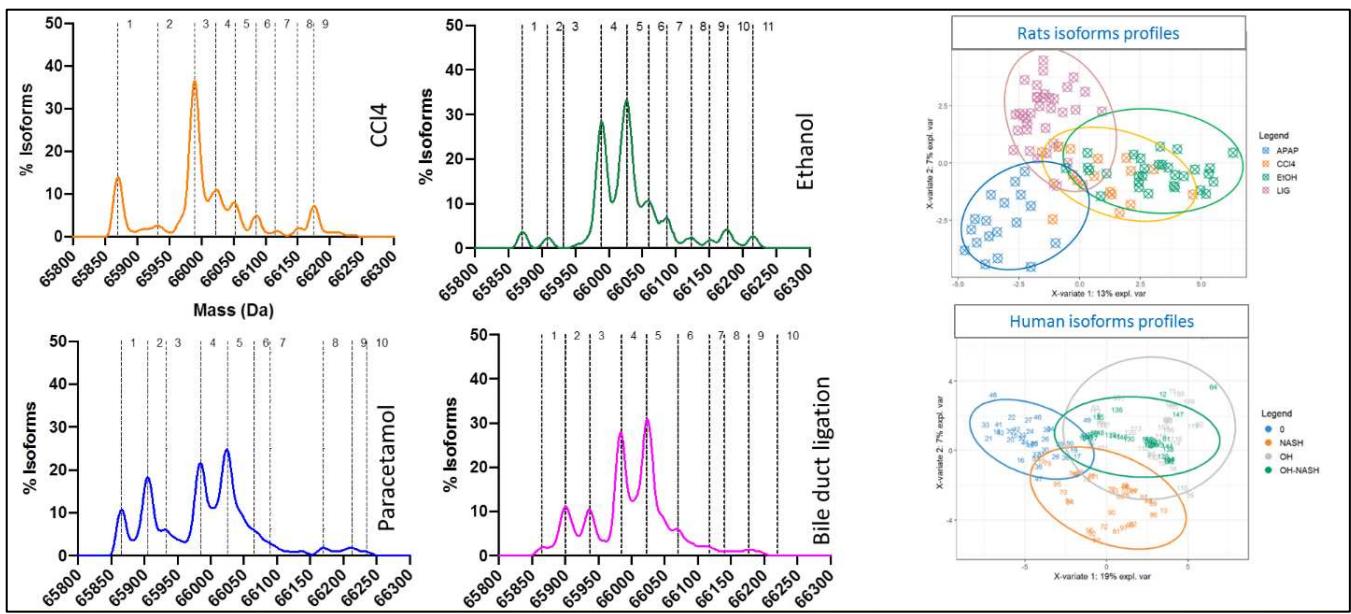


Figure 14. A gauche : Profil médian type des isoformes d'albumine après induction d'une hépatopathie chez des rats avec CCl₄ (tracé orange), EtOH (tracé vert), APAP (tracé bleu) et des rats ayant subi une ligature du canal biliaire (tracé violet). A droite en haut : Séparation par méthode PCA-DA des 4 groupes de rats. A droite en bas : Séparation de 3 groupes de patients cirrhotiques (NASH, éthanol, et mixte éthanol-NASH) versus patients témoins (gris).

Cette même approche statistique par PCA-DA a été appliquée dans une cohorte de patients cirrhotiques présentant différentes étiologies et des témoins et nous a permis de démontrer que les profils d'albumine observés chez les patients cirrhotiques étaient capables de les discriminer des témoins et de discriminer parmi eux les origines et les stades des lésions hépatiques (**Brevet 2 : Figures 7 et 8**). Cela sous-entend que ces profils d'isoformes pourraient être utilisés comme un outil dans le diagnostic et la surveillance des maladies du foie.

En pratique clinique, il est souvent primordial de savoir si les lésions hépatiques sont liées à l'EtOH ou à la NASH, car cette distinction permet d'influencer sur la prise en charge des patients et leur candidature pour une transplantation hépatique. Dans cette cohorte de patients, nous avons pu identifier jusqu'à 14 isoformes d'albumine, toutes également présentes chez les patients témoins (**Brevet 2 : Tableau 5**). Cependant, nous avons observé que l'augmentation de l'isoforme HSA-DA était spécifique aux patients atteints de cirrhose due à un abus d'alcool, les isoformes HSA+SGGS et HSA+2Glyc étaient augmentés spécifiquement chez les patients NASH, et HSA-DA+Cys avec HSA-SO₂H étaient augmentés uniquement chez les patients présentant la forme mixte (**Brevet 2 : Tableau 5**). Malgré ces spécificités, l'utilisation de l'ensemble des informations sur les PTMs issues des spectres MS devrait augmenter les performances de discrimination de notre outil comme décrit ci-dessus. De plus, nous n'avons pas observé aucun isoforme spécifique capable de discriminer

clairement les différents stades de la maladie hépatique, mais l'utilisation de la PCA-DA de l'ensemble de données spectrales a parfaitement séparé les patients atteints de cirrhose avec différents scores de Child-Pugh et les patients témoins (**Brevet : Figure 8**).

II.2.3.4. Conclusion

L'étude des lésions hépatiques et leur impact sur l'albumine a révélé des découvertes significatives et prometteuses. Les PTMs de l'albumine, qui surviennent en réponse à divers agents hépatotoxiques, offrent une fenêtre précieuse sur les mécanismes complexes à l'œuvre lors de lésions hépatiques. Les variations spécifiques de ces PTMs, en fonction de l'agent en cause, suggèrent que chaque substance ou médicament hépatotoxique présente un mécanisme d'action distinct sur le foie. L'adoption de techniques analytiques avancées, comme la LC-ESI-QTOF, a permis de cartographier ces PTMs avec une précision remarquable, ouvrant la voie à de potentielles applications cliniques. Les profils « signature » des isoformes de l'albumine pourraient servir de biomarqueurs précoce pour détecter et diagnostiquer les lésions hépatiques, voire pour déterminer leur cause. Cependant, malgré ces avancées, il reste encore de nombreux défis à relever. La complexité des réactions et interactions dans le foie signifie que notre compréhension des lésions hépatiques et de leurs effets sur l'albumine est loin d'être complète. De plus, la nécessité d'une approche plus globale pour étudier tous les profils des isoformes de l'albumine souligne la profondeur des informations encore non découvertes. En fin de compte, cette recherche établit fermement l'importance de l'albumine comme indicateur potentiel de lésions hépatiques et renforce la nécessité d'approfondir nos connaissances dans ce domaine pour améliorer le diagnostic, la surveillance et le traitement des maladies hépatiques.

II.2.4. Exploration des PTMs de l'HSA dans l'insuffisance rénale chronique terminale : étude de l'efficacité du Sevelamer et du Nicotinamide sur la carbamylation de l'HSA

II.2.4.1. Contexte

Les PTMs de l'HSA sont impliquées dans plusieurs pathologies et notamment les maladies cardiovasculaires et rénales. On sait que, dans l'insuffisance rénale chronique terminale (IRCT), les patients souffrent de pathologies cardiovasculaires avec des facteurs de risque connus comme l'hypertension, l'athérosclérose et l'hypercholestérolémie. Les PTMs de l'HSA et notamment la carbamylation de l'HSA ont été rapportées dans la littérature comme des facteurs de risque liés à ces cardiopathies. Plusieurs études ont suggéré que la carbamylation de l'HSA pourrait contribuer à l'athérosclérose et au risque de maladie cardiovasculaire via ses effets sur les lipoprotéines, le collagène, la fibrine, les protéoglycans et la fibronectine (236,237). La carbamylation est une PTM non enzymatique pouvant être provoquée par l'exposition au cyanate (un produit de la dissociation de l'urée). Les composés carbamylés sont formés par la réaction de protéines, de peptides ou d'acides aminés avec l'acide isocyanique dérivé de l'urée ou par oxydation du thiocyanate par la myéloperoxydase dans un contexte inflammatoire et dans des plaques athéroscléreuses (236). Lorsque la fonction rénale est altérée et que l'urée s'accumule dans le corps, le niveau de carbamylation systémique des protéines augmente (238). La carbamylation des lysines à chaîne latérale des protéines est favorisée par l'urée. Le site de carbamylation prédominant sur l'albumine est la lysine 549. Dans une étude récente, il a été démontré que la carbamylation des protéines exacerberait la calcification vasculaire médiale en régulant négativement l'expression de l'ectonucléotide pyrophosphate/phosphodiesterase 1 (ENPP1), une enzyme clé dans la génération de pyrophosphate, un puissant inhibiteur de la calcification ectopique (239). De plus, le taux sérique d'albumine carbamylée est spécifiquement associé à une mortalité excessive chez les patients atteints d'IRCT et de diabète sucré (240,241). Dans une étude récente, il a été reporté que le Sevelamer (chélateur de phosphate) et le Nicotinamide seraient une alternative thérapeutique potentiellement bénéfique chez les patients atteints d'insuffisance rénale terminale et amélioreraient les fonctions cardiovasculaires (242,243). Cependant, à notre connaissance, les effets du Sevelamer et du Nicotinamide sur la carbamylation de l'albumine n'ont pas encore été étudiés. Par conséquent, nos derniers travaux consistaient (1) à déterminer si le traitement au Sevelamer ou au Nicotinamide était associé au degré de carbamylation de l'HSA et (2) à évaluer une relation éventuelle entre la calcification vasculaire et la carbamylation de l'HSA chez les patients atteints d'IRCT.

II.2.4.2. Article 2: Effect of Sevelamer and Nicotinamide on Albumin Carbamylation in Patients with End-Stage Kidney Disease

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ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE



Effect of Sevelamer and Nicotinamide on Albumin Carbamylation in Patients with End-Stage Kidney Disease

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Abstract

Background and Objective In end-stage kidney disease, high urea levels promote the carbamylation of lysine side chains on a variety of proteins, including albumin. Albumin carbamylation has been identified as a risk factor for mortality and sevelamer led to a decrease in urea levels in dialysis patients. In the present secondary analysis of the NICOREN trial, we investigated the putative impacts of sevelamer and nicotinamide on albumin carbamylation, and the potential correlation between carbamylation and vascular calcifications.

Methods All possible carbamylation of circulating albumin were screened for with high-resolution liquid chromatography-tandem mass spectrometry. Levels of three carbamylated peptides were then measured as a guide to the extent of albumin carbamylation. Carbamylation was measured at baseline in 55 patients included in the NICOREN trial and 29 patients at 24 weeks of treatment. Calcifications on plain radiographs were quantified as the Kauppila score and the Adragao score.

Results Baseline albumin carbamylation was present at three different sites in subjects with end-stage kidney disease. At baseline, we observed only a correlation between urea and the KQTA carbamylation site in these patients. Albumin carbamylation levels did not decrease after 24 weeks of treatment with either sevelamer or nicotinamide. Furthermore, the proportion of carbamylated serum albumin was not correlated with vascular calcification scores in this population.

Conclusions Our results confirmed the presence of carbamylated albumin in patients with end-stage kidney disease and demonstrated the presence of carbamylation beyond the LRV residues. The results also demonstrated the lack of impact of sevelamer or nicotinamide on albumin carbamylation levels. Therapeutic strategies to lower carbamylation load should probably be focused on direct anti-carbamylated processes and/or potentially anti-inflammatory therapies.

Key Points

Carbamylation has detrimental effects at all physiological levels, and its particular relationship with inflammation and uremia sheds light on mortality risk factors in patients with end-stage kidney disease.

Carbamylated albumin is present in patients with end-stage kidney disease, and residues outside albumin's LRV sequence are carbamylated.

The administration of sevelamer or nicotinamide does not influence carbamylation levels.

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1 Introduction

Patients with end-stage kidney disease (ESKD) suffer disproportionately from cardiovascular disease. Conventional risk factors (such as hypertension, atherosclerosis, and hypercholesterolemia) are highly prevalent in patients with ESKD and contribute to the cardiovascular risk. However, newly identified, non-conventional risk factors (such as protein carbamylation) might also be mechanistically linked to cardiovascular disease [1]. Several studies have suggested that carbamylation and/or carbamoylation can contribute to atherosclerosis and the cardiovascular disease risk via its effects on lipoproteins, collagen, fibrin, proteoglycans, and fibronectin [1, 2]. In the literature, the terms “carbamoylation” and “carbamylation” are sometimes used erroneously as synonyms. In fact, carbamylation refers to a different chemical reaction: the reversible interaction of CO₂ with α -amino and ϵ -amino groups in proteins. Protein carbamylation is a non-enzymatic post-translational protein modification that can be driven (at least in part) by exposure to cyanate (a product of urea dissociation). Carbamylated compounds are formed by the reaction of proteins, peptides, or amino acids with isocyanic acid derived from urea or by oxidation of thiocyanate by myeloperoxidase in an inflammatory setting and in atherosclerotic plaques [2]. When kidney function is impaired and urea accumulates in the body, the level of systemic protein carbamylation increases [3]. The type of carbamylation product depends on the altered molecule (i.e., albumin, collagen, erythropoietin, hemoglobin, low-density lipoprotein, and high-density lipoprotein), and thus carbamylation can have various harmful effects [2]. The carbamylation of protein side-chain lysines is promoted by urea. The predominant carbamylation site on albumin is lysine 549. In a recent animal study, it was shown that protein carbamylation exacerbates medial vascular calcification by downregulating the expression of ectonucleotide pyrophosphate/phosphodiesterase 1 (ENPP1), a key enzyme in the generation of pyrophosphate, a potent inhibitor of ectopic calcification [4]. Moreover, the serum level of carbamylated albumin is specifically associated with excess mortality in patients with ESKD and diabetes mellitus [5, 6].

Via the NICOREN trial in a cohort of patients with ESKD, we have previously assessed the efficacy and safety of the phosphate binder sevelamer vs the absorption inhibitor nicotinamide [7]. We found that 24 weeks of treatment with sevelamer led to a significant decrease in the blood urea level [8]. Sevelamer has been shown to exert a number of potentially beneficial pleiotropic actions, some of which may improve cardiovascular functions [9]. The drug reduces the absorption of advanced

glycation end-products, bacterial toxins, and bile acids; hence, it may reduce inflammatory, oxidative, and atherogenic stimuli in addition to its direct phosphate-lowering action. To the best of our knowledge, however, the effects of sevelamer on protein carbamylation have not previously been investigated. The vitamin B₃ derivative nicotinamide is a potentially interesting pharmacological alternative to binder-based approaches in the treatment of hyperphosphatemia [10]. It is involved in a wide range of biological processes, including energy production, the synthesis of fatty acids, cholesterol, and steroids, signal transduction, and the maintenance of genomic integrity. Furthermore, nicotinamide reportedly has anti-inflammatory properties [11–14].

The objectives of the present secondary analysis of the NICOREN trial were to (i) determine whether treatment with sevelamer or nicotinamide was associated with the degree of serum albumin carbamylation (as quantified by liquid chromatography-tandem mass spectrometry) and (ii) assess a putative link between vascular calcification and albumin carbamylation in patients with ESKD.

2 Materials and Methods

2.1 Patient Selection

This was the secondary analysis of the NICOREN trial data [7]. The trial included 100 patients undergoing long-term hemodialysis treated with either sevelamer-HCl or nicotinamide for 24 weeks. The patients were dialyzed three times per week for 3.5–5.0 h. The study was performed in 18 hemodialysis centers across France. All patients gave their informed written consent to the initial and subsequent biochemical analyses. The protocol was approved by a local investigational review board (CPP Nord Ouest II, Amiens, France; reference: 2008-004673-17) and implemented in accordance with the ethical principles of the Declaration of Helsinki (ClinicalTrials.gov registration number: NCT01011699).

2.2 Laboratory Tests

Serum urea, albumin, and protein were assayed in an on-site biochemistry laboratory using standard auto-analyzer techniques. After enrollment, serum was obtained and immediately frozen at –80 °C prior to analysis (i.e., carbamylated protein measurements) at the end of the study in the Biobanque de Picardie Biological Resource Center. In this study, serum samples were available for 55 patients at baseline (27 patients in the sevelamer group and 28 patients in the nicotinamide group) and 29 patients at 24 weeks of treatment (19 patients in the sevelamer group

and ten patients in the nicotinamide group). For the 45 patients not included in the analysis (because the sample was not available), there was no significant difference in age (63.2 ± 14.5 years vs 66.4 ± 13.1 years; $p = 0.247$), serum urea (23.6 ± 6.4 vs 25.5 ± 8.1 ; $p = 0.197$), serum albumin (37.8 ± 9.9 vs 37.5 ± 3.4 ; $p = 0.918$), or dialysis dose [Kt/Vurea] (1.29 ± 0.32 vs 1.28 ± 0.24 ; $p = 0.918$).

2.3 Preparation of Serum Samples

For each serum sample, a volume containing $100 \mu\text{g}$ of protein was treated with $100 \mu\text{L}$ of dithiothreitol (100 mM in 8 M of urea solution, pH 8.0) and incubated at 56°C for 30 min. Next, $100 \mu\text{L}$ of iodoacetamide (100 mM in 8 M of urea solution, pH 8.0) were added, and the sample was incubated for 30 min in the dark at room temperature. One microgram of trypsin (mixed in 50 mM of ammonium bicarbonate solution) was added, and the sample was incubated again at 37°C for 3 h. Last, the digested peptides were eluted by centrifugation after the addition of $3 \times 40 \mu\text{L}$ of 50 mM of ammonium bicarbonate solution. The tryptic peptides were extracted by solid-phase extraction and stored at -80°C until analysis. Details of the specimen processing can be found in the Electronic Supplementary Material (ESM).

2.4 Identification and Measurement of Carbamylation

All possible carbamylation of albumin were searched for using a quadrupole time-of-flight mass spectrometer (TripleTOF[®] 5600+; Sciex, Concord, ON, Canada). The tandem mass spectrometry fragmentation spectra were matched against the SwissprotTM library using the Paragon[®] and Mascot[®] search algorithms provided with ProteinPilotTM software (Version 5.0; Sciex). Digested tryptic peptides were then separated by liquid chromatography (C18 reversed-phase column), and analyzed for carbamylation modifications with mass spectrometry (an 8060 triple-quadrupole mass spectrometer; Shimadzu Corporation, Marne-la-Vallée, France).

The carbamylated and non-carbamylated peptides of interest were then measured by multiple reaction monitoring using tandem mass spectrometry transitions (settings are shown in Table S1 of the ESM) and quantified according to the area under the curve (AUC) (Fig. 1). The percent carbamylation was calculated as follows: percent carbamylation = (AUC for the carbamylated peptide/AUC for the non-carbamylated peptide). The percent carbamylation in subjects with normal kidney function using carbamylation sites was reported by Berg et al. at 0.4% [15]. Details of specimen processing and additional methods for identification and analysis are given in the ESM. In this study, the albumin carbamylation was evaluated

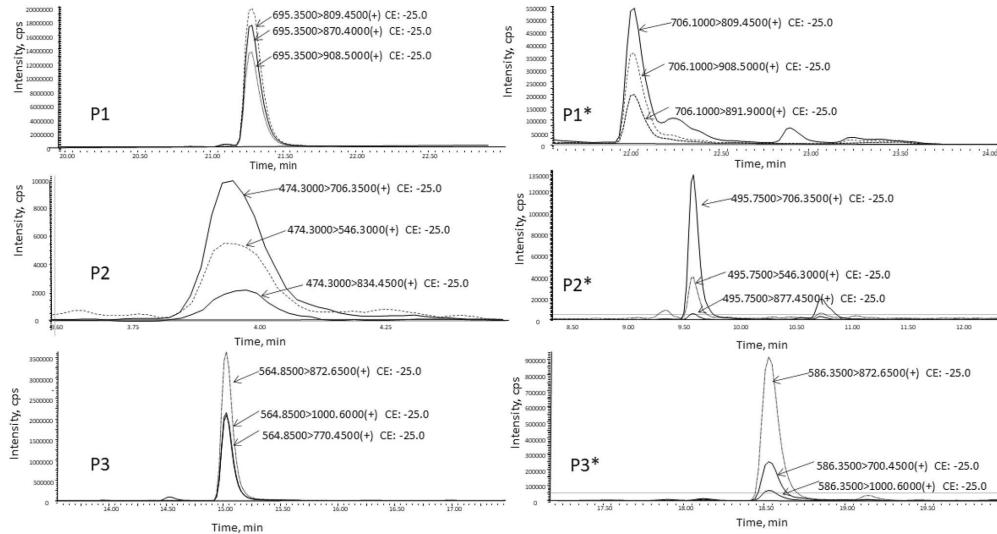


Fig. 1 Mass chromatograms obtained for the three peptides LVRPEVDVMCTAFHDNEETFLKK (P1), LKCASLQK (P2), and KQTALVELVK (P3), and their respective carbamylated peptides (P1*, P2*, and P3*) after the analysis of a serum sample

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in patients with ESKD at baseline and 24 weeks after treatment with sevelamer or nicotinamide.

2.5 Quantification of Calcification

Two methods were used to quantify the presence and extent of calcification at baseline: the Kauppila score [16] and the Adragao score [17]. The Kauppila score was applied to images of the lower abdominal aorta. A lateral plain radiograph of the abdomen was obtained, and the aorta was identified as the tubular structure coursing in front of the anterior surface of the spine. We used a semi-quantitative scoring system; only the abdominal aorta segments in front of the four lumbar vertebrae were considered. Points were assigned on a 0–3 scale (0: absent; 1: small; 2: moderate; 3: large), according to the length of the lumbar vertebrae under consideration. Hence, the Kauppila score could vary from a minimum of 0 points to a maximum of 24 points.

The Adragao score quantifies vascular calcification in the iliac and femoral arteries (on a plain X-ray of the pelvis) and in the radial and digital arteries (on a plain X-ray of the hand). The presence of linear calcification in a given section was counted as 1 and its absence was counted as 0. The final score was the sum of all the subscores and thus ranged from 0 to 8. All the X-rays were read by two investigators, and a consensus was reached in all cases.

2.6 Statistical Analyses

Results were expressed as the mean \pm standard deviation, median (interquartile range), or frequency (percentage), as appropriate. The normality of the distribution of quantitative variables was checked with the Shapiro–Wilk test. The study population was divided into two treatment groups. Potential intergroup differences in mean values were evaluated in an analysis of variance. Comparisons of more than two mean values were assessed in a two-way analysis of variance with repeated measures. If a significant difference was found, Tukey's post-hoc test for multiple comparisons was used to confirm the result. Spearman correlation coefficient was calculated as a guide to the strength of associations after the exclusion of few outliers. The threshold for statistical significance was set to $p < 0.05$. All statistical analyses were performed using SPSS software (Version 18.0; SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL, USA) for Windows (Microsoft Corp, Redmond, WA, USA) or SAS[®] software (Version 9.2, SAS Institute Inc., Cary, NC, USA).

3 Results

Fifty-five patients (male: 64%; mean \pm standard deviation age: 65 ± 13 years; prevalence of diabetes: 50%) were included. The patients' demographic and clinical

characteristics, laboratory data, and calcification scores are summarized in Table 1. Both drugs were effective to lowering serum phosphate and urea levels.

After untargeted screening, we selected three carbamylated sites: **LVRPEVDVMCTAFHDNEETFLKK**, **LKCA-SLQK**, and **KQTALVELVK** (Table 2 and Table S1 of the ESM). These sites are referred to hereafter as LVRP, LKCA, and KQTA respectively. The most frequent carbamylation site was Lys 549 present in the KQTA peptide (Fig. 1). We then developed a multiple reaction monitoring method to reproducibly quantify the proportion of carbamylated albumin (percent carbamylation) on these three-selected peptide sequences (i.e., the ratio between carbamylated and non-carbamylated peptide forms and then by calculating their percentiles) [Table S1 of the ESM]. In this cohort, the most carbamylated site is KQTA, which is 28% of albumin. At baseline, only the KQTA carbamylation site was

Table 1 Baseline demographic clinical characteristics, laboratory results, and calcification scores in the NICOREN cohort of patients with end-stage kidney disease (ESKD)

| Patients with ESKD ($n = 55$) | |
|--|------------------|
| | Baseline |
| Demographics | |
| Age (years) | 66.4 ± 13.1 |
| Men (%) | 64 |
| Sevelamer randomization group, n (%) | 27 (49) |
| Clinical | |
| BMI (kg/m^2) | 27.5 ± 6.1 |
| History of CVD (%) | 49 |
| Diabetes mellitus (%) | 50 |
| Dialysis dose (Kt/Vurea) | 1.28 ± 0.3 |
| Pre-dialysis systolic BP (mmHg) | 147 ± 28 |
| Laboratory data | |
| Serum urea (mmol/L) | 25.5 ± 8.1 |
| Serum albumin (g/dL) | 37.5 ± 3.5 |
| Serum protein (g/dL) | 61.8 ± 5.9 |
| Peptide LVRP (%) | 1.5 (1.2–2.1) |
| Peptide KQTA (%) | 25.1 (21.2–32.7) |
| Peptide LKCA (%) | 4.2 (1.9–29.8) |
| Calcification scores | |
| Adragao score (vascular calcification) | 8 (3–12) |
| Kauppila score (aortic calcification) | 3 (1–5) |

AUC area under the curve, BMI body mass index, BP blood pressure, CVD cardiovascular disease, LVRP KQTA LKCA three albumin carbamylation sites LVRPEVDVMCTAFHDNEETFLKK, LKCASLQK, and KQTALVELVK

Data are quoted as the mean \pm standard deviation or median (25th–75th percentile) for variables with a non-Gaussian distribution and (for qualitative variables) the frequency (percentage)

Percent carbamylation was calculated as follows: % carbamylation = (AUC for the carbamylated peptide/AUC for the non-carbamylated peptide)

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significantly correlated with the urea level in patients with ESKD ($p = 0.042$) (Fig. 2).

Using multiple reaction monitoring, we demonstrated that the percent carbamylation did not differ when comparing the groups after 24 weeks of treatment with sevelamer or nicotinamide (Table 2). Furthermore, the percent carbamylation values for LVRP and KQTA were strongly correlated, whereas the values for LKCA and KQTA were not (Fig. 3).

The correlation coefficients for the various percent carbamylation values at baseline and the patients' Kauppila and Adragao vascular calcification scores are given in Table 3. None of the correlations was statistically significant.

Table 2 Comparison of carbamylation parameters at baseline and after 24 weeks of treatment in each group

| | Sevelamer group ($n = 19$) | | Nicotinamide group ($n = 10$) | | Effect of treatment/time/interaction |
|--------------------------|------------------------------|------------------|---------------------------------|------------------|--------------------------------------|
| | Baseline | 24 weeks | Baseline | 24 weeks | |
| Serum albumin (g/L) | 37.9 ± 4.0 | 36.1 ± 3.4 | 37.8 ± 1.5 | 37.2 ± 4.1 | 0.685/0.586/0.970 |
| Serum protein (g/L) | 62.8 ± 5.3 | 60.2 ± 6.7 | 60.7 ± 3.5 | 57.9 ± 6.5 | 0.250/0.036/0.957 |
| Serum urea (mmol/L) | 26.2 ± 7.0 | 23.4 ± 5.4 | 27.3 ± 6.4 | 22.6 ± 5.8 | 0.963/0.001/0.344 |
| Dialysis dose (Kt/Vurea) | 1.3 ± 0.2 | 1.3 ± 0.3 | 1.3 ± 0.3 | 1.2 ± 0.7 | 0.961/0.373/0.133 |
| Peptide LVRP (%) | 1.6 (1.3–2.1) | 1.5 (1.3–1.9) | 1.8 (1.2–2.1) | 1.8 (1.5–1.9) | 0.766/0.675/0.617 |
| Peptide KQTA (%) | 25.1 (23.8–31.3) | 26.5 (22.5–30.7) | 27.4 (19.7–32.9) | 30.7 (25.5–33.5) | 0.897/0.098/0.063 |
| Peptide LKCA (%) | 10.8 (7.1–37.9) | 3.4 (2.0–31.9) | 4.1 (1.2–14.3) | 2.7 (1.1–12.5) | 0.275/0.399/0.945 |

AUC area under the curve, LVRP KQTA LKCA three albumin carbamylation sites LVRPEVDVMCTAFHDNEETFLKK, LKCASLQK, and KQTALVELVK

Percent carbamylation was calculated as follows: % carbamylation = (AUC for the carbamylated peptide/AUC for the non-carbamylated peptide)

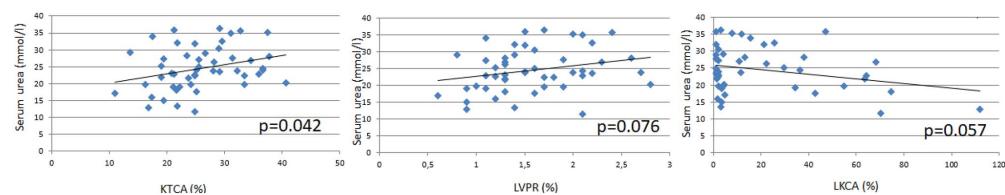


Fig. 2 Correlation between serum urea and three albumin carbamylation sites

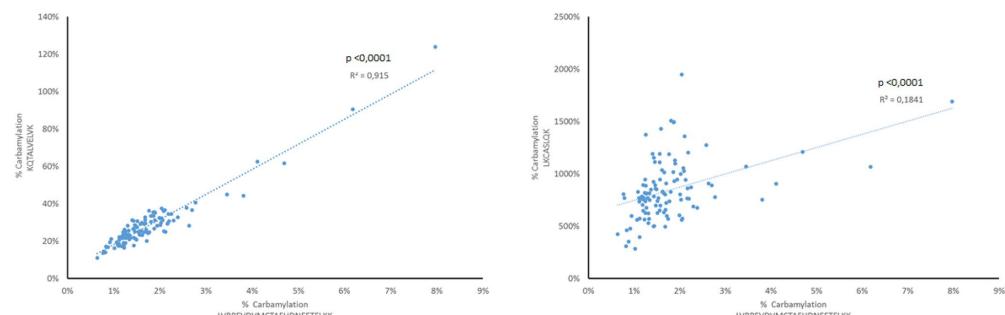


Fig. 3 Correlations between pairs of selected peptides. Percent carbamylation was calculated as follows: % carbamylation = (area under the curve for the carbamylated peptide/area under the curve for the non-carbamylated peptide)

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Table 3 Spearman coefficients (R) for the correlation between serum albumin carbamylation and vascular calcification scores in 47 patients with end-stage kidney disease

| Variables | R value | p value |
|----------------|---------|---------|
| Kauppila score | | |
| Peptide LVRP | 0.192 | 0.338 |
| Peptide KQTA | 0.054 | 0.789 |
| Peptide LKCA | -0.141 | 0.482 |
| Adragao score | | |
| Peptide LVRP | -0.058 | 0.758 |
| Peptide KQTA | -0.211 | 0.255 |
| Peptide LKCA | 0.033 | 0.858 |

LVRP KQTA LKCA three albumin carbamylation sites LVRPEVD-VMCTAFHDNEETFLKK, LKCASLQK, and KQTALVELVK

4 Discussion

In the present study, we developed a method for quantifying albumin carbamylation and then used it to quantify serum albumin carbamylation in patients included in the NICOREN trial. After 24 weeks of treatment in patients with ESKD, we observed a high level of carbamylated albumin at baseline in three sites on the protein but the level of albumin carbamylation did not decrease in either of the two groups, although both drugs were effective at lowering serum phosphate and urea levels. Moreover, we did not find a significant association between carbamylated albumin and the presence of vascular calcification.

Our analytical method was based in trypsin digestion, which we think is more suitable than Glu-c digestion used by others [17]. Glu-c digestion is known to be sensitive to the experimental conditions and is not very reproducible. In preliminary experiments, we were unable to obtain reproducible results with Glu-c. Furthermore, our trypsin digestion procedure took only 3 hours (compared with 24 hours for Glu-c) and was reproducible. Despite these differences in methods, the peptides LVRP and KQTA that we identified and quantified for albumin carbamylation were also identified by Berg et al. Moreover, the percent carbamylation observed in the present study was similar to that reported by Berg et al. [17]. Two of our three peptides were perfectly correlated, and thus one of them could be used to express the percent carbamylation for albumin. LKCA was not an optimal marker because its percent carbamylation was not correlated with those of LVRP and KQTA. Hence, LKCA might have been carbamylated via a different pathway.

Based on KQTA and LVRP in patients with ESKD, we found that 28.14 and 1.78% of serum albumin molecules were carbamylated, respectively. In a study of non-uremic patients, Berg et al. found a mean value of 0.4% [15]. In fact, percent carbamylation for albumin was correlated with time-averaged blood urea concentrations and was twice as high

in patients with ESKD than in non-uremic subjects [18]. It is noteworthy that the serum amino acid concentration is related to the time since the initiation of hemodialysis, inflammation, and malnutrition. Indeed, Małgorzewicz et al. demonstrated that patients with ESKD have abnormal amino acid profiles [19]. Our results emphasize the extent of carbamylation in patients with ESKD.

Neither sevelamer nor nicotinamide appeared to have impacted albumin carbamylation at different sites (LVRP, LKCA, and KQTA) after 24 weeks of treatment, despite a decrease in the serum urea concentration in the sevelamer and nicotinamide groups. In contrast, Di Iorio et al. reported that nutritional treatments (a Mediterranean diet and a very low protein diet) were associated with a significant decrease in serum levels of urea and in protein carbamylation in patients with chronic kidney disease (CKD) grades 3B–4 [20]. Vanholder et al. reported that urea is a major source of the carbamylated compounds that trigger profibrotic damage in mesangial cells, concomitant structural changes in collagen, vascular damage, and endothelial cell apoptosis, thus promoting atherosclerosis [21]. Moreover, the results of Shaykh et al.'s in vitro study suggested that carbamylation affects the metabolism of mesangial cells and promotes glomerular sclerosis through a specific effect in matrix proteins such as collagens I and IV [22]. There appears to be a weak correlation between protein carbamylation (as evaluated by plasma levels of protein-bound homocitrulline) and urea levels [6]. However, other mechanisms beyond urea, such as a possible role of myeloperoxidase, that cause protein carbamylation in patients with ESKD may also exist but remain to be characterized.

Carbamylation molecules are acknowledged prognostic biomarkers in CKD. Indeed, protein carbamylation is positively associated with all-cause mortality in patients with CKD, regardless of the stage [6, 18, 23]. This elevated mortality might be due to the impact of carbamylation on vascular calcification, which is a solid predictor of mortality in patients with CKD. Recently, Mori et al.'s studies including ex vivo and in vivo mice models demonstrated that protein carbamylated molecules exacerbate vascular calcification by impairing mitochondrial function, which in turn results in the downregulation of ENPP1 expression [4]. ENPP1 produces pyrophosphate, which is a potent inhibitor of vascular calcification. The importance of ENPP1 in the pathogenesis of vascular calcification has been confirmed in mice and in humans [23, 24]. However, our data did not reveal an association between albumin carbamylation and vascular calcification in patients with ESKD. Further studies with larger sample sizes and longer follow-up periods are now needed to explore the potential involvement of the carbamylation of other molecules in vascular calcification.

Our study had several limitations, including a relatively small sample size, a treatment period of only 24

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weeks (which may have been too short to assess long-term changes), and a drop-out rate of 45% in the nicotinamide group (compared with 10% in the sevelamer group). Our method for evaluating calcification (on plain radiographs) is semi-quantitative and strongly observer dependent. Moreover, the present study did not feature a control group of individuals not treated with sevelamer or nicotinamide. A comparison with a control group might provide additional information about the effect of phosphate binders on albumin carbamylation. However, it should be noted that these phosphate binders are widely taken to control the elevated serum phosphate levels in patients with ESKD; hence, obtaining a large non-treated control group would be difficult. Last, the use of isotope measurements would have strengthened the study.

5 Conclusions

The present study confirms that serum albumin carbamylation is elevated in patients with ESKD and shows its effect beyond the LVRP site. However, we did not find any evidence of an impact of treatment with sevelamer or nicotinamide on serum albumin carbamylation. Therapeutic strategies to lower carbamylation load should probably be focused on direct anti-carbamylated processes and/or potentially anti-inflammatory therapies.

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Declarations

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Conflict of interest Ziad A. Massy reports grants and Congress Travel support from Amgen, Baxter, Otsuka, and Sanofi-Genzyme, grants from the French Government, MSD, GSK, Lilly, and FMC, and Receipt of honoraria or consultation fees for the Charities from Daichi and Astellas, outside the submitted work.

Ethics approval The study protocol was approved by a local investigational review board (CPP Nord Ouest II, Amiens, France; reference: 2008-004673-17) and implemented in accordance with the ethical principles of the Declaration of Helsinki (ClinicalTrials.gov registration number: NCT01011699).

Consent to participate All participants gave their written agreement to participate in the study.

Consent for publication All participants gave their written agreement to publication of the study data.

Availability of data and material Not applicable.

Code availability Not applicable.

Author contributions Each author contributed intellectual content. ZM and SLB conceived the research idea; AL drafted the manuscript, performed the statistical analysis, and analyzed the data; MAR, JLS, and SLB performed the albumin carbamylation assays; all authors performed a critical analysis of the manuscript, ZM supervised the study.

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II.2.4.3. Discussion

Dans cet article, nous montrons qu'après 24 semaines de traitement chez des patients atteints d'IRCT, des taux significativement élevés d'albumine carbamylée au niveau des différents sites de carbamylation de l'HSA ont été observés, mais le niveau de carbamylation de l'albumine n'a diminué dans aucun des deux groupes, bien que les 2 médicaments aient été efficaces pour abaisser les niveaux sériques de phosphate et d'urée (**Article 2 : Tableau 2**). De plus, nous n'avons pas trouvé d'association significative entre l'albumine carbamylée et la présence de calcification vasculaire (**Article 2 : Tableau 3**). Notre méthode de quantification de la carbamylation de l'HSA a été réalisée par chromatographie liquide couplée à la spectrométrie de masse en tandem (LC-MS/MS) et dans la méthodologie est décrite dans la partie « matériels et méthodes » de l'article 3.

Notre méthode analytique était basée sur la digestion par la trypsine, que nous pensons plus adaptée que la digestion Glu-c utilisée par d'autres (221). La digestion avec la Glu-C est connue pour être sensible aux conditions expérimentales et peu reproductible. Lors d'expériences préliminaires, nous n'avons pas pu obtenir de résultats reproductibles avec la Glu-C. De plus, notre procédure de digestion par la trypsine était reproductible et n'a duré que 3 heures (contre 24 heures pour Glu-C). Malgré ces différences de méthodes, les peptides LVRPEVDVMCTAFHDNEETFLKK et KQTALVELVK, que nous nommerons par la suite peptide LVRP et peptide KQTA et que nous avons identifiés et quantifiés pour la carbamylation de l'albumine ont également été identifiés par Berg et al. (221). De plus, le pourcentage de carbamylation observé était similaire à celui rapporté par Berg et al. (221). Deux de nos trois peptides étaient parfaitement corrélés et l'un d'eux pouvait donc être utilisé pour exprimer le pourcentage de carbamylation de l'albumine. Le peptide LKCASLQK, que nous nommerons par la suite peptide LKCA, n'était pas un marqueur optimal car son pourcentage de carbamylation n'était pas corrélé à ceux du LVRP et du KQTA (**Article 2 : Figure 2**). Dans une étude, le pourcentage de carbamylation de l'albumine était corrélé aux concentrations d'urée sanguine moyennes dans le temps et était deux fois plus élevé chez les patients atteints d'IRCT que chez les sujets non urémiques (244). Pourtant, nos résultats ont montré que ni le sevelamer ni le nicotinamide ne semblent avoir eu d'impact sur la carbamylation de l'albumine à différents sites (LVRP, LKCA et KQTA) après 24 semaines de traitement, malgré une diminution de la concentration sérique d'urée dans les groupes Sevelamer et Nicotinamide. Néanmoins, il a été rapporté que les traitements nutritionnels (régimes méditerranéens, régimes très pauvres en protéines) étaient associés à une diminution significative des taux sériques d'urée et de la carbamylation des protéines chez les patients atteints d'insuffisance rénale chronique (IRC) (245). Il semble y avoir une faible corrélation entre la carbamylation

des protéines (telle qu'évaluée par les niveaux plasmatiques d'homocitrulline liée aux protéines) et les niveaux d'urée (241).

Les molécules de carbamylation sont des biomarqueurs pronostiques reconnus dans l'IRC. En effet, la carbamylation des protéines est positivement associée à la mortalité toutes causes confondues chez les patients atteints d'IRC, quel que soit le stade (241,244,246). Cette mortalité pourrait être due à l'impact de la carbamylation sur la calcification vasculaire, qui constitue un prédicteur de mortalité chez les patients atteints d'IRC. Récemment, des études incluant des modèles de souris *ex vivo* et *in vivo* ont démontré que la carbamylation des protéines exacerbé la calcification vasculaire en altérant la fonction mitochondriale, ce qui entraîne une régulation négative de l'expression d'ENPP1 (239). L'importance de l'ENPP1, puissant inhibiteur de la calcification vasculaire, dans la pathogenèse de la calcification vasculaire a été confirmée chez la souris et chez l'homme (246,247). Or, nos résultats n'ont pas révélé d'association entre la carbamylation de l'albumine et la calcification vasculaire chez les patients atteints d'IRCT.

Nos travaux présentaient plusieurs limites, notamment une quantité d'échantillon relativement faible, une période courte de traitement de seulement 24 semaines. La méthode d'évaluation de la calcification (sur des radiographies simples) était semi-quantitative et fortement dépendante de l'observateur. De plus, la présente étude ne comportait pas de groupe témoin d'individus non traités par Sevelamer ou par Nicotinamide. Une comparaison avec un groupe témoin pourrait fournir des informations supplémentaires sur l'effet des chélateurs de phosphate sur la carbamylation de l'albumine. D'autres investigations avec des échantillons plus grands et des périodes de suivi plus longues seraient nécessaires pour explorer l'implication potentielle de la carbamylation d'autres molécules dans la calcification vasculaire.

II.2.4.4. Conclusion

Nos travaux confirment ainsi que la carbamylation de l'HSA est élevée chez les patients atteints d'IRCT et montre son effet au-delà du peptide LVRP. Cependant, nous n'avons trouvé aucune preuve d'un impact du traitement par le Sevelamer ou le Nicotinamide sur la carbamylation de l'HSA. Malgré leur grande pertinence dans les hépatopathies, il ne faut pas négliger que l'exploration de certaines PTMs de l'HSA, comme la carbamylation dans l'IRCT, peuvent avoir des applications cliniques dans diverses pathologies.

Discussion générale et Conclusion

En raison de leur manque de sensibilité et de spécificité des biomarqueurs sériques directs et/ou combinés dans des panels, des biomarqueurs non invasifs, sensibles et spécifiques pour la détection précoce des atteintes hépatiques conduisant à des maladies hépatiques avancées sont toujours recherchés.

Il a récemment été démontré que les PTMs de l'HSA conduisant à la formation de différentes isoformes pourraient être utilisées comme biomarqueurs pour les maladies hépatiques avancées (3–10). L'origine des PTMs de l'HSA est principalement due à des modifications chimiques et structurales liées à l'environnement chimique au sein des hépatocytes. Étant donné que l'HSA est exclusivement synthétisée par le foie et en raison de sa structure particulière, de la multiplicité de ses ligands et de ses sites de liaison, de son abondance dans le sang (60 % de toutes les protéines) et de son rôle de principal piégeur, il est désormais clair que non seulement la quantité, mais aussi la qualité de l'albumine pourrait refléter une atteinte hépatique. Pour cela, nous avons donc formulé une hypothèse selon laquelle les PTMs de l'HSA surviennent aux premiers stades des lésions des cellules hépatiques et que de telles modifications altèrent la conformation et les propriétés de liaison de la HSA, favorisant potentiellement d'autres lésions hépatiques ; et qu'elles sont prédictives des hépatopathies à venir. Or, ces modifications peuvent être révélées directement par le profil des isoformes de l'albumine dans le sérum par LC-QTOF, ou bien indirectement par les capacités de fixation de l'albumine à différents ligands ayant des sites spécifiques de fixation par ICP-MS. Par conséquent, une partie de nos travaux a permis d'apporter la preuve de concept d'un test fonctionnel multi-élément de capacité de fixation de l'albumine ou SEB Test (Serum Enhanced Binding Test) ayant fait l'objet d'un brevet afin d'évaluer les modifications structurales de l'HSA. Enfin, les principaux résultats de cette thèse apportent de nouvelles innovations ayant permis le dépôt d'un 2^e brevet (PCT/EP2023/077721, déposé le 06/10/2023) L'auteur de cette thèse est parmi les principaux co-inventeurs. L'innovation se base sur l'idée que le profil des isoformes de l'albumine devrait être étroitement lié au métabolisme cellulaire, moléculaire et chimique au sein des cellules hépatiques permettant ainsi d'établir une « signature » par type d'atteinte hépatique des profils des isoformes de l'albumine. Nos résultats préliminaires présentés dans cette thèse apportent les premiers éléments de la preuve de concept de lien entre profil des PTM et le type de l'atteinte hépatique.

Les modifications chimiques et structurelles de l'albumine ont été largement rapportées dans la littérature (132,146). La pertinence clinique de ces modifications a été récemment étudiée dans les maladies hépatiques avancées (4,6,8,10,145,151). Les réductions significatives de la proportion de l'isoforme HMA au profit d'une augmentation des isoformes HNA1 et HNA2 ont été bien étudiées dans les lésions hépatiques. Il a également été rapporté qu'une augmentation des formes oxydées de l'HSA est détectée chez les patients cirrhotiques. En particulier, les proportions circulantes de HNA1 et de HNA2 étaient significativement élevées chez les patients avec une cirrhose décompensée, mais également chez les patients souffrant d'insuffisance hépatique aiguë ou chronique (6,9,209). De plus, il a été rapporté que les patients atteints d'hépatite alcoolique sévère présentaient une augmentation significative d'albumine oxydée en raison de l'environnement de stress oxydatif lié à l'hépatopathie. Dans ces conditions, l'HSA agit comme un pro-oxydant et intensifie les phénomènes de stress oxydatif et d'inflammation grâce à l'activation des polynucléaires neutrophiles (217). Des modifications structurelles impliquant des sites autres que la Cys34 ont également été étudiées. Par exemple, des isoformes tronquées en N- ou C-terminal, ainsi que des isoformes glyquées, ont été trouvées dans des échantillons de plasma provenant de patients ayant une cirrhose aiguë décompensée ou une hépatite alcoolique sévère (3,8). Une dimérisation de l'HSA a été également étudiée chez des patients atteints de cirrhose décompensée. Cependant, l'isoforme homodimérique avec troncature N-terminale était associée de manière indépendante aux complications de la maladie et a permis d'évaluer la survie à un an (3). Récemment, il a été démontré que, chez les patients atteints d'hépatite alcoolique sévère, une liaison excessive de la bilirubine avec l'albumine permet de prédire une mortalité à 3 mois et que cette liaison excessive contribue à une diminution de la capacité de liaison de la dansylsarcosine à l'albumine (5).

Grâce aux travaux décrits ci-dessus, nous avons élaboré et breveté un test fonctionnel multi-élément de capacité de fixation de l'albumine à différents ligands permettant de détecter les modifications structurelles d'albumine les plus pertinentes : le SEB Test (Serum Enhanced Binding Test). Il a été rapporté que chacun des ligands suivants possède un site de liaison spécifique sur HSA : (1) l'or (Au) se lie préférentiellement à la Cys34 ; (2) le cuivre (Cu) au site de liaison N-terminal, (3) le cadmium (Cd) au site de liaison multimétallique, (4) la L-thyroxine a 4 sites de liaison spécifiques (Tr1-Tr4), et (5) la dansylsarcosine se lierait au site médicamenteux 3 ou au site de liaison du diazépam (132). Ces ligands ont été choisis, car ils couvrent les modifications structurelles et conformationnelles les plus importantes de l'albumine. D'autre part, tous les ligands du SEB Test sont mesurables par spectrométrie de masse à plasma inductif (ICP-MS) après incubation du sérum suivie d'une ultrafiltration (**Figure 13**). D'abord, nous avons démontré que la présence des ligands dans l'ultrafiltrat après

les avoir surchargés dans le sérum du patient signe une modification de leur site de liaison spécifique. Ensuite, le test a été optimisé afin de déterminer, pour chaque ligand, la quantité du ligand (après avoir testé plusieurs volumes de solutions à des concentrations différentes), le temps d'incubation, et la capacité de chaque ligand à discriminer les patients cirrhotiques (**Brevet 1 : Figures 1 et 2**). Nous avons observé que le sérum est capable de lier jusqu'à 12 atomes de Cu, 150 atomes d'Au, 50 atomes de Cd, 2,5 molécules de dansylsarcosine et au moins 10 molécules de L-thyroxine par molécule d'albumine (**Brevet 1 : Figure 1**). Enfin, nous avons fixé des valeurs seuils (rapport « atomes de ligand ajoutés sur la valeur d'ALB mesurée ») à 5 atomes pour le cuivre, le cadmium et la thyroxine, à 20 atomes pour la dansylsarcosine et 50 atomes pour l'or. Tous les ligands étaient capables de discriminer les patients cirrhotiques des patients témoins sans atteinte hépatique avec des valeurs de sensibilité et de spécificité supérieures à 95% (**Brevet 1 : Figure 4**).

Parallèlement, on s'est intéressé aux modifications chimiques de l'HSA par une étude approfondie des isoformes de l'albumine. Pour cela, une approche analytique simple, fiable et robuste était nécessaire pour caractériser les isoformes les plus pertinentes de l'HSA de manière rapide et complète dans les hépatopathies. À l'heure actuelle, il y a un intérêt croissant dans le développement de méthodes analytiques simples ; plusieurs équipes ont utilisé des méthodes descendantes (ou top-down) en spectrométrie de masse à haute résolution et ont démontré l'importance des isoformes de l'HSA comme des candidats biomarqueurs prometteurs dans les atteintes hépatiques (4,6,151,160). Dans la majorité des études rapportées et mentionnées ci-dessus, les isoformes de l'HSA ont été identifiées grâce à la détermination de leur différence de masse entre les formes modifiées et non modifiées après « déconvolution » de leurs spectres MS haute résolution. Cette approche analytique, qui peut être considérée comme une analyse descendante (ou top-down) simplifiée, consiste en une injection directe de sérum dilué dans le système LC-MS (218). Elle présente l'avantage de conserver les modifications structurales et chimiques d'intérêt de la forme protéique native. Cependant, pour mieux comprendre les modifications structurelles de l'HSA et confirmer la présence d'isoformes d'intérêt, il était important d'effectuer une analyse ascendante (ou bottom-up) des modifications de l'HSA. Bien que celle-ci nécessite une digestion enzymatique longue et fastidieuse et une longue optimisation des étapes de préparation des échantillons, elle permet une détermination plus efficace de la nature et du site des modifications structurales (219). Il existe très peu d'études ayant utilisé les 2 approches analytiques mais se sont concentrées exclusivement sur les modifications oxydatives ou la glycation (6,151,198). À notre connaissance, la confrontation des 2 approches analytiques top-down et bottom-up réalisées sur les mêmes échantillons n'a pas encore été rapportée notamment pour les PTMs de l'HSA.

L'élaboration d'une méthode par LC-QTOF illustrée par la figure 1 (**Article 1 : Figure 1**) a permis d'identifier 15 isoformes potentielles de l'HSA par l'approche top-down dans des échantillons de sérum de patients cirrhotiques (**Article 1 : Tableaux 1 et 2**). La plupart d'entre elles ont déjà été rapportées dans la littérature par une approche top-down similaire (**Article 1 : Tableau 4**) (6,132,139,149,161,162,198,220–227). Parmi ces isoformes, plusieurs se sont révélées avoir une pertinence clinique dans les hépatopathies chroniques avancées.

Parmi les 15 isoformes identifiées, l'analyse bottom-up a confirmé l'identification de 10 isoformes avec des spécifications sur les sites de modification : HSA+Cys, HSA+3Ox, HSA+Glyc, HSA+Cys+1Ox, HSA+1Ox+Glyc, HSA+3Ox+Glyc, HSA+Cys+Glyc, HSA+2Glyc, HSA+Cys+2Glyc, HSA-L (**Article 1 : Tableau 4**). La confrontation de ces résultats montre que toutes les isoformes identifiées par analyse top-down, et rapportées comme ayant un intérêt clinique, sont confirmées par une analyse bottom-up et ne sont pas susceptibles d'être des artefacts. Par contre, l'approche top-down n'a pas permis de détecter certaines isoformes due à la carbamylation, à la conversion de la cystéine en déhydroalanine ou à la dimérisation de l'HSA, qui ont toutes été bien caractérisées par une analyse bottom-up. Cependant, seule la dimérisation de l'HSA aurait un intérêt clinique dans le diagnostic de la cirrhose (3,8), mais celle-ci pourrait être identifiée et séparée uniquement par certaines méthodes comme la chromatographie d'exclusion stérique ou l'électrophorèse 2D en conditions non réductrices. De plus, certaines PTMs de l'HSA n'ont pas été confirmées par l'approche bottom-up, comme les troncatures N-terminales (HSA-DA et HSA+Cys-DA) en raison de l'enzyme protéolytique utilisée (trypsine) ou la glutathionylation en raison de ses propriétés physico-chimiques.

Nos travaux ont montré que l'approche analytique top-down peut être considérée comme une approche « tout-en-un » simple et rapide permettant de caractériser les isoformes de l'HSA et de déterminer de façon reproductible leurs abondances relatives dans un temps d'analyse d'à peine 3 minutes et avec une préparation simple des échantillons. Cependant, plusieurs isoformes pourraient être manquées ou mal identifiées par cette approche ; mais comme les isoformes les plus cliniquement significatives connues à ce jour sont détectées, cela serait idéal pour une application clinique. A notre connaissance, la confrontation d'approches top-down et bottom-up réalisées sur les mêmes échantillons n'a pas encore été rapportée notamment pour les PTMs de l'HSA. L'analyse bottom-up de l'HSA est informative et essentielle malgré sa complexité en termes de préparation d'échantillons et de retraitement de données. Ainsi, l'approche analytique top-down pourrait rivaliser, après certaines optimisations, avec l'approche analytique bottom-up pour l'investigation des PTMs de l'HSA dans un cadre de recherche, voire une application clinique.

Le développement de cette approche analytique top-down simple par LC-QTOF a permis de confronter les modifications structurelles et chimiques entre elles. La nature et les abondances relatives des isoformes de l'HSA trouvées dans notre analyse sont en accord avec les résultats précédents (5,6,10,190,217) et avec les résultats du SEB Test (**Brevet 1 : Tableau 1**). En effet, en comparaison avec les patients ayant une fonction hépatique normale, tous les patients cirrhotiques présentaient des abondances relatives significativement élevées des isoformes modifiées de l'HSA (nitrosylation, cystéinylation et glycation) et significativement très abaissées de l'isoforme non modifiée de l'HSA (**Brevet 1 : Figure 3**).

Par la suite, des modèles animaux d'intoxication aiguë ont été développés au cours de nos travaux. Une hépatotoxicité aiguë induite par une exposition quotidienne à l'EtOH, au CCl₄ et au APAP chez le rat a été conçue pour étudier le moment et la gravité de l'atteinte hépatique à partir de laquelle les modifications structurelles et chimiques de l'albumine apparaissent. Un dernier modèle animal d'hépatotoxicité par ligature du canal biliaire chez les rats a été mis au point pour provoquer une atteinte hépatique chronique afin de développer une cirrhose biliaire. Les résultats de ces modèles ont apporté des preuves solides prouvant les différents concepts. Par exemple, nous avons observé dans le modèle EtOH que les modifications de l'albumine étaient principalement l'acétylation, la cystéinylation et la glycation. Le SEB Test était positif pour le Cd à partir de J-14, et pour le Cu, l'Au et la L-thyroxine dès J-1 (**Brevet 1 : Figure 5**). Les lésions hépatiques ont été confirmées par des concentrations élevées des transaminases hépatiques après J-7 et par une fibrose émergente au niveau histologique à J-14. Nos travaux ont révélé qu'il était possible de détecter précocelement des lésions hépatiques, avant même les biomarqueurs biochimiques et l'histologie. Dans 3 modèles animaux, l'albumine native a diminué au profit d'autres isoformes 24 heures après l'administration des différents hépatotoxiques. Il est intéressant de noter que la nature et l'intensité des isoformes étaient différentes selon la substance hépatotoxique. Les résultats observés dans les 2 autres modèles d'hépatotoxicité aiguë (CCl₄ et APAP) sont très cohérents avec les observations du modèle d'hépatotoxicité induite par EtOH et indiquent une augmentation des taux de quelques isoformes tout en expliquant le comportement des ligands du SEB Test. Chez les animaux ayant subi une hépatotoxicité à l'éthanol, au CCl₄ ou à l'APAP ou ceux soumis à une ligature du canal biliaire, les modifications de l'albumine se produisaient bien avant que les biomarqueurs biochimiques (ASAT, ALAT, PAL ou bilirubine) n'augmentent. De plus, ces augmentations montraient des dommages histologiques qui devenaient visibles juste après la perturbation du profil des isoformes (données non présentées). Comme l'albumine de rat n'a pas encore été cristallisée et sa structure 3D élucidée, il est difficile de trouver le lien entre les modifications de l'albumine et ses capacités de liaison. Cependant, les résultats suggèrent que notre test pourrait révéler une souffrance hépatocytaire à un stade précoce, avant les

biomarqueurs biochimiques actuels, et qu'une diminution de la capacité de l'albumine à se lier au cadmium pourrait être un marqueur de lésions hépatiques plus avancées.

Les profils isoformes observées diffèrent selon le type de lésion hépatique dans chaque modèle animal (**Figure 14, gauche**). L'analyse en PCA-DA permis de valider une distinction entre ces modèles en prenant en compte l'ensemble des informations spectrales du profil de l'albumine (**Figure 14, droite-haut**). Dans une cohorte de patients, la différentiation des causes et des stades de l'atteinte hépatique a été également prouvée par PCA-DA sur des profils d'isoformes de patients cirrhotiques (NASH, éthanol, mixte éthanol-NASH) et des sujets témoins (**Figure 14, droite-bas**). De plus, 14 isoformes de l'HSA ont été identifiés chez les 2 populations (**Brevet 2 : Tableau 5**) avec certaines isoformes spécifiques selon la cause de la cirrhose, comme par exemple HSA-DA chez les éthyliques, HSA+SGGS et HSA+2Glyc dans la NASH ou bien HSA-DA+Cys et HSA-SO₂H pour l'atteinte mixte (**Brevet 2 : Tableau 5**). Par contre, nous n'avons identifié aucune isoforme permettant de différencier clairement les stades de la maladie. Bien que on identifie clairement des isoformes spécifiques à l'atteinte hépatique, une analyse complète des PTMs de l'HSA à partir des spectres de masse sera primordiale pour améliorer la distinction entre les patients. Ces découvertes suggèrent que l'analyse complète du profil des isoformes de l'HSA, y compris les plus rares et les plus minoritaires, offre une vue précise de l'état chimique et moléculaire des cellules hépatiques.

En conclusion, les modifications structurelles révélées par le SEB Test et les modifications chimiques par l'étude des isoformes de l'albumine montrent un potentiel de détection précoce des lésions hépatiques et peut constituer un outil de détection rapide des atteintes hépatiques avec une approche type « criblage des patients ». Malgré les efforts visant à identifier les biomarqueurs, le diagnostic des hépatopathies reste difficile en raison de la diversité des présentations cliniques et du manque d'indicateurs précoces et spécifiques. Bien que certains biomarqueurs mécanistiques, comme le microARN-122, se soient révélés très prometteurs, leur utilisation clinique est limitée par les variations biologiques. Nos travaux montrent que l'utilisation d'un seul ligand, comme le test IMA selon Bar-or et al. (248), pourrait ne pas être suffisante pour détecter et évaluer les PTMs de l'albumine. En fait, la couverture d'une plus grande partie de la structure de l'albumine semble être essentielle pour détecter précocement les lésions hépatiques. L'ensemble de nos résultats soutient l'hypothèse selon laquelle des PTMs de l'albumine se produisent tôt au cours d'une lésion hépatique induite, ce qui suggère que l'utilisation des PTMs de l'albumine comme biomarqueur précoce pour caractériser les blessures induites par une substance ou un médicament hépatotoxique serait pertinente. De plus, nous n'avons pas observé d'isoforme spécifique capable de discriminer clairement les différents stades de l'atteinte hépatique, mais l'étude et l'utilisation de

l'ensemble des informations des profils isoformes de l'albumine représentent des données importantes qui pourraient aider à diagnostiquer les maladies du foie, à les classer et à déterminer leur origine. L'utilisation du SEB Test et la surveillance des isoformes de l'albumine sont prometteurs pour combler ces lacunes, en offrant une approche temporelle spécifique au patient pour le diagnostic et le pronostic des atteintes hépatiques. De futures investigations plus approfondies sont nécessaires pour explorer leur potentiel plus large en hépatologie en utilisant par exemple des études *in vitro* par production artificielle des isoformes ou des études *in silico* par la modélisation moléculaire devraient être menées pour et comprendre et mettre en relation les isoformes et les ligands de l'albumine.

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Annexes

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| Annexe 1. Données supplémentaires (Article 1) | 234 |
| Annexe 2. Données supplémentaires (Article 2) | 245 |

Annexe 1. Données supplémentaires (Article 1)

SUPPLEMENTARY DATA

Material and Methods

1. Materials and reagents

Acetonitrile (ACN), methanol (MeOH), trifluoroacetic acid (TFA) and formic acid (FA) were obtained from Fisher Scientific (LC-MS grade, Illkirch, France). Dithiothreitol (DTT), iodoacetamide (IAA), ammonium formate and ammonium bicarbonate were purchased from Sigma (Saint-Quentin-Fallavier, France), sequencing grade trypsin from Promega (Charbonnières, France). Oasis® HLB (3cc, 60mg) cartridges were purchased from Waters (Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines, France).

2. Top-down approach

Sample preparation

20 µL of serum were diluted with 980 µL of an aqueous 20mM ammonium formate solution containing 0.1% FA. After vortex-mixing, the mixture was centrifuged at 10°C and 14,000 g and then 300 µL of the supernatant were passed through a 0.22 µm cellulose acetate filter before injection.

Liquid chromatography - tandem mass spectrometry (LC-MS/MS)

The chromatographic separation was performed using a Nexera LC40 system (Shimadzu Corporation, Noisiel, France) equipped with a thermostated column compartment and a thermostated autosampler with a six-port switching valve. Samples were analyzed in the flow injection analysis mode (FIA) at 50 µL/min under isocratic conditions in 3 min using a mixture of 50% phase A (2mM ammonium formate, 0.1% FA) and 50% phase B (0.1 % FA in ACN: mobile phase A, 90:10, by volume).

Mass spectrometric detection was performed using a Q-TOF mass spectrometer (TripleTOF® 5600+, Sciex, Concord, Canada) equipped with a DuoSpray™ ion source and operated in the positive ionization mode. A calibration solution was injected each hour in order to recalibrate the mass analyzer. The source conditions were as follows: temperature, 200 °C; declustering potential (DP), 250 V; curtain gas (CUR), 40 units; ion source gas (GS1, GS2), respectively 70 and 10 units; and ion-spray voltage floating, 5.5 kV. All MS parameters were controlled by Analyst® TF 1.7 (Sciex). *m/z* ratios were scanned using a TOF MS scan from *m/z* 900 and 1,800 with an accumulation time of 500 ms.

Spectrum deconvolution and relative intensity of the signals

The LC-MS data were processed using PeakView® 2.2 software and its Bio Tool Kit 2.2.0 feature (Sciex). The input MS spectrum selected from 1,300 to 1,600 was deconvoluted between *m/z* 1,000 to 200,000 at low resolution (5,000). The reconstructed spectra were then centroided and exported as text files to be imported in R software. The relative intensity was calculated by dividing the peak area of the identified isoform by the sum of the peak areas of all isoforms in the mass range chosen.

2. Bottom-up approach

Tryptic digestion

A volume equivalent to 100 µg of proteins was either alkylated in 10 mM IAA (to maintain albumin integrity), or reduced in 5 mM DTT and alkylated in 10 mM IAA (to reduce disulfide bonds). Digestion was performed overnight at 37 °C using 0.1 µg of trypsin. The peptide samples were then purified on a 3cc 60 mg HLB cartridge as follows: conditioning with 3 mL MeOH, equilibration with 3mL of 0.5% FA in water, loading of sample diluted with 3 mL of 0.5% FA in water, 2 washes with 3mL of 0.5% FA in water and elution with 3 mL MeOH. After evaporation under nitrogen, the digests were resolubilized at 1 µg/µL in 100 µL of the loading solvent (2% ACN, 0.05% TFA). The extracts were kept at -80°C until analysis.

Library generation for SWATH analysis

The resulting peptides were analyzed by microLC-MS/MS using a nanoLC 425 system (Eksigent, Dublin, CA) in the micro-flow mode, coupled with a TripleTOF 5600+ (Sciex) operating with a resolution of 30,000 in MS spectrum and 22,000 in MS/MS spectrum. Reverse-phase LC was performed in a trap-and-elute configuration using a trap column (C18 Pepmap100 cartridge, 0.3 mm i.d. × 5 mm, 5µm; Thermo Scientific) and an analytical column (ChromXP C18 column, 150 × 0.3 mm i.d., 120Å, 3 µm; Sciex) with the following mobile phases: above mentioned loading solvent, solvent A (0.1% FA in water) and solvent B (95% ACN, 0.1% FA). All samples were loaded, trapped and desalting using a flowrate of 10 µL/min with the loading solvent for 5 minutes. The chromatographic separation was performed at a flow rate of 3 µL/min as follows: initial, 5% B, increased to 35% in 63 min, then increased to 95% B in 3 min, maintained at 95% for 7 min, and finally, decreased to 5% B for reequilibration.

1µg of each sample was subjected to data-dependent acquisition (DDA) to generate the SWATH-MS spectral library. MS and MS/MS data were continuously recorded with up to 40 precursors selected for fragmentation from each MS survey scan, giving a total cycle time of 4.25 s. Precursor selection was based upon ion intensity and whether or not the precursor has been previously selected for fragmentation (dynamic exclusion). Ions were fragmented using the rolling collision energy mode.

All DDA mass spectrometer files were searched using ProteinPilot software v.5.0.1 (Sciex) and the Paragon algorithm. Searching parameters were set up as follows: cysteine alkylation with iodoacetamide, digestion by trypsin and presence of potential biological modifications. The search was conducted using a thorough identification effort against an in-house database containing the HSA sequence after processing (Albumin Chain from 25 to 609 of Uniprot P02768 sequence) and known truncated variants (N-terminal truncation with DA loss and C-terminal truncation with L loss). The output of this search was a group file containing all the identified peptides, which were manually checked to assess the existence of the proposed sequence. The result of this search led to the creation of a reference spectral library containing all the validated peptides carrying or not PTMs. One example of MS/MS spectrum for each PTM is available in **Supplementary Figure 1**.

SWATH analysis and data processing

One µg of each sample was then subjected to cyclic DIA of mass spectra using 60 variable swath windows over the 300-1,250 m/z range using the same chromatographic method as for the DDA analysis. Variable windows were manually defined in a way that the unchanged and modified isoforms of the same peptide cannot be found in the same window to avoid false assignments. For these experiments, the mass spectrometer was operated to obtain a 50-ms survey scan (TOF-MS), followed by MS/MS analyses of all precursors using an accumulation time of 75 ms per swath window, giving a total cycle time of 4.55 s. Ions were fragmented using the rolling collision energy mode adapted to the swath window m/z range.

Spectral alignment and targeted data extraction from DIA spectra were made using MultiQuant Software 3.0.1 (Sciex), considering the four to six most abundant fragments for each peptide with a resolution of 40,000. The list of validated peptides with the corresponding SWATH window number, predicted retention time and fragments (in bold, those carrying the PTM) are presented in **Supplemental Table III**.

Mass peak areas were collected for all fragments for each peptide and listed in **Supplemental Figure 1**. For the peptide 21-41 carrying the cysteinylation on Cys34, an estimated relative abundance between the unchanged peptide (represented by the carbamidomethylated isoform) and the cysteinylated isoform was calculated by dividing the isoform area by the sum of all the peptide isoforms.

Supplemental Table I. Clinical characteristics of patients without and with hepatic disorders.

| Sample identification | Controls | | Patients with hepatic dysfunction | | | |
|---|----------|------|-----------------------------------|----------|--------|----------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| Characteristics | | | | | | |
| Age, years | 74 | 75 | 55 | 53 | 64 | 67 |
| Gender (M/F) | F | M | M | M | F | M |
| Etiology of hepatic disorders | - | - | MI | OH | MI | OH |
| Biochemical parameters | | | | | | |
| Serum bilirubin, UI/L | 4.7 | 14.2 | 30.7 | 34.7 | 85.3 | 28.8 |
| Serum albumin, g/L | 42.6 | 45.7 | 31.7 | 29.2 | 27.7 | 34.6 |
| Serum creatinine, µM | 57 | 90 | 89 | 99 | 70 | 171 |
| ASAT, UI/L | 17 | 19 | 56 | 46 | 45 | 54 |
| ALAT, UI/L | 15 | 27 | 27 | 29 | 24 | 41 |
| INR | 0.94 | 1.12 | 1.70 | 1.36 | 1.68 | 1.38 |
| Sodium, mM | 140 | 141 | 145 | 134 | 129 | 128 |
| Clinical parameters | | | | | | |
| Ascites | - | - | Slight | Moderate | Slight | Moderate |
| Encephalopathy grade | - | - | 0 | 4 | 0 | 3 |
| Prognostic scores of cirrhosis | | | | | | |
| Child-Pugh class (A/B/C) and score | - | - | B8 | C11 | C10 | C10 |
| MELD score | - | - | 15 | 17 | 18.5 | 25 |

INR: International Normalized Ratio; MELD: Model of End-Stage Liver Disease; OH: alcoholic cirrhosis; MI: mixed cirrhosis

Supplemental Table II: Quantification of HSA isoforms by relative intensity in the top-down approach (MD : mass difference ; PA : peak area; RI : relative intensity)

| | Isoforms | Control (1) | | | | Control (2) | | | | Cirrhosis B (3) | | | |
|---|----------------|-------------|------|-------|--------|-------------|------|------|--------|-----------------|------|------|--------|
| | | Mass (Da) | MD | PA | RI (%) | Mass (Da) | MD | PA | RI (%) | Mass (Da) | MD | PA | RI (%) |
| A | HSA-DA | 66250.5 | -186 | 0.41 | 1.63 | 66253.0 | -185 | 0.01 | 0.03 | 66252.8 | -183 | 0.04 | 0.17 |
| B | HSA-L | 66321.8 | -115 | 1.51 | 6.08 | 66326.3 | -112 | 0.01 | 0.06 | 66321.3 | -115 | 0.62 | 2.48 |
| C | HSA+Cys-DA | 66363.8 | -73 | 0.12 | 0.5 | 66367.8 | -70 | 0.01 | 0.03 | 66367.3 | -69 | 0.06 | 0.22 |
| D | HSA Native | 66436.5 | 0 | 10.09 | 40.35 | 66437.8 | 0 | 6.13 | 24.54 | 66435.8 | 0 | 8.00 | 32.02 |
| E | HSA+NO | 66465.3 | 29 | 1.06 | 4.24 | | | 0.00 | 0.00 | 66465.3 | 30 | 0.69 | 2.76 |
| F | HSA+3Ox | 66487.8 | 51 | 1.5 | 6.01 | 66494.8 | 57 | 0.3 | 1.2 | 66483.8 | 48 | 0.67 | 2.66 |
| G | HSA+2(3Ox) | 66531.0 | 95 | 0.3 | 1.21 | 66538.8 | 101 | 0.29 | 1.16 | 66535.5 | 100 | 0.22 | 0.89 |
| H | HSA+Cys | 66555.3 | 119 | 4.99 | 19.97 | 66557.3 | 120 | 5.9 | 23.61 | 66554.5 | 119 | 7.41 | 29.65 |
| I | HSA+Cys+1Ox | 66574.0 | 138 | 0.65 | 2.61 | 66579.0 | 141 | 1.00 | 3.99 | 66575.0 | 139 | 1.02 | 4.1 |
| J | HSA+Glyc | 66600.8 | 164 | 2.44 | 9.75 | 66599.5 | 162 | 4.38 | 17.52 | 66600.0 | 164 | 3.29 | 13.16 |
| K | HSA+Glyc+Ox1 | 66618.5 | 182 | 0.41 | 1.66 | 66625.8 | 188 | 0.57 | 2.28 | 66619.3 | 184 | 0.33 | 1.32 |
| L | HSA+Glyc+3Ox | 66644.8 | 208 | 0.19 | 0.75 | 66638.5 | 201 | 0.35 | 1.42 | 66646.5 | 211 | 0.15 | 0.62 |
| M | HSA+Cys+Glyc | 66718.0 | 282 | 0.47 | 1.86 | 66718.5 | 281 | 2.2 | 8.79 | 66717.3 | 282 | 1.64 | 6.56 |
| N | HSA+GSH | 66734.8 | 298 | 0.07 | 0.3 | 66741.0 | 303 | 0.37 | 1.46 | 66735.3 | 300 | 0.38 | 1.5 |
| O | HSA+2Glyc | 66755.3 | 319 | 0.05 | 0.21 | 66764.8 | 327 | 1.36 | 5.46 | 66765.0 | 329 | 0.34 | 1.34 |
| P | HSA+Cys+2Glyc | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Total spectrum | | | 25 | 100 | | | 25 | 100 | | | 25 | 100 |
| | Total isoforms | | | 24 | 97 | | | 23 | 92 | | | 25 | 99 |

| | Isoforms | Cirrhosis C (4) | | | | Cirrhosis C (5) | | | | Cirrhosis C (6) | | | |
|---|----------------|-----------------|------|-------|--------|-----------------|------|-------|--------|-----------------|------|------|--------|
| | | Mass (Da) | MD | PA | RI (%) | Mass (Da) | MD | AUC | RI (%) | Mass (Da) | MD | PA | RI (%) |
| A | HSA-DA | 66255.8 | -181 | 0.00 | 0.02 | 66260.0 | -178 | 0.00 | 0.01 | 66252.5 | -186 | 0.00 | 0.02 |
| B | HSA-L | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| C | HSA+Cys-DA | 66368.0 | -69 | 0.43 | 1.71 | 66367.5 | -70 | 0.01 | 0.05 | 66368.0 | -70 | 0.45 | 1.82 |
| D | HSA Native | 66437.0 | 0 | 1.89 | 7.54 | 66437.8 | 0 | 1.39 | 5.57 | 66438.0 | 0 | 1.42 | 5.67 |
| E | HSA+NO | 66463.0 | 26 | 0.07 | 0.28 | | | | | 66467.8 | 30 | 1.09 | 4.38 |
| F | HSA+3Ox | 66486.0 | 49 | 0.03 | 0.12 | | | | | | | | |
| G | HSA+2(3Ox) | 66534.8 | 98 | 0.46 | 1.86 | 66538.5 | 101 | 0.26 | 1.02 | 66533.0 | 95 | 0.85 | 3.4 |
| H | HSA+Cys | 66555.0 | 118 | 14.11 | 56.46 | 66557.8 | 120 | 11.84 | 47.37 | 66557.3 | 119 | 8.06 | 32.24 |
| I | HSA+Cys+1Ox | 66573.5 | 137 | 1.85 | 7.4 | 66581.8 | 144 | 1.72 | 6.87 | 66578.3 | 140 | 1.74 | 6.98 |
| J | HSA+Glyc | 66606.8 | 170 | 0.94 | 3.77 | 66602.8 | 165 | 1.73 | 6.93 | 66603.3 | 165 | 2.2 | 8.81 |
| K | HSA+Glyc+Ox1 | 66622.0 | 185 | 0.27 | 1.07 | 66618.8 | 181 | 0.91 | 3.62 | 66625.8 | 188 | 0.74 | 2.95 |
| L | HSA+Glyc+3Ox | 66648.0 | 211 | 0.07 | 0.26 | 66640.8 | 203 | 0.37 | 1.47 | 66640.8 | 203 | 0.71 | 2.83 |
| M | HSA+Cys+Glyc | 66715.8 | 279 | 2.91 | 11.64 | 66721.3 | 284 | 3.98 | 15.93 | 66720.8 | 283 | 4.47 | 17.88 |
| N | HSA+GSH | 66739.0 | 302 | 0.33 | 1.33 | 66742.3 | 305 | 0.87 | 3.47 | 66741.8 | 304 | 0.59 | 2.34 |
| O | HSA+2Glyc | 66761.8 | 325 | 0.16 | 0.65 | 66766.3 | 329 | 0.84 | 3.35 | 66762.8 | 325 | 0.48 | 1.94 |
| P | HSA+Cys+2Glyc | 66877.8 | 441 | 0.15 | 0.62 | 66879.8 | 442 | 0.34 | 1.34 | 66880.3 | 442 | 1.13 | 4.52 |
| | Total spectrum | | | 25 | 100 | | | 25 | 100 | | | 25 | 100 |
| | Total isoforms | | | 24 | 95 | | | 24 | 97 | | | 24 | 96 |

Supplemental Table III: SWATH-MS library of HSA.

| Amino acids # | Peptide sequence | theoretical m/z | z | SWATH Experiment | SWATH Window | RT | Fragments for MRM reconstruction (fragments carrying PTM in bold) |
|---------------|--|-----------------|---|------------------|--------------|-------|--|
| 11-20 | FKDLGEENFK | 409.5399 | 3 | 14 | 408.4-420.5 | 22.2 | 519.2562 408.2242 666.3093 723.3308 |
| 11-20 | FK[CAM]PLGEENFK | 635.3091 | 2 | 38 | 634.7-637.4 | 34.2 | 951.4418 723.3308 836.4149 434.2034 |
| 13-20 | DLEENFK | 476.2245 | 2 | 20 | 470.4-481.1 | 21.2 | 723.3308 519.2562 408.2242 666.3093 |
| 21-41 | ALVLFALAQYLOQC[CAM]PFEDHVK | 830.7665 | 3 | 55 | 829.5-847.3 | 59.0 | 284.1969 871.4308 1031.4726 397.2809 1400.6627 1563.726 |
| 21-41 | ALVLFALAQYLOQC[SCC]PFEDHVK | 638.8224 | 4 | 39 | 637.6-567.7 | 55.8 | 284.1969 871.4308 1093.4441 397.2809 1349.5613 1462.6454 |
| 42-51 | LNEVTEFAK | 575.3111 | 2 | 33 | 565.4-575.7 | 28.5 | 937.4625 595.3086 694.377 1036.531 |
| 42-51 | LVD[Dea]EVTEFAK | 575.8032 | 2 | 34 | 575.5-581.0 | 27.9 | 938.4489 595.3086 694.377 1037.515 |
| 42-51 | LVD[Dea]EVTEFAK | 575.8032 | 2 | 34 | 575.5-581.0 | 30.35 | 938.4489 595.3086 694.377 1037.515 |
| 42-51 | LNEVTEF[Ox]IAK | 583.3086 | 2 | 35 | 580.6-598.4 | 28.8 | 953.4575 611.3035 710.3719 1052.5259 |
| 65-73 | SLHTLFGDK | 339.8503 | 3 | 6 | 339.1-349.2 | 26.0 | 460.2296 319.1612 262.1397 680.3614 |
| 65-81 | SLHTLFGDKLC[CAM]TVATLR | 483.7647 | 4 | 22 | 481.4-492.1 | 37.4 | 460.2878 389.2507 338.1823 871.4308 |
| 65-81 | SLHTLFGDKLC[CAM]TVATLR | 644.6839 | 3 | 39 | 637.6-567.7 | 37.4 | 820.4346 660.4039 933.5186 460.2878 |
| 74-81 | LC[CAM]TVATLR | 438.7522 | 2 | 16 | 430.5-442.4 | 28.6 | 460.2878 660.4039 763.4131 559.3562 |
| 74-81 | LC[DH]ATVATLR | 467.2629 | 2 | 19 | 462.4-471.4 | 21.8 | 660.4039 460.2878 559.3562 820.4346 |
| 74-81 | LC[DH]ATVATLR | 421.7584 | 2 | 15 | 419.5-431.5 | 24.3 | 729.4254 460.2878 559.3562 660.4039 |
| 74-81 | LC[DH]ATVATLR | 462.7446 | 2 | 18 | 451.4-63.4 | 27.0 | 460.2878 559.3562 660.4039 265.0853 |
| 82-93 | ETYGEMADC[CAM][C]ICAM]AK | 717.7703 | 2 | 47 | 716.1-722.6 | 17.5 | 855.3158 1041.3798 724.2753 538.2112 378.1806 |
| 94-106 | QIPQ[Dea]FERNEC[CAM]FLQH | 566.5949 | 3 | 33 | 565.4-575.7 | 20.0 | 284.1717 729.3515 672.3828 241.0819 |
| 94-114 | QEPERNEC[CAM]FLQHDDNPNLPR | 659.8122 | 4 | 40 | 655.7-665.6 | 19.4 | 596.3515 730.3944 940.4493 258.1084 |
| 94-114 | QIPQ[EP]ERNEC[CAM]FLQHDDNPNLPR | 655.5556 | 4 | 39 | 637.6-567.7 | 23.0 | 596.3515 499.2987 272.1717 241.0819 |
| 99-106 | NEC[CAM]FLQH | 359.1712 | 3 | 9 | 357.5-368.15 | 15.0 | 416.7103 284.1717 481.2316 525.3144 |
| 99-114 | NEC[CAM]FLQHDDNPNLPR | 499.9878 | 4 | 24 | 496.501-2 | 20.6 | 499.2987 272.1717 596.3515 385.2558 |
| 107-114 | NDPNLPR | 470.7278 | 2 | 20 | 470.4-481.1 | 15.0 | 596.3515 272.1717 499.2987 710.3944 |
| 115-136 | LPVPEVDVVM[CAM]TFAHDNEETFLK | 663.3215 | 2 | 40 | 655.7-665.6 | 41.0 | 809.4516 908.52 595.3562 995.468 871.8793 |
| 115-136 | LPVPEVDVVM[Ox]I[CAM]TFAHDNEETFLK | 667.3202 | 4 | 41 | 664.669.5 | 34.5 | 809.4516 595.3562 908.52 995.468 879.8767 |
| 115-137 | LPVPEVDVVM[Ox]I[CAM]TFAHDNEETFLKK | 559.6766 | 5 | 32 | 549.5-666.5 | 31.35 | 809.4516 595.3562 275.2078 1008.536 |
| 137-144 | KYLEYEAR | 528.2978 | 2 | 29 | 525.5-539.6 | 24.1 | 927.4934 764.4301 651.3461 129.1022 |
| 138-144 | LYLEIAR | 464.2504 | 2 | 19 | 462.4-471.4 | 27.7 | 651.3461 488.2827 277.1547 764.4301 |
| 138-144 | LY[X]LYEIR | 472.2478 | 2 | 20 | 472.4-481.1 | 27.9 | 651.3461 488.2827 764.4301 293.1496 249.1069 |
| 138-144 | LY[Ox]IYIAR | 472.2478 | 2 | 20 | 470.4-481.1 | 27.9 | 667.3431 488.2827 780.425 277.1547 265.156 |
| 138-144 | LY[Nt]IYIAR | 486.7429 | 2 | 22 | 481.4-492.1 | 35.0 | 696.3311 809.4152 249.1598 277.1547 |
| 145-159 | RHPYVAPELLFFAK | 633.6699 | 3 | 37 | 615.3-635.7 | 48.57 | 701.3518 964.5502 554.2834 935.4522 |
| 146-159 | HPPYVAPELLFFAK | 581.6362 | 3 | 35 | 580.6-598.4 | 52.8 | 779.3511 964.5502 545.2507 512.2867 |
| 163-174 | AATFC[CAM][C]ICAM]QAADK | 686.287 | 2 | 44 | 682.3-686.6 | 16.0 | 852.3339 1082.4241 981.3764 692.3032 532.2726 |
| 163-174 | AATFC[CAM][C]ICAM]Q[D]eA]ADK | 686.7779 | 2 | 45 | 685.4-693.5 | 16.63 | 1083.4081 853.3179 982.3605 533.2566 |
| 163-174 | AATFC[D]H[A]C[2O]Q]AADK | 628.2666 | 2 | 37 | 615.3-635.7 | 22.67 | 966.3933 865.3536 736.293 667.2716 532.2726 |
| 163-174 | AATFC[D]H[A]CQAADKouAAFTEC[C]DHA]QAADK | 612.2717 | 2 | 36 | 597.4-616.3 | 17.37 | 833.3458 934.3935 704.3032 635.2817 601.294 |
| 175-181 | AAC[C]MLPK | 386.7229 | 2 | 11 | 377.5-389.3 | 22.0 | 630.3643 244.1656 470.3337 701.4015 |
| 175-181 | AAC[D]H[A]LLPK | 341.2183 | 2 | 6 | 339.1-349.1 | 23.26 | 539.3552 244.1656 143.0815 610.3923 |
| 175-181 | AAC[D]C]LLPK | 417.7142 | 2 | 14 | 408.4-420.5 | 17.99 | 692.347 244.1656 357.2496 763.3841 |
| 182-186 | LDEL | 323.1819 | 2 | 4 | 319.7-330.7 | 14.5 | 532.2726 417.2456 288.203 229.1183 |
| 182-190 | LDELDEKG | 358.8254 | 3 | 9 | 357.5-368.1 | 12.3 | 481.2329 423.7194 359.1981 204.1343 |
| 198-205 | L[K]IAC[C]ASLQK | 495.2761 | 2 | 23 | 491.9-497.5 | 15.6 | 706.3552 284.1969 876.4608 |
| 200-205 | C[C]AM]ASLQK | 353.6813 | 2 | 7 | 348.1-354.7 | 7.09 | 475.2875 546.3244 232.075 319.1071 275.1714 |
| 200-205 | C[C]AM]ASLQ[D]eA]K | 354.1733 | 2 | 8 | 353.8-358.5 | 8.01 | 476.2715 547.3086 232.075 319.1071 276.1554 |
| 213-218 | AWAVAR | 337.1926 | 2 | 5 | 329.7-340.1 | 19.5 | 416.2616 258.1237 345.2245 602.3409 |
| 213-218 | AW[2Ox]AVAR | 353.1876 | 2 | 7 | 348.1-354.7 | 9.97 | 416.2616 290.1135 345.2245 616.3202 |
| 213-218 | AW[2Ox]AVAR | 353.1876 | 2 | 7 | 348.1-354.7 | 10.86 | 416.2616 290.1135 345.2245 616.3202 |
| 213-218 | AW[2Ox]AVAR | 353.1876 | 2 | 7 | 348.1-354.7 | 15.86 | 416.2616 290.1135 345.2245 634.3307 |
| 213-218 | AW[2Ox]AVAR | 353.1876 | 2 | 7 | 348.1-354.7 | 18.9 | 416.2616 290.1135 345.2245 616.3202 |
| 213-218 | AW[Ox]AVAR | 345.1901 | 2 | 6 | 339.1-349.1 | 19.54 | 416.2616 345.2245 274.1186 |
| 226-233 | AEEFVK | 440.7242 | 2 | 16 | 430.5-442.4 | 17.07 | 680.3614 533.293 201.087 348.1554 |
| 226-233 | AEEFVK[De]A]EVSK | 448.7216 | 2 | 17 | 441.4-452 | 16.61 | 696.3563 533.293 201.087 364.1503 |
| 226-240 | AEEFVK[He]VLTDLTK | 604.9874 | 3 | 36 | 597.4-616.3 | 48.71 | 201.087 348.1554 577.3192 789.4716 |
| 234-240 | VLTDLTK | 395.2395 | 2 | 12 | 388.398.9 | 19.6 | 577.3192 676.3876 213.1598 361.2445 |
| 241-257 | VHTEC[CAM]C[AM]HGDLLEC[CAM]ADDRADLK | 522.6468 | 4 | 28 | 513.4-526.5 | 19.4 | 290.1459 636.2406 476.21 605.2424 765.2823 |
| 241-262 | VHTEC[CAM]C[AM]HGDLLEC[CAM]ADDRADLK | 647.0349 | 4 | 39 | 637.6-567.7 | 23.19 | 237.1346 114.3206 218.1499 |
| 263-274 | SH[C]CAM]IAEVEND[Ox]I[PDLPSLAADFVESK | 722.3247 | 2 | 47 | 716.1-722.6 | 15.8 | 1167.4946 321.1769 878.4214 1007.464 |
| 263-274 | YIC[C]AM]ENQDSISK | 722.8167 | 2 | 48 | 724.4-751.2 | 17.4 | 1168.4787 321.1769 1008.448 879.4054 |
| 275-286 | LKE[C]CAM][C]EKPLLEK | 387.4546 | 4 | 11 | 377.5-389.3 | 15.22 | 599.3763 276.1554 820.3328 948.4278 |
| 275-286 | LKE[C]DHA[C][2Ox]EKPLLEK | 358.4444 | 4 | 8 | 353.8-358.5 | 18.86 | 599.3763 389.2395 832.3869 530.7708 496.2601 |
| 277-286 | E[C]CAM][C]CAM]EKPLLEK | 435.8774 | 3 | 16 | 430.5-442.4 | 15.49 | 599.3763 502.3235 899.375 290.0805 1016.5445 727.4713 |
| 277-286 | E[C]CAM][C]CAM]EKPLLEK | 653.3125 | 2 | 39 | 637.6-567.7 | 15.49 | 599.3763 290.0805 1016.5445 727.4713 |
| 277-286 | E[C]DHA[C][2Ox]EKPLLEK | 397.1972 | 3 | 12 | 388.398.9 | 19.1 | 599.3763 389.2395 676.2406 783.3342 |
| 282-286 | PLLEK | 300.1918 | 2 | 2 | 295.5-310.7 | 15.6 | 502.3235 389.2395 324.2282 453.2708 |
| 287-313 | SH[C]CAM]IAEVEND[Ox]I[PDLPSLAADFVESK | 997.4513 | 3 | 60 | 997.1089.9 | 47.07 | 1163.5943 385.1288 698.2926 797.3611 |
| 313-323 | NYAEAK | 348.1716 | 2 | 6 | 339.1-349.1 | 6.79 | 418.2296 347.1925 218.1499 278.1135 |
| 324-336 | DVFLGMFLYEYEAR | 812.3974 | 2 | 51 | 794.3-815 | 60.0 | 1149.5397 1092.5183 961.4778 1262.6238 |
| 324-336 | DVFLGMFLYEYEAR | 820.3949 | 2 | 52 | 814.8-20.7 | 54.7 | 1165.5347 1108.5132 961.4778 701.3253 |
| 337-348 | RHDPSVSVLLR | 489.9525 | 3 | 22 | 481.4-492.1 | 36.4 | 613.4396 514.3711 401.2771 782.3385 |
| 337-348 | RHDPSVSVLLR | 498.6244 | 3 | 24 | 496.501-40.6 | 6.6 | 613.4242 514.3583 401.2771 782.3385 |
| 337-348 | RHDPSVSVLLR | 656.3746 | 2 | 40 | 655.7-665.6 | 40.5 | 1174.683 596.6033 962.6033 235.119 |
| 338-348 | RHDPSVSVLLR | 437.9188 | 3 | 16 | 430.5-442.4 | 40.5 | 514.3711 401.2771 613.4396 699.3097 |
| 352-359 | TYETTLK | 492.7478 | 2 | 23 | 491.9-497.5 | 16.5 | 720.3774 591.3348 883.4407 265.1183 |
| 360-372 | C[C]AM][C]CAM]AA[D]PH[C]CAM]YAK | 518.2041 | 3 | 28 | 513.4-526.5 | 11.05 | 670.2865 392.1057 807.3454 904.3982 |
| 373-378 | VDFEKF | 392.6974 | 2 | 12 | 388.398.9 | 26.5 | 685.3192 538.2506 294.1812 423.2238 |
| 373-389 | VDFEKFPLVEEPQLNLIK | 682.3737 | 3 | 43 | 672.4-682.4 | 43.72 | 712.4352 1279.7256 899.8929 1069.5888 |
| 373-389 | VDFEKFPLVEEPQLNLIK | 682.698 | 3 | 44 | 682.3-686.6 | 45.15 | 1280.7096 713.4192 900.4749 616.3665 488.3239 |
| 403-410 | FQD[De]A]ALLVR | 481.2769 | 2 | 21 | 480.9-481.8 | 31.81 | 686.4196 571.3926 276.1343 814.4781 |
| 403-410 | FQD[De]A]ALLVR | 481.2769 | 2 | 21 | 480.9-481.8 | 31.4 | 686.4355 277.1183 571.3926 814.4781 |
| 403-410 | FQD[De]A]ALLVR | 481.7689 | 2 | 22 | 481.4-492.1 | 33.3 | 686.4196 815.4621 571.3926 500.3555 |
| 414-428 | KVPQVSTP[De]VLTVEVS | 547.3174 | 3 | 30 | 538.6-547.5 | 28.8 | 490.262 589.3204 702.4145 900.5149 |
| 414-428 | KVPQVSTP[De]VLTVEVS | 547.6454 | 3 | 31 | 547.4-550 | 29.5 | 589.3304 490.262 <b |

Supplemental Table III (end):

| Amino acids # | Peptide sequence | theoretical m/z | z | SWATH Experiment | SWATH Window | RT | Fragments for MRM reconstruction (fragments carrying PTM in bold) |
|---------------|---------------------------|-----------------|---|------------------|--------------|-------|---|
| 485-500 | RPC[CAM]FS[2H]ALEVDEYVPK | 636.9769 | 3 | 38 | 634.7-637.4 | 33.3 | 959.4404 717.3.137 244.1656 830.3978 |
| 485-500 | RPC[DHA]FSALEVDEYVPK | 607.3123 | 3 | 36 | 597.4-616.3 | 37.4 | 870.4468 628.3.202 244.1656 741.4042 |
| 485-500 | RPC[3Ox]FSALEVDEYVPK | 951.4511 | 2 | 57 | 908.2-953 | 38.7 | 254.1612 552.2235 1350.6787 1648.7411 |
| 485-500 | R[CRM]P[CAM]FSALEVDEYVPK | 977.4724 | 2 | 59 | 959.988 | 40.0 | 244.1656 1004.4618 1218.5572 762.3352 |
| 501-519 | EFAEATFTFHADIC[CAM]TLEK | 754.0124 | 3 | 49 | 750.2-756.7 | 41.4 | 1036.4979 835.3982 587.2821 737.3498 |
| 501-521 | EFAEATFTFHADIC[CAM]TLEKER | 637.0471 | 4 | 38 | 634.7-637.4 | 38.6 | 648.3311 373.1505 761.4152 1250.6045 |
| 525-534 | KQTALVELVK | 376.9044 | 3 | 10 | 367-378.5 | 26.0 | 542.3297 488.3079 587.3763 429.2456 |
| 525-534 | K[Dea]TALVELVK | 565.345 | 2 | 32 | 549-566.4 | 27.99 | 872.5451 1001.5877 771.4975 488.3079 |
| 525-534 | K[Hex]TALVELVK | 430.922 | 3 | 16 | 430.5-442 | 25.7 | 700.4604 587.3763 488.3079 520.2613 |
| 525-534 | K[CRM]TALVELVK | 586.3609 | 2 | 35 | 580.6-598.4 | 32.8 | 872.5451 771.4975 700.4604 172.1081 |
| 525-534 | K[1Ac]TALVELVK | 585.8583 | 2 | 35 | 580.6-598.4 | 33.7 | 872.5452 299.1714 771.4975 700.4604 |
| 526-534 | QTLALVELVK | 500.8055 | 2 | 24 | 496-501.4 | 32.1 | 587.3763 488.3079 771.4975 624.3352 |
| 526-534 | Q[Dea]TALVELVK | 501.2975 | 2 | 25 | 500.9-503.4 | 34.31 | 587.3763 488.3079 397.2082 |
| 526-534 | Q[PGT]TALVELVK | 492.2922 | 2 | 23 | 491.9-497 | 33.8 | 587.3763 488.3079 771.4975 379.1976 |
| 526-534 | Q[PGT][1Ac]TALVELVK | 513.2975 | 2 | 27 | 507.4-514.4 | 48.63 | 587.3763 700.4604 237.087 308.1241 |
| 526-534 | Q[TDy]TALVELVK | 491.8002 | 2 | 22 | 481.4-492.1 | 32.07 | 624.3352 737.4.192 396.2241 836.4876 |
| 546-557 | AVMDFAAFKEV | 671.821 | 2 | 42 | 669.4-673 | 44.6 | 1172.5292 1041.4888 926.4618 664.3665 |
| 546-557 | AVM[2Ox]DDFAAFKEV | 687.8159 | 2 | 45 | 686.4-693.5 | 39.4 | 1204.5191 1041.4888 811.4349 664.3665 |
| 546-557 | AVM[Ox]DDFAAFKEV | 679.8185 | 2 | 43 | 672.682.5 | 38.1 | 1041.4988 1188.5242 664.3665 811.4349 |
| 561-573 | ADDKETC[CAM]FAEEGK | 500.5488 | 3 | 24 | 496-501.1 | 13.8 | 533.2566 680.325 462.2195 1070.4459 |
| 561-574 | ADDKETC[CAM]FAEEGKK | 543.2471 | 3 | 30 | 538.6-547.5 | 5.7 | 661.3515 590.3144 808.4199 820.3142 |
| 565-574 | ETC[CAM]FAEEGK | 400.1851 | 3 | 13 | 397.9-409.4 | 5.8 | 590.3144 661.3515 461.2718 332.2292 |
| 574-585 | KLVAAASQAAALGL | 571.3506 | 2 | 33 | 565.4-575.7 | 32.8 | 840.4938 769.4567 953.5778 698.4196 |
| 575-584 | LVAVASQAAALG | 450.7611 | 2 | 17 | 441-452 | 23.54 | 641.3617 712.3988 570.3246 213.1598 |
| 575-585 | LVAVASQAAALGL | 507.3031 | 2 | 26 | 502.4-507.4 | 37.9 | 189.1234 712.3988 641.3617 132.1019 |
| 575-585 | LVAASQ[Dea]AALGL | 507.7951 | 2 | 27 | 507.4-514.4 | 39.9 | 189.1234 713.3828 132.1019 642.3457 |
| 575-585 | LVAASQ[Dea]AALGL | 1014.583 | 1 | 60 | 987-1089.8 | 39.9 | 713.3828 642.3457 826.4669 883.4884 |

Supplementary Figure 1: Representative MS/MS spectra of 6 peptides carrying different HSA PTMs

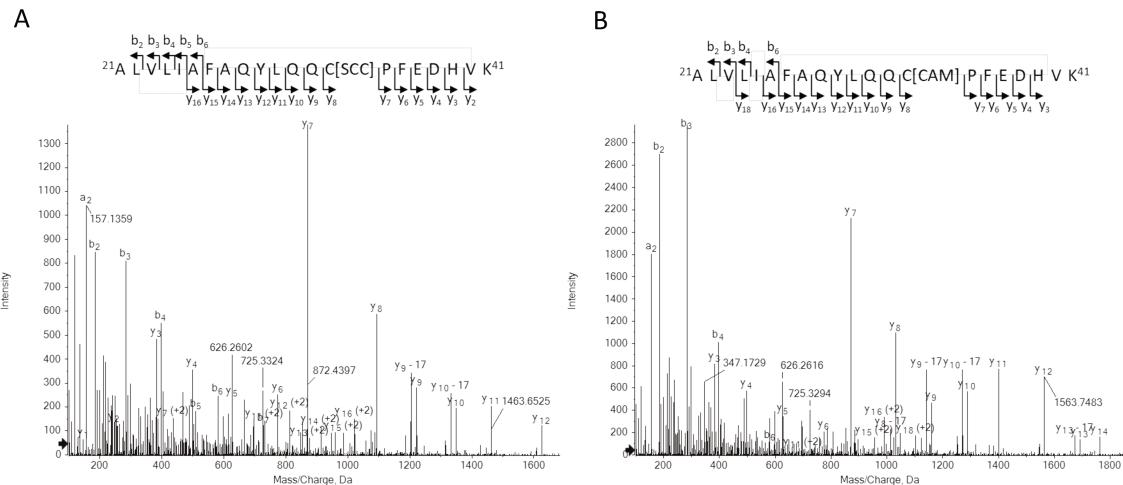


Figure S1: Representative MS/MS spectra of the $^{21}\text{ALVLIAFAQYLQQCPFEDHVK}^{41}$ peptide: carbamidomethylated [CAM] isoform corresponding to the non-modified isoform (A) or cysteinylated [SCC] isoform (B) on Cys34. The b/y fragments detected and annotated on each spectrum confirm the identified peptidic sequence. A minimum of 4 fragments among the most intense were used to create the SWATH library. When present, at least one fragment carrying the modification was added.

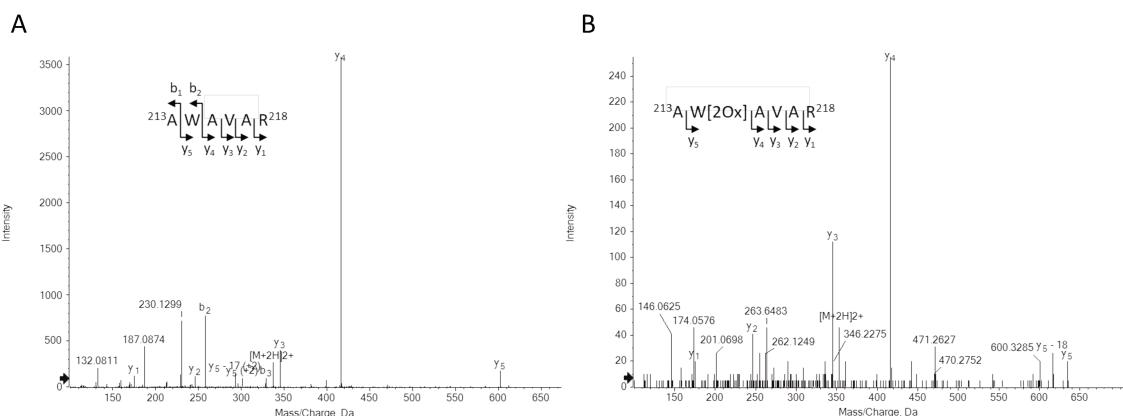


Figure S2: Representative MS/MS spectra of the $^{213}\text{A W A V A R}^{218}$ peptide: non-modified isoform (A) and isoform di-oxidized [2Ox] (B) on Trp214. The b/y fragments detected and annotated on each spectrum confirm the identified peptidic sequence. A minimum of 4 fragments among the most intense were used to create the SWATH library. When present, at least one fragment carrying the modification was added.

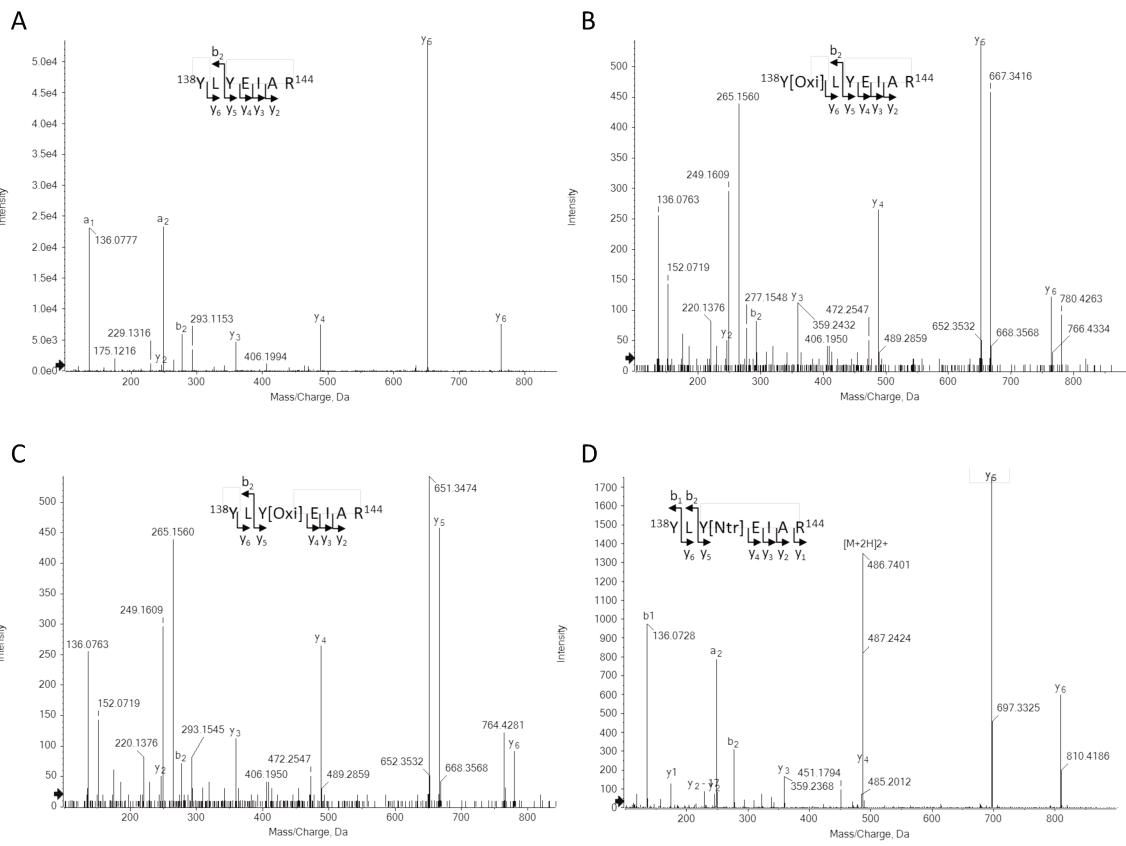


Figure S3: Representative MS/MS spectra of the ¹³⁸YLYEIAR¹⁴⁴ peptide: non-modified isoform (A), isoforms oxidized [Oxi] on Tyr138 (B), oxidized (C) or nitrated [Ntr] (D) on Tyr140. MS/MS spectra for oxidation on Trp138 and Trp140 are superimposed due to coelution. The b/y fragments detected and annotated on each spectrum confirm the identified peptidic sequence. A minimum of 4 fragments among the most intense were used to create the SWATH library. When present, at least one fragment carrying the modification was added.

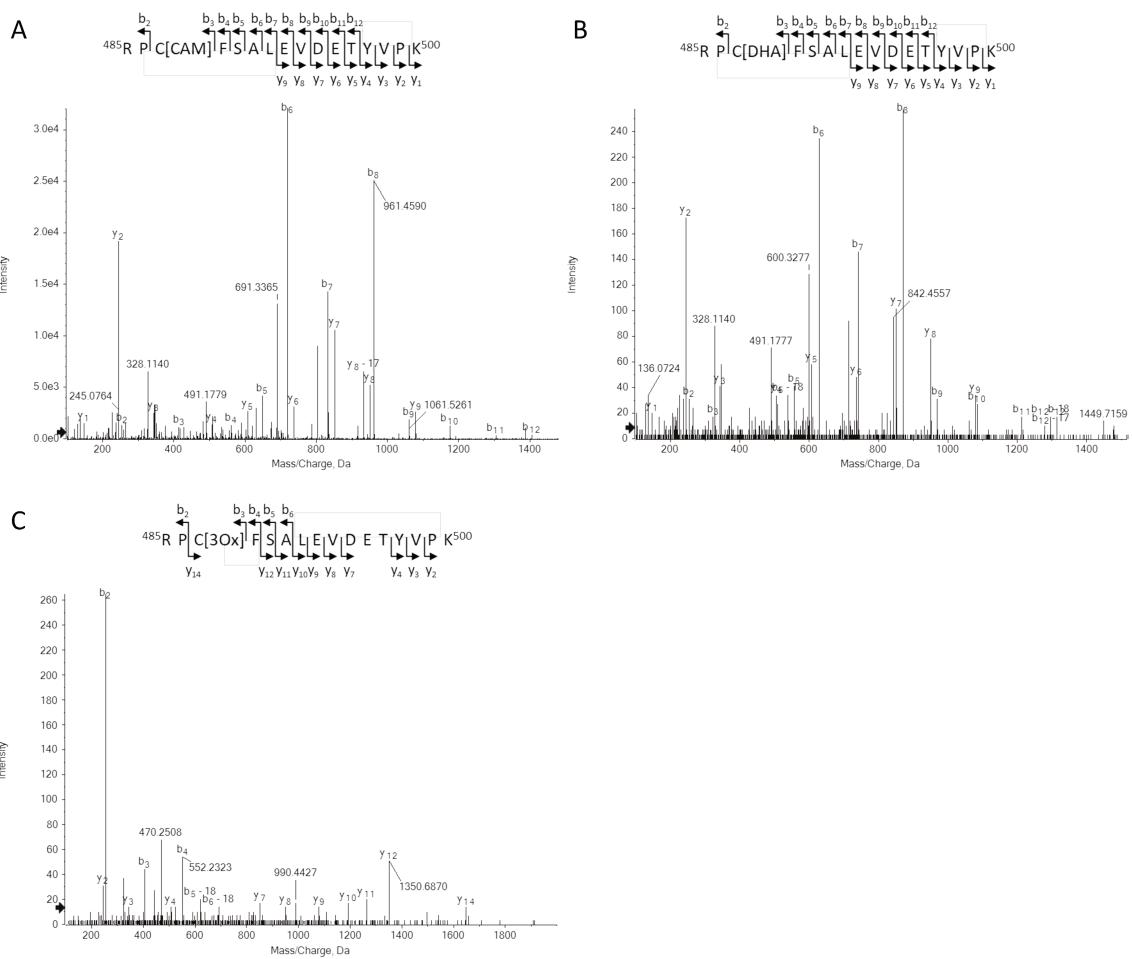


Figure S4: Representative MS/MS spectra of the ⁴⁸⁵RPCFSALEVDETYVPK⁵⁰⁰ peptide: carbamidomethylated [CAM] albumin corresponding to the non-modified isoform (A), isoforms carrying a dehydroalanine [DHA] (B) or a tri-oxidation [3Ox] (C) on Cys487. The b/y fragments detected and annotated on each spectrum confirm the identified peptidic sequence. A minimum of 4 fragments among the most intense were used to create the SWATH library. When present, at least one fragment carrying the modification was added.

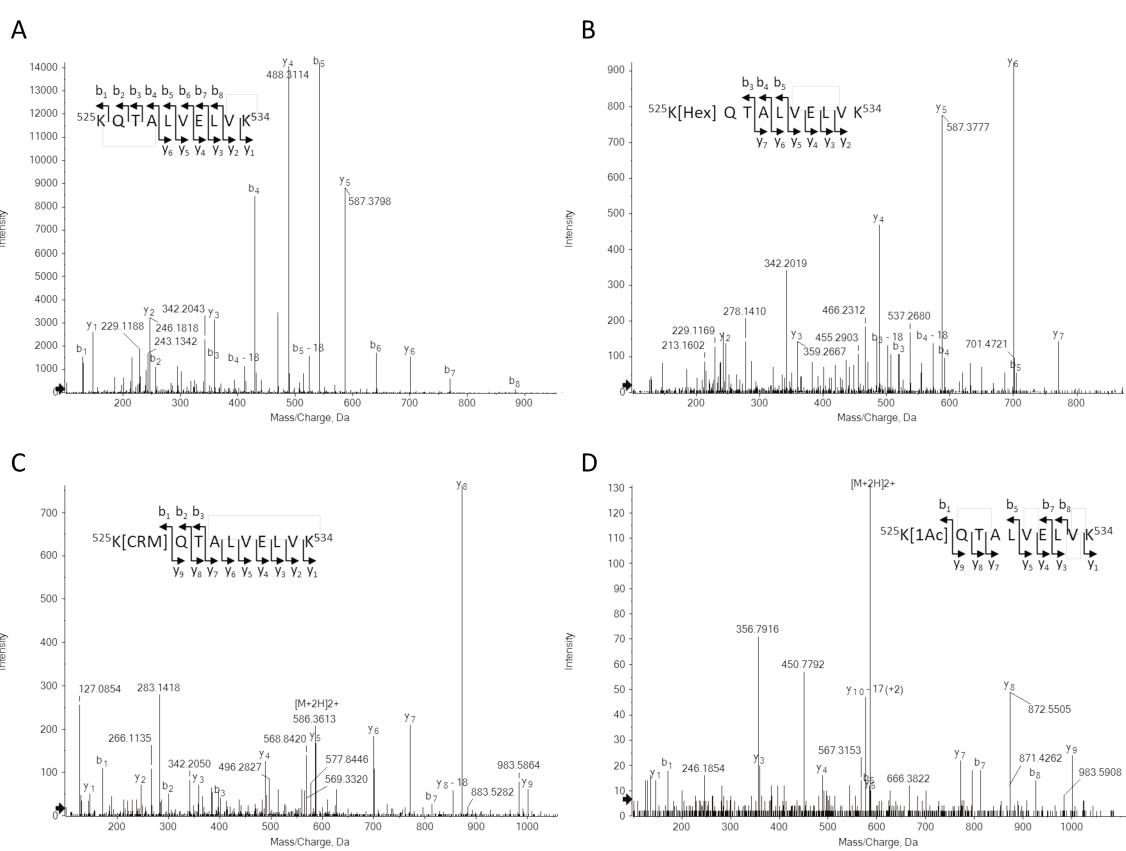


Figure S5: Representative MS/MS spectra of the $^{525}\text{KQTALVELVK}^{534}$ peptide: non-modified isoform (A), isoforms glycated [HEX] (B), carbamylated [CRM] (C) or acetylated [1Ac] (D) on Lys525. The b/y fragments detected and annotated on each spectrum confirm the identified peptidic sequence. A minimum of 4 fragments among the most intense were used to create the SWATH library. When present, at least one fragment carrying the modification was added.

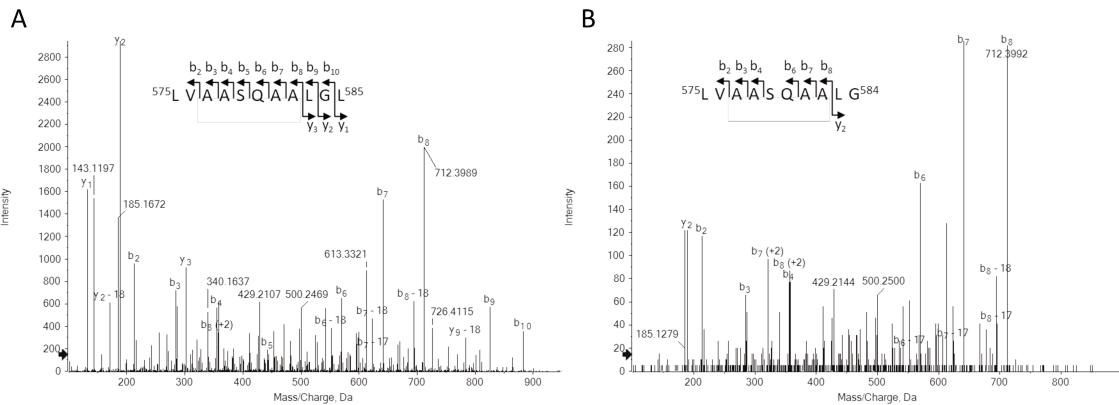


Figure S6: Representative MS/MS spectra of the native C-terminal peptide (A) or the truncated C-terminal peptide (B). The b/y fragments detected and annotated on each spectrum confirm the identified peptidic sequence. A minimum of 4 fragments among the most intense were used to create the SWATH library. When present, at least one fragment carrying the modification was added.

Annexe 2. Données supplémentaires (Article 2)

Supplementary materials and methods

Standards and reagents

Organic solvents and reagents were of analytical grade. Acetonitrile was obtained from Merck (Molsheim, France), methanol from VWR (Fontenay-sous-Bois, France), trifluoroacetic acid, formic acid, urea, dithiothreitol (DTT), iodoacetamide (IAA), ammonium bicarbonate and sodium chloride from Sigma (Saint-Quentin-Fallavier, France), trypsin from Promega (Charbonnières, France), beta-galactosidase digest from Sciex (Villebon, France). Amicon® Ultra 0.5 ml Centrifugal filters Ultracel® 10K were purchased from Millipore (Molsheim, France) and Oasis® HLB (3cc, 60mg) cartridges from Waters (Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines, France). Deionized water was prepared on a Direct-Q laboratory plant (Millipore, Molsheim, France).

Filter-Aided Sample Preparation (FASP)

The centrifugal filters were initially activated with 2 x 500 µl of deionized water and centrifuged for 10 min at 10°C and 14 000g, all other centrifugations were carried out under these conditions. A volume equivalent to 100 µg of proteins was then added and centrifuged. The concentrate was washed using 2 x 500 µl of an 8M urea solution and centrifuged. Afterwards, the filters were heated at 56°C for 15 min after addition of 100 µL of a 0.1M dithiothreitol solution prepared in the 8M urea solution and centrifuged. 100 µL of a 0.1M iodoacetamide solution prepared in the 8M urea solution were then added. The filters were maintained in the dark for 30 min and further centrifuged. The concentrate was washed with (i) 2 x 500 µl of an 8M urea solution, (ii) 2 x 500 µL of a 50mM ammonium bicarbonate solution and centrifuged. This latter step, by eliminating the residual urea, makes it possible to prevent any carbamylation due to the experimental conditions. The digestion was performed for 3 h at 37°C after addition of 75 µL of a solution prepared after mixing 1 µg of trypsin in the 50mM ammonium bicarbonate solution. Finally, the digested peptides were eluted by centrifugation after addition of 3 x 40 µL of the 50mM ammonium bicarbonate solution and 50 µL of a 0.5M sodium chloride solution.

Solid-Phase Extraction (SPE)

1.25 mL of a 0.5% formic acid solution was added to the digests. The mixture was then submitted to SPE on an Oasis® HLB cartridge, previously conditioned with 2 mL methanol and 2 mL of the 0.5% formic acid solution. After rinsing the cartridge with 3 mL of a methanol:water:formic acid (5:95:0.5, by volume) solution, elution was performed with 3 mL of a acetonitrile:water (70:30, by volume) solution. The extract was evaporated to dryness using a TurboVap® LV system (Biotage, Uppsala, Sweden) and reconstituted in 100 µL of a mixture of acetonitrile/water (2:98, by volume) with 0.1% trifluoroacetic acid. The extracts were kept at -80°C until analysis.

Liquid chromatography – mass spectrometry

- micro HPLC – Q-TOF detection

Chromatographic separation of tryptic peptides was performed using an Eksigent Ekspert nanoLC425 system (Sciex, Villebon, France) equipped with: a thermostated column compartment, a ten-port micro-switching valve and a thermostated microwell plate autosampler with a six-port micro-switching valve. Extracted samples were injected and concentrated on a trapping column packed with C18 PepMap 100 (0.5 cm×300 µm i.d., Thermo Scientific, Villebon, France) using solvent A, a mixture of acetonitrile/water (2:98, by volume) with 0.05% TFA, delivered at 10 µl/min. The trapping column was switched on-line with the analytical column, an Eksigent ChromXP C18CL PepMap 120Å (15 cm×0.3 mm i.d., Sciex, Villebon, France) after 3 min loading time. The chromatographic separation was performed using the abovementioned analytical system and elution column, and a 120 min curvilinear gradient of solvent C, a mixture of acetonitrile/water (95:5, by volume) with 0.1% FA in solvent B, an aqueous solution containing 0.1% FA, programmed as follows: 0–2 min, 2% C; 2–45 min, 2% to 25% C; 45–48 min, 25% to 95% C; 48–55 min, 95% C; 55–55.5 min, 95% to 2% C, equilibration with 2% C, at a constant flow rate of 3 µl/min.

Mass spectrometric detection was performed using a Q-TOF mass spectrometer (TripleTOF® 5600+, Sciex, Concord, Canada) equipped with a DuoSpray ion source and operated in the positive ionization mode. A beta-galactosidase solution was used for internal calibration every four samples. The source conditions were as follows: temperature, 200 °C; declustering potential (DP), 100 eV; curtain gas

(CUR), 30 units; ion source gas (GS1), 10 units; and ion-spray voltage floating, 5.5 kV. All MS parameters were controlled by Analyst® TF 1.7 (Sciex). Data were processed with PeakView® 2.1 (Sciex) and MultiQuant™ 3.0.1 software (Sciex).

All m/z ratios were first scanned using a TOF MS scan from m/z 400 and 1250 with an accumulation time of 125 ms, and dynamic background subtraction switched on. The 20 most intense ions with an intensity threshold above 100 cps were then selected as parent ions; each ion could be selected for a maximum of 3 occurrences and the ions previously selected were excluded for 20 s after 5 occurrences. The dependent scan corresponded to a product ion scan from m/z 100 to 2000 using rolling collision energy with a CE spread of 15 eV and an accumulation of 175 ms, in the high sensitivity mode, so that a complete cycle lasted 3.68 s

Library searching

Library search of the spectra obtained using Q-TOF in the IDA mode was performed in the Swissprot™ library using the Paragon® and Mascot® search algorithms provided with ProteinPilot™ software (version 5.0, Sciex). Only the sequences with the highest scores (99% confidence for Paragon or >50 for Mascot) were considered.

The proposed sequences were systematically checked using the peptide fragments option, accessible in PeakView® software. Only the most abundant peptide fragments perfectly matching the *in silico* fragmentation pattern were afterwards entered in our in-house library.

Liquid chromatography – mass spectrometry

Chromatographic separation was performed using a Shimadzu Nexera 2 LC system (Shimadzu, Noisiel, France) equipped with: a thermostated column compartment and a thermostated microwell plate autosampler with a six-port micro-switching valve. Extracted samples were injected on a CorteCS™ C18+, 2.7 µm (2.1 mm×150 mm, Waters, Guyancourt, France), thermostated at 60°C and using a gradient of phase A, 0,1 % acetic acid in water and phase B, 0.1% acetic acid in a mixture of methanol and water (80:20, by volume). The chromatographic separation was performed using the abovementioned analytical system and elution column, and a 30 min linear gradient, programmed as

follows: 0–1 min, 2% B; 1–10 min, 2% to 15% B; 10–18 min, 15% to 40% B; 18–21 min, 40% to 55% B; 21–22 min, 55% to 95 % B; 22–25 min, 95% B; 25–25.2 min, 95% to 2 % B; 25.2–30 min, equilibration with 2 % B, at a constant flow rate of 250 µl/min.

Mass spectrometric detection was performed using an LCMS 8060 triple quadrupole mass spectrometer (Shimadzu Corporation, Marne-la-Vallée, France) operated in the positive ionization mode. The source conditions were as follows: interface voltage: 1.5 kV; nebulizing gas flow: 3 L/min; heating gas flow: 15 L/min; interface temperature: 300 °C; desolvation line (DL) temperature: 250 °C; heat block temperature: 400 °C; drying gas flow: 5 L/min, collision gas pressure 300 kPa.

Table S1: MRM transitions, retention time and mass spectrometric conditions of the selected peptides

| Compound | | Precursor ion | Product ion | | | | | | Retention time (min) |
|------------------|--------------------------|---------------|-------------|-----|--------|-----|--------|-----|----------------------|
| | | | m/z | m/z | CE | m/z | CE | m/z | |
| Peptide 1 | LVRPEVDVMCTAFHDNEETFLKK | 695.35 | 809.45 | 25 | 870.40 | 25 | 908.50 | 25 | 21.2 |
| | LVRPEVDVMCTAFHDNEETFLK*K | 706.10 | 809.45 | 25 | 891.90 | 25 | 908.5 | 25 | 22.1 |
| Peptide2 | LKCASLQK | 474.3 | 706.35 | 25 | 546.30 | 25 | 834.45 | 25 | 6 |
| | LKCASLQK* | 495.75 | 706.35 | 25 | 546.30 | 25 | 877.45 | 25 | 9.5-10.5 |
| Peptide3 | KQTALVELVK | 564.85 | 1000.60 | 25 | 872.65 | 25 | 770.45 | 25 | 15 |
| | K*QTALVELVK | 586.35 | 1000.60 | 25 | 872.65 | 25 | 770.45 | 25 | 18.5 |

Modifications post-traductionnelles de l'albumine comme biomarqueurs d'atteinte hépatique

L'utilisation de stratégies de diagnostic précoce est primordiale pour maintenir les patients atteints d'hépatopathies dans un état stable et pour retarder la décompensation, et ainsi améliorer la prise en charge médicale. L'albumine (HSA) subit plusieurs modifications post-traductionnelles (PTMs) dans les hépatocytes, et la pertinence clinique de certaines de ces modifications chimiques et structurales dans les maladies hépatiques avancées permet de les considérer comme des biomarqueurs potentiels.

Nos travaux ont montré que les capacités de liaison de certains ligands via l'élaboration du Serum Enhanced Binding Test (SEB Test) mesurées par spectrométrie de masse à plasma inductif (ICP-MS), sont significativement différentes entre les patients cirrhotiques et les patients sans dysfonctionnement hépatique. Grâce à une approche par chromatographie à haute résolution (LC-QTOF), des échantillons de sérum provenant de sujets sans et avec dysfonctionnements hépatiques ont été analysés en utilisant des approches descendantes (TD) et ascendantes (BU) afin d'étudier les modifications chimiques de l'HSA exprimées par la formation d'isoformes de l'HSA, et la diminution des capacités de liaison chez les cirrhotiques a été mise en parallèle avec la formation d'isoformes de l'HSA significativement plus élevées chez ce type de patients. Des expérimentations animales ont également montré la précocité de survenue de ces modifications de l'HSA au cours d'un dysfonctionnement hépatique chronique ainsi que la présence de profil « signature » en fonction du type d'atteinte d'hépatique.

Nos résultats suggèrent que les modifications post-traductionnelles de l'HSA dues à un dysfonctionnement hépatique pourraient être révélées précocement en identifiant et quantifiant les isoformes de l'HSA par LC-QTOF et en mesurant la fraction non liée de ligands spécifiques enrichis en sérum via le SEB Test. Le SEB Test devrait être plus facile à mettre en œuvre en clinique que le profilage des isoformes d'albumine.

Mots-clés : Albumine, Atteintes hépatiques, PTMs, SEB Test, ICP-MS, LC-QTOF

Post-translational modifications of albumin as biomarkers of liver injury

The use of early diagnosis strategies is essential to maintain patients with liver disease in a stable state and to delay decompensation, and thus improve medical care. Albumin (HSA) undergoes several post-translational modifications (PTMs) in hepatocytes, and the clinical relevance of some of these chemical and structural modifications in advanced liver diseases allows them to be considered as potential biomarkers.

Our work has shown that the binding capacities of certain ligands via the development of the Serum Enhanced Binding Test (SEB Test) measured by inductively coupled plasma mass spectrometry (ICP-MS), are significantly different between cirrhotic patients and patients without liver dysfunction. Using a high-resolution chromatography (LC-QTOF) approach, serum samples from subjects without and with hepatic dysfunctions were analyzed using top-down (TD) and bottom-up (BU) approaches to study chemical changes. of HSA expressed by the formation of HSA isoforms, and the decrease in binding capacities in cirrhotics was paralleled by the formation of significantly higher HSA isoforms in this type of patients. Animal experiments have also shown the early onset of these changes in SAH during chronic hepatic dysfunction as well as the presence of a “signature” profile depending on the type of liver disease.

Our results suggest that post-translational modifications of SAH due to hepatic dysfunction could be revealed early by identifying and quantifying SAH isoforms by LC-QTOF and measuring the unbound fraction of specific ligands enriched in serum via the SEB Test. The SEB Test should be easier to implement in the clinic than albumin isoform profiling.

Keywords: Albumin, Liver injuries, PTMs, SEB Test, ICP-MS, LC-QTOF

