

# From the Archive

## Yeast becomes a cell biologist

Summer research collaborations at the Woods Hole Marine Biological Laboratory have a magical way of unveiling cellular secrets. In 1982, when Alison Adams, her graduate advisor John Pringle, and John Kilmartin met up, little did they know that their attempts to visualize actin and tubulin would transform yeast from a genetics-only organism to a cell biology workhorse.

For her graduate work, Adams wanted to study what actin was doing in yeast, specifically using immunofluorescence (IF) for localization. But her committee members (and many others in the field) were skeptical, because the impermeable yeast cell wall would block antibody penetration. Pringle says he distinctly remembers “having pessimistic conversations” about small, round yeast cells making bad candidates for IF compared with the large, flattened cells that were in vogue for the technique.

The two went to Woods Hole to see if Bob and Anne Goldman’s antibodies to mammalian cytoskeletal proteins would recognize yeast proteins. By chance, Kilmartin was there with his new monoclonal anti-tubulin antibody, which he had already managed to get into spheroplasts. The spheroplasts showed good IF, but had lost the original cell’s shape and organization. “We decided to try to fix the cells before removing the cell wall,” Adams recalls. It worked. “It was exciting to see cytoplasmic microtubules in yeast that are hard to see by EM, but by IF they really stood out.”

IF tools now in hand, Adams and Pringle returned to the University of Michigan (Ann Arbor, MI), and Kilmartin to the MRC Laboratory of Molecular Biology (Cambridge, UK) to delve further into the roles of actin and microtubules. Kilmartin examined actin by IF while Adams stained it with the newly available fluorescent phalloidin.

In two papers, they described the distribution of actin in cortical patches and cytoplasmic cables that ran along the long axis of mother–bud pairs (Adams and Pringle, 1984; Kilmartin and Adams, 1984), a phenomenon particularly clear in mutants with elongated buds. The studies also revealed that the IF patterns of actin and tubulin never significantly overlapped during the cell cycle. And actin was seen around the base of small, forming buds and clustered in the neck region during cytokinesis.

This last observation suggested that maybe the neck-localized actin was driving the new cell wall growth of bud formation—a distinct switch from the prevailing view that microtubules served this function. A few years later, this idea was solidified when Peter Novick and David Botstein showed that temperature-sensitive actin mutants were defective for polarized secretion to the bud (Novick and Botstein, 1985). The Botstein and Pringle labs also showed bud growth occurring normally in the absence of microtubules (Huffaker et al., 1988; Jacobs et al., 1988). As for the actin patches, they are now thought to act as endosome coats (Huckaba et al., 2004).

The studies’ biggest contribution—IF of internal yeast structures—got only a brief mention. “Effective IF procedures for yeasts,” the authors noted, “should greatly facilitate use of these genetically tractable organisms for study of various problems in cell biology.” Adams says she did not appreciate the full potential of the technique at the time. “We didn’t even have a fluorescence scope in the lab,” she says. “I had to hike 20 minutes over to the medical school and call back to John to describe what I was seeing.”

When the findings were presented at the 1983 yeast meeting, however, there was a palpable buzz from interested colleagues. David Drubin, whose current studies of yeast actin draw heavily on real-time fluorescence microscopy, says he remembers the impact the breakthrough made on his choice of post-doctoral positions. “People tended to think of yeast as a big bacterium—you couldn’t use it for questions of spatial organization,” he says. “Now, you could have really powerful genetics and see how the structures in a cell changed. It just opened up for yeast.” **KP**

Adams, A.E.M., and J.R. Pringle. 1984. *J. Cell Biol.* 98:934–945.

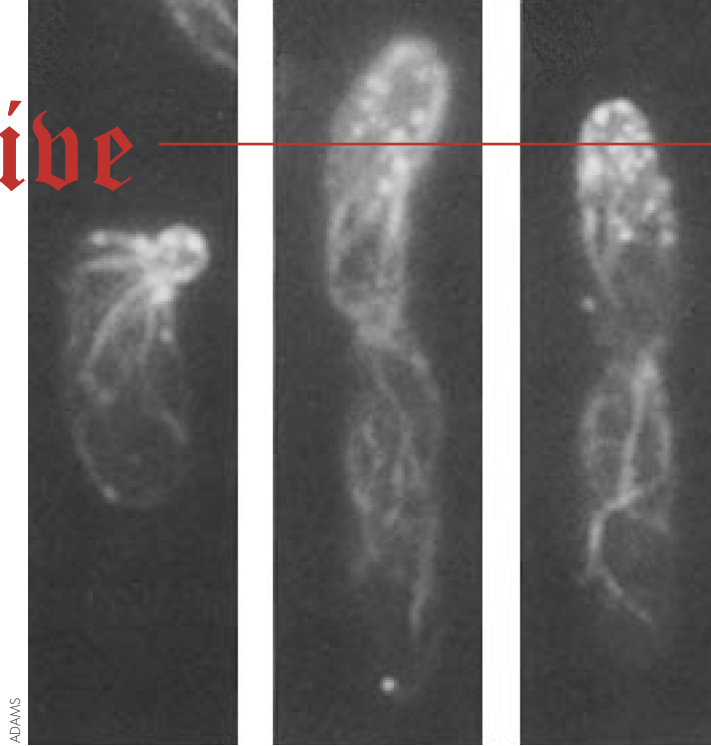
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Actin (top) and tubulin (bottom) can be tracked during the budding yeast cell cycle.

Adams, Pringle, and Kilmartin introduce new antibody techniques, and budding yeast makes its debut as a cell biology workhorse.

## More than one way to attach

How cells connect to each other and to the extracellular matrix (ECM) was a sticky issue in the early 1980s. Integrins, molecules that hook the cytoskeleton to ECM proteins such as collagen and fibronectin, hadn't been discovered, but evidence for a link between external and internal fibers was mounting. For example, Irwin Singer (1979) observed that extracellular fibronectin molecules closely approached—or possibly attached—to intracellular actin. Several researchers postulated that membrane-spanning receptors made the connection. A pair of papers by post-doc Wen-Tien Chen of the University of California, San Diego, and his adviser S.

Jonathan Singer bolstered the idea that cells deploy different membrane receptors to couple with different components of the matrix.

A new technique devised in Singer's lab gave the researchers a clearer look at the junction between cell and surface. They reared cells on a gelatin mat, which they could roll up like a carpet, freeze, and cut into thin slices. Staining the gap with two types of antibodies pinpointed proteins clustering on both sides of the membrane. When the researchers zoomed in on a type of contact called a focal adhesion, they saw no signs of fibronectin outside the cell, although it's a key component of some cell surface junctions (Chen and Singer, 1980). Fibronectin's absence meant that cells needed a second kind of receptor to attach to the extracellular fibers found in focal adhesions, the researchers hypothesized.

A follow-up study that included more kinds of contacts (Chen and Singer, 1982). They found that fibronectin amassed in two kinds of interactions, but not in two others. Moreover, at one type of fibronectin-rich junction, microfilaments inside the cell ran

parallel to the membrane. But in another sort of interaction devoid of fibronectin, microfilaments attached to the membrane head-on, like an extension cord plugging into a wall socket. These structural differences solidified the case that cells carry different receptors for different extracellular matrix proteins, says Chen (now at the State University of New York, Stony Brook). One type fastens fibronectin to microfilaments stretching along the membrane; the other joins other extracellular proteins to microfilaments that arrive perpendicular to the membrane. Chen then teamed with Kenneth Yamada of the National Cancer Institute to characterize a fibronectin-grabbing receptor (Chen et al., 1985), which later work identified as an integrin. **ML**

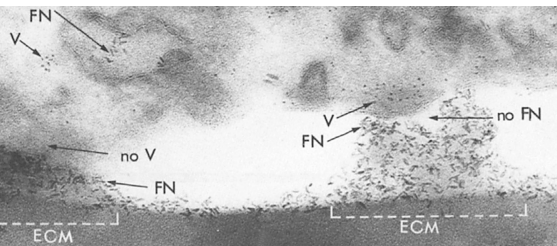
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Singer, I.I. 1979. *Cell.* 16:675–685.

Singer and Ruoslahti. 1988. *J. Cell Biol.* 106:2171.



Different cell adhesion sites have different arrangements of vinculin (V) and fibronectin (F).

## Dishing up bone formation

Hiroaki Kodama knew little about dental and bone research when he became an assistant professor at Tohoku Dental University. What he *did* know was cell culture technology, and he recognized the field's need for a clonal cell line "which retains as far as possible a normal ability to differentiate into functional cells."

In 1979, he and his colleagues started establishing cell lines that differentiated into osteoblasts (bone-forming cells) rather than odontoblasts (dentin-forming cells). At that time, only a few primary bone cell cultures had been reported to show hints of in vitro bone formation (Binderman et al., 1979; Nijiweide et al., 1982).

Kodama (RIKEN, Wako Saitama, Japan), says the secret to success was using the same cell culture method used to make the immortalized mouse fibroblast 3T3 cell line (Todaro and Green, 1963; see "A cell line that is under control" *JCB* 168: 988). This meant repeated subcultivation of newborn mouse skull bone cells under 3T3 conditions—3 days to transfer at a factor of 3 cell plating density.

When one of the lines that arose, called MC3T3-E1, became confluent, it exhibited properties of osteoblasts, including high alkaline phosphatase activity and staining for calcified secretions (Sudo et al., 1983). At day 21 of culture, calcified nodes appeared and then grew in number and size to eventually fuse with one another. By day 30, white nodes in the dish were visible to the naked eye. But because calcium is easily deposited under basic culture conditions, the team had to show that they

were seeing true bone formation.

Mineralization proceeded in much the same way it did in vivo, by the secretion of matrix vesicles containing crystals, which were deposited along collagen fibrils. Electron diffraction defined the crystals as hydroxyapatite, the chemical that forms bone matrix.

But in vitro bone formation, Kodama notes, was not easily reproducible by other groups until the discovery that bone morphogenetic protein acts as a potent inducer of osteoblast differentiation (Yamaguchi et al., 1991). The MC3T3 cell line remains an important tool for studying bone cell differentiation today, with renewed focus on mesenchymal stem cell differentiation and the need for better osteoporosis therapies, like bone-building agents. In fact, the line was the most widely distributed by the RIKEN Bioresource Center (Tsukuba, Japan) in 2003. **KP**

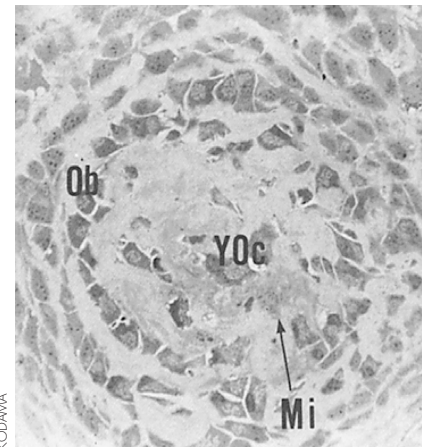
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Making bone in a dish: osteoblasts (Ob) surround a nodule of young osteoclasts (YOc) embedded in mineralized matrix.