

Lytic Cycle of *Toxoplasma gondii*: 15 Years Later

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Abstract

Toxoplasmosis is the clinical and pathological consequence of acute infection with the obligate intracellular apicomplexan parasite *Toxoplasma gondii*. Symptoms result from tissue destruction that accompanies lytic parasite growth. This review updates current understanding of the host cell invasion, parasite replication, and eventual egress that constitute the lytic cycle, as well as the ways *T. gondii* manipulates host cells to ensure its survival. Since the publication of a previous iteration of this review 15 years ago, important advances have been made in our molecular understanding of parasite growth and mechanisms of host cell egress, and knowledge of the parasite's manipulation of the host has rapidly progressed. Here we cover molecular advances and current conceptual frameworks that include each of these topics, with an eye to what may be known 15 years from now.

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INTRODUCTION

A review of the *Toxoplasma gondii* lytic cycle first appeared under the same title as this review 15 years ago (17). At that time the lytic cycle was differentiated into five steps: attachment, invasion, vacuole formation, replication, and egress, with calcium signaling identified as a critical regulator. Although these basic steps have not changed, new findings facilitated by advances in technology and the improved experimental access to *Toxoplasma* have improved our understanding of their connections and details within them. First, egress is now viewed as linked to and immediately preceding invasion since many shared features have become apparent. Second, the understanding of the structure and function of the parasitophorous vacuole and its interface with the host cell has seen a tumultuous advance over the last 15 years. Finally, molecular detail on signaling pathways has permeated each step of the lytic cycle; each of the following sections discusses these pathways.

Toxoplasma gondii

Toxoplasma is a member of the Apicomplexa, a phylum comprising more than 5,000 protozoa that are almost exclusively obligate intracellular pathogens of both vertebrate and invertebrate animals. Together with the ciliates and dinoflagellates, the Apicomplexa make up the superphylum Alveolata. All alveolates share a peripheral alveolar membrane system; in the Apicomplexa it is known as the inner membrane complex (IMC). The parasitic lifestyle of the Apicomplexa contrasts with the variety of lifestyles found among the ciliates and dinoflagellates. These evolutionary distinctions suggest that the Apicomplexa evolved from free-living, photosynthetic organisms into the diverse extant obligate intracellular parasites. Within the Apicomplexa, *Toxoplasma* is a member of the cyst-forming coccidia.

Because an excellent review chronicling the discovery of *Toxoplasma* is available (43), we focus here on the key aspects of the parasite's life cycle. The asexual, or vegetative, stages of *Toxoplasma*

IMC (inner membrane complex): the peripheral alveolar membrane cytoskeleton system defining the superphylum Alveolata, which comprises the dinoflagellates, ciliates, and Apicomplexa

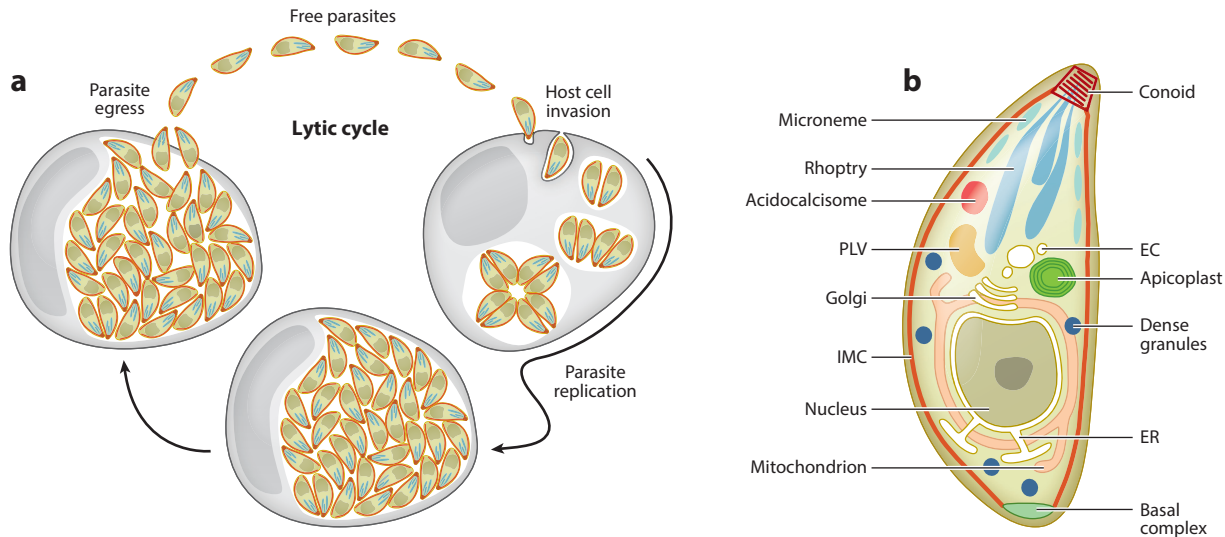


Figure 1

The *Toxoplasma* lytic cycle and basic tachyzoite organization. (a) The lytic cycle of invasion, replication, and egress. (b) Organelles in the secretory pathway are shown in white and the secretory organelles themselves in three shades of blue. Abbreviations: EC, endosome compartment; ER, endoplasmic reticulum; IMC, inner membrane complex; PLV, plant-like vacuole.

have been encountered in virtually every mammal and bird tested, whereas the coccidian, or sexual development, stages are exclusive to cats of any sort (Felids). The typical route of infection for coccidian parasites like *Toxoplasma* is through sporozoites developing within the oocysts shed in the feces of the definitive host. When an intermediate host ingests a sporulated oocyst the sporozoites will excyst in the small intestine and infect epithelial cells. Subsequently, these sporozoites will develop into tachyzoites that replicate inside the parasitophorous vacuole established upon invasion. Following replication they will actively egress from the host cell, which will be destroyed in the process. Freed tachyzoites will continue this cycle of invasion, replication, and egress—the lytic cycle (**Figure 1a**). Tachyzoites spread throughout all tissues in the body until they are controlled by a potent host immune response that triggers the parasite to differentiate into the bradyzoite stage. Bradyzoites are the persistent stage of *Toxoplasma* infection and are maintained for the life span of the host. Consumption of bradyzoite tissue cysts from infected animals is a second route of horizontal transmission and is the route of infection for the definitive (feline) host. Within a host, bradyzoites can differentiate back into tachyzoites upon loss of a potent immune response, which is a major cause of *Toxoplasma*-associated morbidity and mortality in immunocompromised humans. Finally, unlike most coccidians, *Toxoplasma* is capable of vertical transmission during which tachyzoites cross the placenta and infect the developing fetus (congenital infection).

Toxoplasmosis

Clinical manifestations associated with *Toxoplasma* infection are very diverse and range from myocarditis, ocular toxoplasmosis (retinochoroiditis, choroiditis), encephalitis, and hydrocephalus to mental diseases (102). Although local rates vary tremendously, on a global scale one-third of the human population is infected with *Toxoplasma*. Clinical disease due to *Toxoplasma* is not common because it is predominantly the fast-replicating tachyzoite stage that is responsible for tissue

Moving junction:

protein complex at the host-parasite interface of invasion; composed of rhoptry neck proteins and microneme-secreted AMA1

destruction resulting in clinical manifestations, and this stage is typically well controlled by the host immune response. Bradyzoite infection is latent and does not generate any clear clinical disease. Two conditions confer heightened risks for clinical disease: (a) immunosuppression, which typically results in bradyzoites converting back to the tachyzoite stage, and (b) primary infection during pregnancy, which can result in congenital infection of the fetus, where lack of a mature immune system facilitates uncurbed tachyzoite replication.

HOST CELL EGRESS AND INVASION

Intracellular and extracellular parasites represent two distinct biological states. Extracellular parasites do not divide, are highly motile, extrude the conoid, and secrete the contents of their microneme organelles. Intracellular parasites divide, are nonmotile, and do not secrete micronemes or extrude their conoid (see **Figure 1b** for identity of the organelles). The switch between states is accompanied by many dramatic changes in gene expression (54, 83), mRNA availability for translation (86), and translocation of the glycolytic enzymes from the cytoplasm to the cortex (120). Motility, and therefore secretion of motility-associated motors and adhesins from the micronemes, is required for the portion of the parasite life cycle that spans egress, movement to a new host cell, and subsequent invasion. Because of these similar requirements, egress is considered the first step in invasion (66). However, our molecular understanding of invasion and egress has begun to indicate that, although gliding and secretion are required for both processes, several aspects are specifically tailored to only either egress or invasion. Host cell calpains, for example, disassemble the host cell's cytoskeleton to forge a path out for the parasite and are only required for egress (32). The formation of the moving junction (MJ) (described in detail below) is likewise required only for invasion.

Triggers and Signaling Toward Egress

Activation toward the extracellular state can be considered the first step of the lytic cycle. The proposed triggers can be divided into those that occur in the presence of a host immune response and those that occur in the absence of a host immune response (summarized in **Figure 2a**). Several arms of host immunity respond to *Toxoplasma* infection, and some are paths toward egress (98, 115, 142). Best understood are perforin and death-receptor (Fas/FasL)-mediated damage to the host cell following a cytotoxic CD8⁺ T cell response (116). Damage to the host cell leads to a drop in intracellular K⁺, which triggers egress (105).

In the absence of an immune response, parasites replicate to maturity and initiate egress through several different mechanisms. One such mechanism involves abscisic acid (ABA), which the parasite continuously produces during intracellular replication. When the concentration of ABA rises above a threshold (quorum sensing), the parasite egresses (108). It is unclear how ABA is sensed or how its signal is transduced, but interestingly, pharmacological interference with ABA production leads to enhanced bradyzoite differentiation, indicating ABA may play multiple roles during the parasite's life cycle.

In addition, parasite replication leads to acidification of the parasitophorous vacuole. Egress is also triggered when decreasing pH overcomes the suppression of microneme secretion and motility by K⁺ ions (123). This implicates K⁺ in egress, though its principal role appears to be during invasion when the parasite is in the intracellular environment, as discussed below. The pH change is especially relevant to perforin-like protein 1 (PLP1), a microneme protein (MIC protein) that inserts itself in membranes at low pH and is critical to the formation of pores in the vacuolar and host cell's plasma membranes to forge a path out of the host cell (74). The mechanisms of

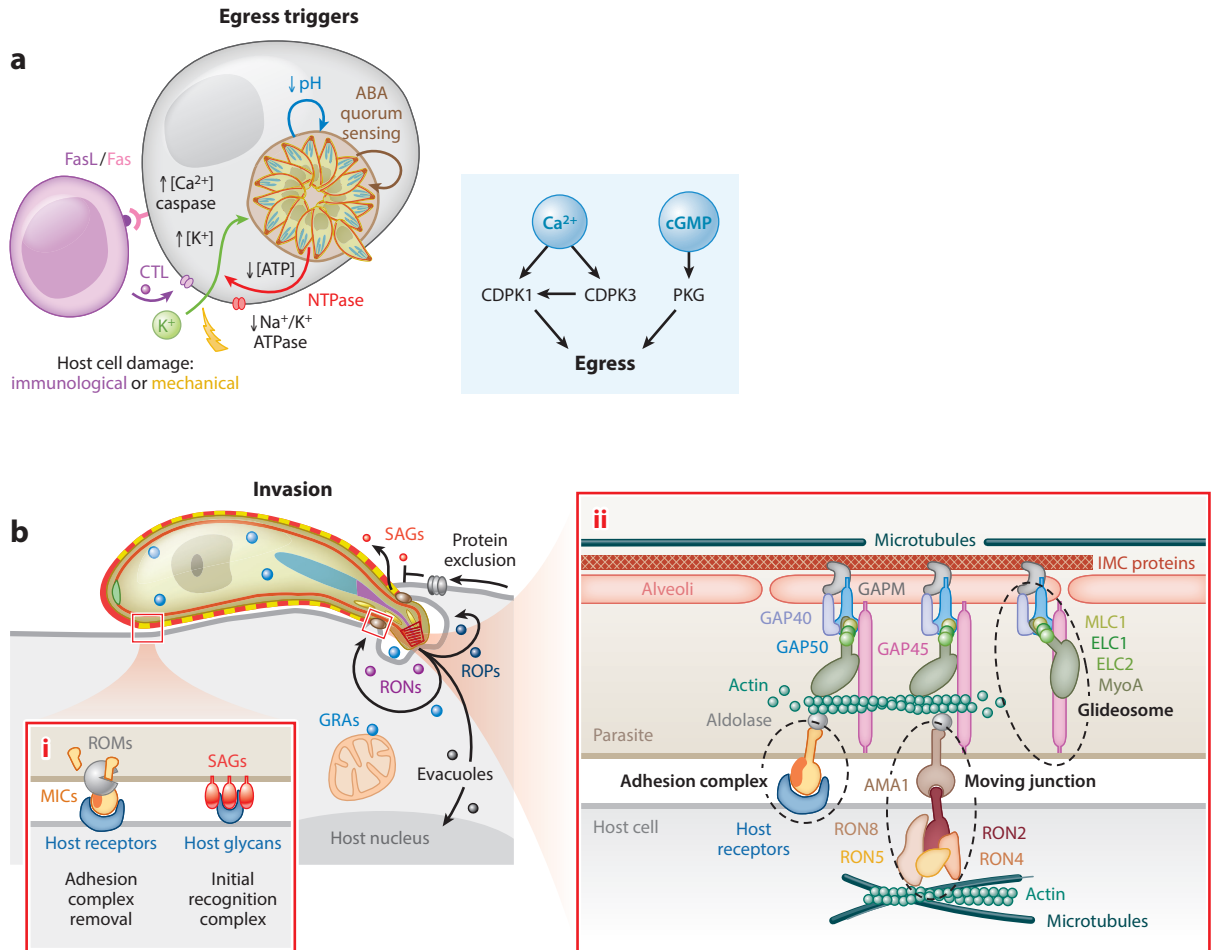


Figure 2

Activation of egress, gliding motility, and host cell invasion. (a) Schematic overview of described egress stimuli. The cytotoxic T cell response releases perforin, which inserts itself into the plasma membrane. Fas receptor activation induces host cell necrosis rather than apoptosis. (*Inset*) Summary of Ca^{2+} and cGMP secondary messenger signaling following triggers to egress. (b) Invasion gliding motility and glideosome composition (modified from Reference 15 with permission): (i) initial attachment and adhesion release; (ii) molecular composition and mechanism of adhesion, gliding motility, the glideosome, and the moving junction. The family of actin-binding proteins is not depicted. Abbreviations: ABA, abscisic acid; AMA1, apical membrane antigen 1; CDPK, Ca^{2+} -dependent protein kinase; cGMP, cyclic guanosine monophosphate; ELC, essential light chain; GAP, glideosome-associated protein; IMC, inner membrane complex; MIC, microneme protein; MLC, myosin light chain; MyoA, myosin A; PKG, protein kinase G; RON, rhopty neck protein; ROM, rhopty bulb protein; SAG, glycosylphosphatidylinositol (GPI)-anchored surface antigen.

vacuole acidification are currently unknown. Several parasite H^+ -ATPases have been described, but their role in this process is poorly understood. The relative topologies of the pH and ABA pathways are also unknown, and they may intersect or run parallel to one another (123).

Yet another player associated with egress is a family of nucleotide triphosphate-degrading enzymes (NTPases) that the parasite secretes into the vacuole. It has been postulated that the NTPases increasingly deplete host cell ATP, leading to the Na^+/K^+ -ATPase pumps running dry, a drop in K^+ , and eventually egress. It is unclear, however, whether the redox state within the

CDPKs

(Ca²⁺-dependent protein kinases):

apicomplexan protein family that includes both a calmodulin-like Ca²⁺-binding domain and a Ser/Thr protein kinase domain

vacuole activates the NTPases, and thus it remains unclear whether the NTPases act as a primary sensory pathway or are secondary effectors (134).

Egress of *T. gondii* from the host cell clearly involves various mechanisms. Individual pathways are tuned to different environmental cues, and multiple pathways may communicate and converge. Genetic and pharmacological manipulations can trigger dramatically inflated vacuole sizes that eventually physically rupture the host cell in the absence of regulated egress (e.g., 32, 46, 74). Hence, timing of egress is controlled by the parasite and is not due to a simple physical rupture of the host cell.

Ca²⁺ and cGMP. The signals triggering egress are transduced by two secondary messengers: cytoplasmic Ca²⁺ and cyclic guanosine monophosphate (cGMP). The essential role of Ca²⁺ in egress and invasion is well documented (for recent reviews see 109, 119). Chelation of intracellular Ca²⁺ abrogates motility and microneme secretion, whereas increase of cytoplasmic Ca²⁺ concentration by ionophores triggers egress, enhances microneme secretion and motility, and increases invasion capacity (146). Ca²⁺ stored in the acidocalcisome and the endoplasmic reticulum can be released upon stimulation, whereas Ca²⁺ stored in the mitochondrion plays a minor role (109, 146). Pharmacological evidence indicates the presence of 1,4,5-triphosphate inositol (IP₃)-responsive channels (28) and cADPR (produced by ADP-ribosyl cyclase)-sensing, ryanodine-response channels in the endoplasmic reticulum (34), but molecular evidence for these channels is lacking in the genome (91). In addition, there is a putative role for Ca²⁺ from outside the parasite (112). The failure to bioinformatically identify these Ca²⁺ channels, which are almost certainly present, suggests that the primary structure of *T. gondii* Ca²⁺ channels deviates dramatically from the well-studied model organism channels. Despite this gap in knowledge, the identities of some other operators acting on Ca²⁺ in the parasite—such as sarco/endoplasmic reticulum Ca²⁺ ATPase (SERCA) channels in the endoplasmic reticulum (107), a vacuolar Ca²⁺-dependent ATPase pump in the acidocalcisome (92), and a Na⁺/H⁺ exchanger that is involved in Ca²⁺ homeostasis (8)—have been established.

Although the upstream regulators are unknown, cGMP is produced by membrane-bound guanylyl cyclases and degraded by cyclic nucleotide phosphodiesterases. The only known effector of cGMP in apicomplexans is protein kinase G (PKG). A recent study in *Plasmodium berghei* found that the production of lipids—notably, the production of phosphatidylinositol (4,5)-bisphosphate [PI(4,5)P₂] by PIP5K (22)—is controlled by PKG activity. In turn, PI(4,5)P₂ is the substrate for phosphoinositol protein lipase C (PI-PLC), which then produces the secondary messenger IP₃, triggering the release of intracellular Ca²⁺ through IP₃-responsive Ca²⁺ channels. These data identify an upstream connection between PKG and Ca²⁺ levels that likely applies to *Toxoplasma*. This extrapolation is supported by inhibition of *Toxoplasma* P-glycoprotein transporters, which results in reduced or aberrant lipid synthesis and defects in Ca²⁺ signaling, although it cannot be excluded that this effect originates in the residence of the transporters in the acidocalcisome (19). PKG activation also leads to phosphorylation of IMC proteins, glideosome (motility) proteins, and vesicular trafficking proteins, any or all of which may be important for parasite egress.

Global phosphoproteomic studies (110, 143) and specific studies of two Ca²⁺-dependent protein kinases, CDPK1 (88) and CDPK3 (144), have generated insights into specific phosphorylation events associated with Ca²⁺ release. The global studies have identified hundreds of phosphoproteins involved in signal transduction cascades (kinases, phosphatases), the regulation of exocytosis, the cortical cytoskeleton (IMC), and the control of parasite motility, as well as many hypothetical proteins with as yet unknown functions. The identification of the IMC in both cGMP- and Ca²⁺-dependent processes is intriguing, as this structure is the platform for motility.

CDPKs are kinases not found in the mammalian host and have therefore garnered significant interest as potential drug targets. CDPK1 is required for microneme secretion (77, 89), while

CPDK3 is involved in the K^+ -mediated egress pathway (55, 90, 95). Target identification for CDPK1 did not immediately provide intuitive insights into its mechanism of action (88), whereas the CDPK3 target identification hinted at roles upstream of other Ca^{2+} -dependent signaling pathways, in ion homeostasis and metabolism (144).

Gliding Motility

Gliding motility is considered critical to *Toxoplasma* tachyzoite invasion of host cells. However, the role of gliding in invasion is not uniquely conserved across apicomplexan parasites, and the bigger common denominator is that the innovation of gliding permitted the crossing of biological barriers, greatly expanding host range and tissue tropism (59). Although tachyzoites demonstrate three different forms of motility on slides—circular gliding (full circles), helical gliding (half-circle followed by a flip), and twirling (parasite spins its apex while standing on its base) (63)—this translates into spiral movements in a 3D gel matrix (84). The concept of apicomplexan gliding motility is based on the following principles: (a) microneme secretion of adhesion molecules on the apical end and their insertion into the parasite's plasma membrane; (b) anchoring of the adhesion molecules on the cytoplasmic side to short actin filaments; (c) apical-to-basal translocation of actin filaments by a myosin motor; (d) anchoring of the myosin motor in the IMC membrane; and (e) release of MIC proteins on the basal end by intramembrane cutting rhomboid proteases [Figure 2b(i)] (References 96 and 129 are recent reviews).

Microneme secretion and microneme proteins. Micronemes are located on the apical end of the parasite (Figure 1) and are secreted in a Ca^{2+} -dependent fashion. Although an attractive model was that the micronemes merge with the rhoptry neck to purge their contents into the outside milieu, genetic ablation of rhoptries does not impair microneme secretion, suggesting a direct fusion with the plasma membrane (11). Germane to motility, several microneme protein complexes recognize a variety of substrates—notably, glycosaminoglycans present in the extracellular matrix and on the surface of host cells (for a recent review see 29).

The glideosome. The engine powering gliding motility is myosin A (MyoA) (97), a class XIVa myosin contained in a protein complex known as the glideosome [Figure 2b(ii)]. MyoA is in complex with glideosome-associated proteins 45 and 50 (GAP45, GAP50) (71). GAP50 is the main anchor in the IMC, whereas GAP45 spans the space between the plasma membrane and the IMC outer membrane through lipid modifications anchoring it in both membranes (52), which likely secures the distance between the two membranes so that the motor can reach the actin filaments associated with the MIC proteins. Furthermore, the glideosome contains a myosin light chain (MLC1) and two essential light chains (ELC1, ELC2) that regulate the activity of the motor: The MLC1 phosphorylation and Ca^{2+} binding by the ELCs change their conformations and modulate MyoA activity (110, 140). In addition, the phosphorylation state of MyoA itself is critical (140), underscoring the multiple levels of Ca^{2+} -mediated control that prevent premature motor activation, thereby curbing premature egress.

Actin polymerization. The spatiotemporal control of actin polymerization is critical for activation of motility. Compared to mammals, Apicomplexa encode a limited set of a dozen actin-interacting proteins (9). The cytoplasmic concentration of G-actin is relatively high (8–10 μ M), whereas F-actin is not readily detectable (40). Actin only polymerizes in very short (100 nm), unstable filaments (128, 132). F-actin in normal parasites is observed in cables or bundles restricted to areas where there is contact between the parasite and host cell or substrate (147). Branched

Gliding motility: adhesion-dependent, actinomyosin-based motility underlying tissue migration and host cell invasion of Apicomplexa

networks are not observed, which is consistent with the genetic absence of ARP2/3, required to form actin branches in other systems. These observations fit a model wherein filaments are only formed transiently and where the spatiotemporal dynamics of filament formation likely controls the proper directionality and timing of motility. A key question relevant to the Apicomplexa is how the actin filaments are connected with the cytoplasmic domain of the MIC adhesion protein complexes. For several years the glycolytic enzyme aldolase was a strong candidate, but recently, genetic deletion of aldolase was demonstrated not to block invasion, disproving this model (131). Therefore, the connection of actin to the adhesive proteins secreted from the micronemes is still an open question.

Rhomboid proteases. Transportation of MIC protein complexes to the basal end would lead to a pileup, unless the complexes were released from the parasite. This release is facilitated by several rhomboid proteases localized at the basal end of the parasite that have the ability to cleave transmembrane domains inside the membrane-spanning sequence (24, 42). Hence, when gliding, the parasites leave behind trails of MIC proteins.

Invasion

Following egress, tachyzoites glide around in the extracellular environment. Compared with the time spent intracellularly this condition is of relatively short duration, but it provides the parasite opportunities to disseminate to new tissues.

Attachment. The first contact of the parasite with a potentially new host cell is through its surface protein coat. The parasite is covered in glycosylphosphatidylinositol (GPI)-anchored surface antigens known as SAGs. The SAG1 structure recognizes sulfated proteoglycans on the host cell (65). This model is supported by the inhibition of host cell attachment in cells with a reduced amount of SAG1 on their surface (16), or upon addition of exogenous glycans (27).

Moving junction. Following initial recognition, the parasite is triggered to engage in a tighter interaction. This is mediated by the secreted MIC proteins and subsequently by the formation of the MJ (73). The MJ is a cooperative structure between the microneme protein apical membrane antigen 1 (AMA1) and proteins residing in the rhoptry neck (RON proteins). RON proteins are secreted before the proteins residing in the rhoptry bulb (ROPs) (3). The presence of rhoptry proteins in the host cell's cytoplasm implies that a breach in the host's plasma membrane is made (62), but the molecular details of this breach are as yet unclear. In contrast to the Ca^{2+} -based regulation of micronemes, the signals for rhoptry release remain obscure. It has been shown that AMA1 (99), MIC8 (76), and RON5 (10) are required for rhoptry release, but the underlying mechanisms are unknown. In the MJ, AMA1 is anchored in the parasite's plasma membrane and interacts with the RON complex anchored in the host cell's plasma membrane [Figure 2*b(ii)*]. Direct interaction between AMA1 and the transmembrane domain protein RON2 has been resolved at the molecular level. In addition, RON8 mediates the contact of the complex with the host cytoskeleton and is required for proper interaction (135), whereas RON4 and RON5 appear to have a more structural function in organizing the architecture of the complex (15).

Entry. After establishing the MJ, the parasite lunges forward, thereby invaginating the host cell plasma membrane, which becomes the parasitophorous vacuole membrane (PVM). Interestingly, the MJ functions as a sieve for proteins in the host cell's plasma membrane, excluding all transmembrane proteins and proteins in lipid rafts (102). In effect, this results in a vacuolar compartment

lacking receptors for the intracellular host cell machinery and yields a nonfusogenic membrane that is refractory to fusion with the host cell membrane trafficking machinery.

Motility. One of the unanswered questions surrounding host cell invasion is whether motility is a strict requirement. It has been shown that many of the glideosome components are required for efficient invasion but that a fraction of the parasites are still able to invade and develop normally. This suggests a potential alternative mechanism powering the entry of the host cell (44); plasticity between different myosins has also been demonstrated (51). Therefore, the mechanism of host cell invasion is currently a dynamic area of research.

PARASITE REPLICATION

The parasite employs a unique mode of cell division known as endodyogeny. Endodyogeny unfolds through the formation of two daughter cells within the boundaries of a mature parent parasite that is consumed at the end of the process (49, 130, 136) (**Figure 3**). As discussed in detail below, *Toxoplasma*'s cell division process differs at several levels from how its mammalian host divides.

Cell Cycle Progression

The tachyzoite has a haploid genome (1N). During S phase the DNA is replicated, but duplication pauses at an $\sim 1.8N$ DNA content, at which time the mitotic spindle starts to appear. Therefore, a true G2 phase, intervening between the S phase and mitosis, is missing in these parasites; however, the slowdown in the S phase upon reaching $1.8N$ might be the functional equivalent. Another distinct feature is that daughter budding, and as such cytokinesis, starts when $1.8N$ DNA content is reached.

The molecular machinery underlying cell cycle progression is, as in other systems, based on cyclins and cyclin-dependent kinases (Cdks). Although cyclins and Cdks have been identified in *Toxoplasma*, it has not been established which pairs control which step of the cell cycle (81). Cell cycle progression is characterized by two different subtranscriptomes: one with a G1 signature (biosynthetic and metabolic genes turned on), and one with an S/M signature (DNA replication, cytoskeleton, and invasion organelle genes turned on). In fact, one-third of genes are expressed in bimodal patterns throughout the cell cycle, controlled by a unique family of ApiAP2 transcription factors, many of which are active in sequential waves themselves (14).

The genome harbors candidates for the spindle assembly checkpoint controlled by the anaphase-promoting complex (APC/C), but these have not been studied in detail. In summary, we have identified the major cell cycle progression regulators, but the molecular mechanism is still largely undefined.

Centrosome as Organization Hub

Toxoplasma cell division has been approached by forward genetics (60). This has drawn the attention to a pivotal role for the centrosome in coordinating the mitotic, karyokinetic, and cytokinetic events (33, 47, 48, 138). The centrosome resides in cytoplasm and is always in close apposition to the spindle pole embedded in the nuclear envelope. Late in G1, the centrosome migrates to the basal end of the nucleus and divides (64). At this point the microtubules for the spindle are assembled, nucleating from the centrosome. Following migration back to the apical side, the spindle is established to facilitate mitosis, and the first daughter cytoskeleton elements start to accumulate on the duplicated centrosomes.

Endodyogeny: cell division through internal budding of two daughter parasites within the confinement of the parent parasite

ApiAP2 (apicomplexan apeta 2): family of transcription factors unique to the Apicomplexa; each contains 1–4 AP2 DNA-binding domains

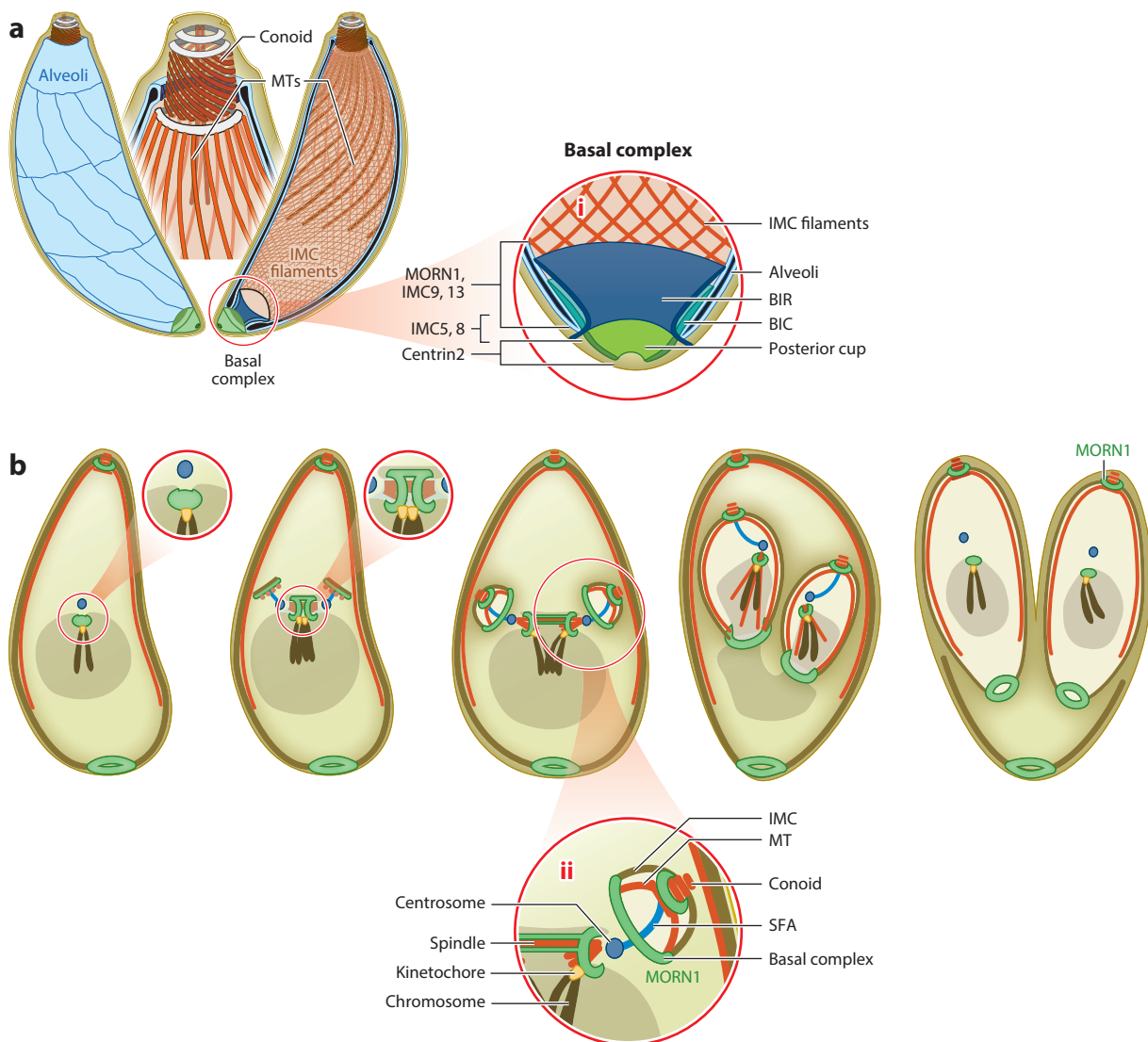


Figure 3

The cortical cytoskeleton and cell division. (a) A patchwork of alveoli (flattened vesicles) underlies the plasma membrane (*left*). The alveoli are supported by a meshwork of intermediate filament-like IMC proteins (*right*). At the apical end (*enlarged in center*), the conoid composed of microtubules is an extrudable basket, whereas 22 cortical, subpellicular microtubules emanate from the apical end to about two-thirds the length of the parasite. At the basal end, the cytoskeleton is capped by the basal complex and posterior cup, as magnified in inset *i*. (b) Concurrent mitosis and cytokinesis are coordinated by the centrosome. Mitosis is closed without chromosome condensation, whereas the spindle resides eccentrically at the apical side of the nucleus. Throughout the cell cycle the 14 chromosomes are clustered at the centromeres and anchored at the spindle pole (centrocone) by the kinetochore. Daughter bud assembly starts before completion of mitosis and is driven by assembly of the cortical cytoskeleton in an apex-to-base direction. The nucleus is anchored in the daughter scaffolds through the centrosome and SFA fiber. Constriction of the basal complex drives tapering of the daughter bud toward the basal end and is required to separate the daughter parasites. Inset *ii* magnifies the interaction between nucleus, centrosome, and daughter cytoskeleton. Abbreviations: BIC, basal inner complex; BIR, basal inner ring; IMC, inner membrane complex; MORN1, membrane occupation and recognition nexus protein 1; MT, microtubule; SFA, striated fiber assemblin. Panel *b* adapted from Reference 61 with permission.

At the heart of the *Toxoplasma* centrosome resides a pair of atypical parallel centrioles (104). Only recently have researchers begun to elucidate the protein composition in detail, by identification of orthologs found in higher eukaryote centrosomes (138). The striking observation was that the *Toxoplasma* centrosome comprises two functionally distinct regions: a proximal region that appears to organize mitosis and a distant region that is associated with initiating cell division. This functional separation of the centrosome's role in mitosis from its role in cytokinesis permits the uncoupling of the mitotic cycle from the cell division cycle, which is used during merogony in the cat gut, where not every mitosis is followed by daughter budding.

The centrosomal cycle is coordinated by a variety of kinases. Although the genome lacks the typical Polo-like kinases, various Aurora-like and NIMA-related kinases are present. The NIMA-related kinase Nek1 controls centrosome splitting, whereas the three Ark kinases are associated with various aspects of the centrosome—though their exact role has not yet been pinpointed (138; C.-T. Chen, M.-J. Gubbels, C. Doerig, W. Daher, manuscript in preparation). Furthermore, two kinases not associated with mammalian centrosome biology have been associated with the *Toxoplasma* centrosome. The first is a Ca^{2+} -dependent kinase, CDPK7, required for centrosomal positioning and integrity (103). The second is a MAPK (mitogen-activated protein kinase)-like protein, MAPK-L1 (25), which in mammals works in the signal transduction cascade but in *Toxoplasma* is required for anchoring the daughter bud to the centrosome (138).

Mitosis

The *Toxoplasma* genome is maintained in 14 chromosomes totaling 65 Mb. Mitosis is closed, meaning that segregation of duplicated chromosomes occurs within the confines of the nuclear envelope (130). The spindle pole is embedded in the nuclear envelope in a structure known as the centrocone, which appears to be a modified or specialized nuclear pore (M.E. Francia & B. Striepen, personal communication) (**Figure 3b**). The centrocone, but not the spindle pole microtubules, is retained throughout the cell cycle. As in other eukaryotes, the chromosomes attach to the spindle microtubules via the kinetochore protein complex assembled on the centromere (47). The centromeres are always clustered together and anchored to the centrocone (23), which in interphase is independent of the presence of microtubules (47). The reason for this persistent clustering is not well understood, but it may be related to maintaining genome integrity.

Cortical Cytoskeleton

In the last 15 years much progress has been made in our understanding of the cortical cytoskeleton, which drives the assembly of the daughter parasites (Reference 4 is a detailed, recent review). The cortical *Toxoplasma* cytoskeleton is a complex, layered structure comprising an outer plasma membrane and an underlying IMC (130). The IMC is composed of a double membrane system assembled from a series of alveolar vesicles (**Figure 3a**). On the cytoplasmic side a family of IMC subcompartment proteins (ISPs) differentiates the various alveolar subcompartments (12). In addition, a 10-nm filamentous network of intermediate filament-like IMC proteins lines the cytoplasmic side of the IMC membranes and endows shape to the parasite (5, 94). The IMC rests on a final cytoskeletal layer composed of 22 subpellicular microtubules emanating from the apical end of the parasite and ending at two-thirds the length of the parasite. Specialized cytoskeletal structures are present at the extreme anterior and posterior ends of the parasite, which are known as the apical complex and basal complex, respectively. At the apical end the IMC is connected to a tubulin basket known as the conoid, which is extruded out of the parasite upon egress in a Ca^{2+} -dependent fashion. The conoid is a complex structure bound by several apical rings (68, 75).

TOXOPLASMA CELL DIVISION BY INTERNAL BUDDING IS RELATED TO THE FLAGELLA-FORMING MACHINERY

The composition of the division apparatus of *Toxoplasma* suggests it is mechanistically related to the flagellar machinery (see 49 for a recent review). Although tachyzoites do not carry flagella, the male microgametes have two; the most likely ancestor also carries two flagella (49). Indeed, assembly of the tubulin-containing conoid follows recruitment of the striated fiber assemblin (SFA) fiber, which is also present in algal flagellates such as *Chlamydomonas* (48). Furthermore, the conoid harbors additional evidence that the cytoskeleton is derived from the flagellar apparatus in the presence of a SAS-6-like protein residing at its bases, next to a normal SAS6 in the centrosome; SAS6 proteins function in microtubule organization (39). Finally, a centrin molecule, TgCentrin2 (67), and a myosin VI (TgMyosinJ) (K. Engelberg and M.-J. Gubbels, unpublished data) are present at both the apicomplexan basal complex and the flagellar transition zone.

At the basal end of the IMC lies the basal complex, a multilayered structure containing MORN1 and a set of dedicated IMC proteins (4, 61, 87). At the extreme basal end of the parasite lies the posterior cup, which is composed of Centrin2 (67, 68, 94). As discussed below, the basal complex functions as the contractile ring in completing cell division.

Internal Budding

The division cycle starts with duplication of the Golgi apparatus, followed by centrosome duplication (64). Budding of daughter cells is driven by assembly of the cortical cytoskeleton, which forms the scaffold in which all subsequently formed or divided organelles will be anchored (49, 111). Several aspects of budding are shared with the machinery assembling flagella, suggesting shared ancestry (see sidebar, *Toxoplasma* Cell Division by Internal Budding Is Related to the Flagella-Forming Machinery). The first daughter elements recruited to the (outer) centrosome are IMC15 and Rab11B (5, 138); the latter trafficks Golgi-derived vesicles into the daughter alveoli (1). In addition, striated fiber assemblin (SFA) proteins are recruited to form an SFA fiber that anchors the centrosome in the developing cytoskeleton at the base of the conoid [Figure 3b(ii)] (48). The next critical cytoskeleton elements to be incorporated are MORN1 and the ISPs. MORN1 is associated with the early alveolar vesicles and transitions to the apical and basal complexes (61, 67), whereas ISP2 is essential for early IMC development (12). From this time on, the cytoskeleton grows from the basal end (the basal complex) by deposition of various IMC proteins and growth of subpellicular microtubules into a widening cone. Coinciding with the completion of karyokinesis, which also concludes division of the endoplasmic reticulum, the subpellicular microtubules stop growing when they reach two-thirds the ultimate length of the daughter cell.

Halfway through the assembly of the daughter scaffold several notable changes occur. A subset of IMC proteins initially assembled in the daughter scaffold transition to the basal complex, where, at the same time, Centrin2 is recruited. Upon continuing growth of the bud the basal complex starts to contract, resulting in tapering of the parasite toward the basal end (67). Because constriction is independent of actin/myosin in the parasite (in contrast to mammalian cells), it has been postulated that Centrin2, which can form contractile fibers, drives constriction (67).

At this point, the two daughter cells are trapped within the parent cell and further growth is facilitated by the organized disassembly of the parent cell's cytoskeleton (Figure 3b). Disassembly progresses in the direction of apex to base. Where the parent cell's IMC retracts, the plasma membrane is zippered onto the IMC by the deposition of GAP45 in a Rab11a-dependent process

(2, 52, 104). Interestingly, the basal complex does not completely separate the parasites, and a cytoplasmic bridge remains.

The apical secretory organelles (micronemes and rhoptries) assemble *de novo* in the daughter buds (111) in a process requiring the alveolate-specific, dynamin-related protein DrpB (21). Protein trafficking during assembly to the secretory organelles, apicoplast, and IMC proceeds through the secretory pathway using a repurposed endosomal system to cover the wide variety of destinations (141). Vesicular targeting is mediated by the Rab family of GTPases (80). However, a specific Rab could not be identified for each organelle, suggesting additional sorting mechanisms. An extended family of palmitoyltransferases could potentially function here, whereas organelle-specific palmitoyltransferases do also partake in organelle-specific protein targeting (53).

The apicoplast divides by association with the centrosome, and its scission concludes by the action of another dynamin-related protein, DrpA (145). Just before basal complex constriction concludes, one mitochondrion enters each daughter cell (111). Taken together, the timing of daughter budding with respect to the cell cycle and the intimate relationship between daughter budding and mitosis are the hallmark of tachyzoite cell division.

PARASITE-HOST INTERACTION (VACUOLE)

When the previous review of the *T. gondii* lytic cycle was published, 15 years ago, few details regarding the role of the host cell were known (17). We now have a better (yet still incomplete) understanding of how the host cell contributes to the parasite's life cycle. The preceding sections highlight how the host cell contributes to invasion and egress. Below, we discuss how the parasite manipulates host cell processes to evade host cell defenses and to facilitate its replication.

Immune Evasion

The interplay between the host immune response and parasite immune evasion strategies is critical in balancing host survival with parasite survival. To this end the parasite interferes at various levels with the host immune response.

Host cell autophagic degradation of the parasitophorous vacuole. Innate and adaptive immune responses are required for resistance to *Toxoplasma*, and IFN- γ is critical for both (139). IFN- γ kills *Toxoplasma* by upregulating expression of antiparasitic genes that utilize a variety of mechanisms to kill the parasite. These include autophagy-dependent degradation of the PVM by the p47 family of IFN- γ -regulated GTPases (IRGs) (36) and degradation of essential nutrients, such as tryptophan by indoleamine dioxygenase (117). *Toxoplasma* has developed two primary ways of evading these IFN- γ effectors.

First, *Toxoplasma* secretes proteins into the host cell cytoplasm that directly inactivate some effectors. The best-studied example of this mechanism is the inactivation of the IFN- γ -inducible GTPases by ROP, ROP1, and ROP17. Interestingly, ROP5, ROP18, and ROP17 are polymorphic between parasite strains and ROP5 is the major virulence factor in mice (13, 122). Given that higher primates do not express functional IRGs, it is tempting to speculate that *Toxoplasma* polymorphic virulence factors coevolved with a specific clade of host species to ensure parasite survival (69).

Toxoplasma also avoids IFN- γ -dependent killing by interfering with IFN- γ -regulated gene expression (79). IFN- γ activates gene expression by stimulating phosphorylation of the STAT1 transcription factor, which allows STAT1 to translocate to the nucleus and bind DNA (121). *Toxoplasma* does not inhibit STAT1 phosphorylation or nuclear localization. Rather, it blocks STAT1 from binding to the promoters of its target genes by disrupting chromatin remodeling

IRGs
(IFN- γ -regulated GTPases): enzymes able to sense and destroy the intracellular parasite in mice

Inflammasome:

multiprotein complex that detects microbe-derived factors and promotes IL-1 β and IL-18 synthesis and secretion and pyroptotic host cell death

NLRPs [nucleotide-binding domain and leucine-rich repeat (NLR)-containing pyrin domains]:

family of proteins that function in the inflammasome

and by preventing its recycling between promoters (82, 126). The STAT1-inhibiting parasite factor or factors are unknown, but given that all known *Toxoplasma* strains inhibit STAT1, this factor is likely nonpolymorphic (79).

CD40

The IRGs are not the only proteins that can degrade the PV via autophagy. CD40 is a ubiquitously expressed member of the TNF receptor superfamily, and genetic disruption of this gene as well as its ligand, CD154, decreases murine resistance to *Toxoplasma* (7). Upon CD154 binding, CD40 kills *Toxoplasma* by inducing accumulation of autophagy-associated proteins on the PV surface, and this is followed by degradation of the PV and the parasite (6). But *Toxoplasma* can evade CD40-triggered autophagy by activating epidermal growth factor receptor signaling, thereby preventing autophagosome formation (106).

Host Cell Death Pathways (Apoptosis and Pyroptosis)

Killing of an infected host cell is an important innate defense strategy, and inflammasome-dependent pyroptosis has emerged as a cell death pathway critical for resistance (30, 35). The inflammasome is a multiprotein complex that assembles after a sensor protein binds a microbe-derived molecule. The complex then activates caspase 1, whose activity leads to IL-1 β and IL-18 secretion and triggers formation of large pores in the plasma membrane, resulting in cell lysis and death. The inflammasome was demonstrated to be important for resistance to *Toxoplasma*: Polymorphisms in human and rat genes for the inflammasome sensor NLRP1 correlated with resistance to *Toxoplasma* (31, 149).

Although humans and rats use the inflammasome to control parasite growth, they do so by different mechanisms. In rats, inflammasome activation leads to rapid death of the infected host cells (30). Infected human host cells, however, do not die, suggesting a role for IL-1 β /IL-18 signaling or a novel mechanism (58). Another key difference between humans and rats is that inflammasome activation in humans requires GRA15, which is a dense granule protein secreted into the host cell that regulates NF- κ B (59). In mice, *Toxoplasma* also activates the inflammasome via both NLRP1 and NLRP3; and as with human cells, mouse cells do not undergo pyroptosis following infection (45, 57).

Three critical questions remain regarding the interaction between *Toxoplasma* and the host inflammasome. First, how do polymorphisms in NLRP1 alter resistance to *Toxoplasma*? Second, which parasite factors are sensed by the inflammasome? Third, why does inflammasome activation fail to activate pyroptosis in human and murine cells, and what impact does this have on virulence? One possibility is that after caspase 1 is activated, a rhoptry or dense granule factor is secreted into the host cell and this factor prevents pyroptosis but has no effect on cytokine synthesis.

Apoptosis is a second cell death pathway that is activated by intrinsic (e.g., mitochondrial damage) and extrinsic (e.g., Fas ligand) stimuli that culminate in activation of caspase 3. *Toxoplasma* inhibits caspase 3 activation as well as several upstream caspases that regulate either the intrinsic or extrinsic pathways (56). It has been proposed that *Toxoplasma* inhibits host cell apoptosis via increased expression of antiapoptotic proteins, activation of cell survival signaling pathways, and inhibition of proapoptotic proteins (26, 78, 100, 113). But unlike pyroptosis in humans and rodents, which genetic studies have linked to susceptibility to *Toxoplasma* infection, apoptosis has not been linked to toxoplasmosis. The importance of host cell apoptosis in host resistance remains to be established.

Host Cell Manipulation to Promote Replicative Niche Development

To obtain the resources it needs to grow and replicate, the parasite manipulates and redirects pathways in the host cell in various ways.

Membrane trafficking. During parasite invasion, the PV is formed using lipids derived from the host plasma membrane and most GPI-linked and peripheral plasma membrane proteins but not transmembrane proteins (102, 137). These data supported a model that the PV was in a nonfusogenic state due to its ability to avoid host endosomes and lysosomes. This was challenged when the parasite was shown to scavenge lipids such as cholesterol and sphingolipids by redirecting host endolysosomal- and Golgi-derived vesicles to the PV (37, 124). How these lipids cross the PV and are taken up by the parasite is unknown. A dense granule protein, GRA7, may function in the former process (38), whereas receptor-mediated or bulk flow endocytic pathways may be used for the latter (41).

It has long been recognized that large host organelles such as mitochondria and endoplasmic reticulum are closely apposed to the PV, in contrast to endolysosomal trafficking (72). How host endoplasmic reticulum is recruited to the PV remains unknown. Host mitochondrial recruitment was recently discovered to only occur in cells infected with type I parasites; this is due to a dense granule protein, MAF1, that is secreted into the host cytosol and appears to modulate host cytokine expression (114). Important questions regarding MAF1 remain, including how MAF1 (or any dense granule or rhoptry protein) enters the host cell and how it recruits mitochondria.

Transcription and signaling. Early transcriptomic studies revealed that regardless of the host cell type, infection induces large-scale changes to host cell transcription, which likely leads to global changes in the cell's physiology (18). Not surprisingly, immune response genes (e.g., those encoding chemokines and cytokines) are one clade of these genes. The others, including those involved in metabolism, cell growth, and signaling, provide a glimpse at host cell processes needed to support parasite growth. As an example, host mevalonate metabolic genes are upregulated, most likely due to parasite scavenging of host isoprenoids (85).

The large numbers of host cell genes modulated by infection also suggested that infection modulated the activity of a diverse array of host cell transcription factors. Some of these (NF- κ B, STAT3, STAT6, NFAT4, and STAT5) are regulated by polymorphic factors and appear to be important not for parasite replication but rather for shaping the resulting immune response (70, 93, 125, 127). However, other host cell transcription factors are activated [including hypoxia-inducible factor 1 (HIF-1), c-myc, and early growth response factor (EGR)], apparently in a nonpolymorphic manner (118, 133, 148). The mechanisms by which these factors are activated appear to be diverse. EGR is dependent on p38 MAPK activation, and this is mediated by GRA24, which is a dense granule protein that is injected into the host cell (20). c-myc is activated by host JNK MAPK signaling, although it remains to be determined how *Toxoplasma* activates this kinase (50). Finally, HIF-1 is activated by signaling through members of the host serine/threonine kinase receptor family, ALK4,5,7, although the parasite factor that activates ALK4,5,7 is also unknown (148). Of these host transcription factors, parasite growth is dependent on only HIF-1, although HIF-1 is primarily required at physiological oxygen levels (133).

SUMMARY POINTS

1. The lytic cycle is associated with the most severe pathology.
2. The intracellular and extracellular parasites represent two distinct biological states.

3. Ca^{2+} and cGMP are secondary messengers in transition between the two states.
4. Internal budding and mitosis are coordinated by the centrosome.
5. Parasite division concludes by constriction of the basal complex.
6. A diverse array of proteins secreted by the parasite (in some cases tailored to the specific mammalian host) manipulate the host cell's physiology and the immune response at numerous levels.

FUTURE ISSUES

1. How are the triggers for egress sensed by the parasite, and how are these signals transduced to release Ca^{2+} and produce cGMP?
2. How is rhoptry secretion triggered, and how are the contents released in the host cell's cytoplasm?
3. What controls and mediates the specific disassembly of the parasite parent cell structures in the late stages of cell division?
4. What is the contractile mechanism driving basal complex constriction?
5. How is the wide variety in host tropism covered by the parasite on the level of specific parasite-host interaction following invasion?
6. Which parasite factors are sensed by the inflammasome sensor and which modulate the inflammasome?
7. How does *Toxoplasma* regulate host membrane trafficking?
8. Which host proteins are required for parasite growth?

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

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