

1 **Genomic insights into metabolism and phylogeography of the mesophilic**
2 **Thermotogae genus *Mesotoga***

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Abstract

The genus *Mesotoga*, the only described mesophilic Thermotogae lineage, is commonly detected in low-temperature anaerobic hydrocarbon-rich environments. Besides mesophily, *Mesotoga* displays lineage-specific phenotypes, such as no or little H₂ production, dependence on sulfur-compound reduction and ability to oxidize acetate, which may influence its ecological role. We used comparative genomics of 18 *Mesotoga* strains and a transcriptome of *M. prima* to investigate how life at moderate temperatures affects phylogeography, and to interrogate the genomic features of its lineage-specific metabolism. Phylogenetic analysis revealed three distinct *Mesotoga* lineages having different geographic distributions patterns and high levels of intra-lineage recombination but little gene-flow between lineages. All 16S rRNA genes from the genomes had > 99% identity whereas average nucleotide identity among genomes was 90.6–98.6% within groups and 80–86% between groups. Including data from metagenomes, phylogeographic patterns revealed that geographical separation is more important for *Mesotoga* than their thermophilic relatives, and we suggest its distribution is constrained by their strictly anaerobic lifestyle. We propose that H₂ oxidation and thiosulfate reduction are accomplished by a sulfide dehydrogenase and a hydrogenase-complex and that a pyruvate:ferredoxin oxidoreductase acquired from *Clostridia* is responsible for oxidizing acetate.

Introduction

The genus *Mesotoga* is the only characterized mesophilic lineage within the otherwise thermophilic bacterial phylum Thermotogae (Pollo *et al.*, 2015). *Mesotoga* spp. have been isolated from and detected in polluted marine sediments, low temperature oil reservoirs, and waste water treatment facilities (Nesbø *et al.*, 2010; 2012; Hania *et al.*, 2011; 2013), and are common in anaerobic methanogenic environments (Nesbø *et al.*, 2010) where they may be involved in syntrophic acetate degradation (Nobu *et al.*, 2015). The first described member of this genus, *Mesotoga prima* MesG1Ag4.2 (hereafter, *M. prima*), was isolated from a PCB-degrading enrichment culture inoculated with sediments from Baltimore Harbor, Maryland (USA) (Nesbø *et al.*, 2006; 2012). Sequencing the genomes of *M. prima* and the very closely related *M. prima* PhosAc3 (hereafter, PhosAc3) isolated in Tunisia (Hania *et al.*, 2015) revealed larger genomes than thermophilic Thermotogae, with more genes involved in regulatory functions and interactions with the environment (Zhaxybayeva *et al.*, 2012).

Genome size in Thermotogae inversely correlates with optimum growth temperature (Pollo *et al.*, 2015; Zhaxybayeva *et al.*, 2012). However, it is unclear how growth temperature affects other aspects of genome evolution including levels of homologous recombination. Hyperthermophilic *Thermotoga* display extremely high levels of homologous recombination, which could be a side effect of the need for DNA repair at high temperatures (Nesbø *et al.*, 2015). Nesbø *et al.* (2015) also found that *Thermotoga* spp. from similar environments have exchanged more genes than geographically close isolates from different environments. This has been observed for metagenomes in general, where geographical distance has little effect on gene sharing,

and gene composition is more strongly affected by ecology than proximity (Fondi *et al.*, 2016). Moreover, the phylogeography and patterns of gene flow among *Thermotoga* genomes suggested that oil reservoirs were colonized from subsurface populations rather than being buried with the sediments that mature into oil reservoirs (a corollary of the paleosterilization hypothesis; Wilhelms *et al.*, 2001). Comparative genomic analyses of mesophilic *Thermotogae* may shed light on the role of growth temperature on recombination and phylogeography.

In addition to lower optimal growth temperature (37°C - 40°C), *Mesotoga*'s core energy metabolism also differs from that of other characterized *Thermotogae*. For instance, while growth of most *Thermotogae* is stimulated by adding sulfur-compounds to the medium (Ravot *et al.*, 1995; Boileau *et al.*, 2016), reduction of sulfur compounds appears to be essential for growth of *Mesotoga* in pure culture and they produce little or no H₂ (Hania *et al.*, 2011; 2013; Fadhlaoui *et al.*, 2017).

Here we compare 18 *Mesotoga* genomes obtained from isolates and single cells originating from six geographically different sites, including three low temperature continental oil reservoirs, in order to elucidate genomic markers of metabolic differences and to investigate how growth temperature influences phylogeography and prevalence of recombination. We also compare our genomes to *Mesotoga* sequences available in publicly available metagenomes. We infer that geographic separation has had a significant influence on the phylogeography of *Mesotoga*, possibly due to selective pressures of dispersal of strict anaerobes through aerobic environments. Finally, we present a model that accounts for *Mesotoga*'s distinct sulfur-dependent metabolism involving a hydrogenase complex.

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89 **Materials and Methods**

90 *Sources of genome sequences*

91 Nine *Mesotoga* strains (BR, HF and BH designations) were isolated from oil reservoirs
92 and anaerobic sediments in Canada and the USA (Table 1). In addition, seven single cells
93 were physically selected from oil field fluids or oil sands enrichment cultures from
94 Canada or a contaminated aquifer in the USA (PW, NAPDC and TOLDC designations,
95 respectively) and amplified by PCR to produce single cell amplified genomes (SAGs).
96 Detailed descriptions of isolation procedures, DNA extraction, genome assembly and
97 annotation are provided in Supplementary Information.

98 To augment the strain genomes, 15 publicly available metagenomes containing
99 large numbers of *Mesotoga* spp. sequences were identified using blastn searches of IMG
100 (JGI; accessed February 2017) and SRA (NCBI; accessed December 2016) using *rpoB*
101 from *M. prima* as a probe and expected (exp.) set to $< e^{-50}$. For additional details on
102 search parameters and information on assembly of draft genomes from metagenomic
103 sequences or contigs see Supplementary Information.

104

105 *Genome content and genome alignments*

106 Shared genes were identified in IMG Version 4 (Markowitz *et al.*, 2014) using translated
107 proteins and 70% identity cut-off and exp. $< e^{-10}$, whereas 30% sequence identity cut-off
108 and exp. $< e^{-5}$ were used to identify strain-specific genes and for comparing *Mesotoga*
109 genomes to other Thermotogae genomes.

Pan-genome calculations were performed in Panseq (Laing *et al.*, 2010) using a fragment size of 500 bp and 70% identity cutoff, and $\exp. < e^{-10}$. The data matrices of shared core single nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs) and 500-bp fragments were converted into uncorrected distances and visualized in SplitsTree 4 (Huson and Bryant, 2006) using NeighborNet clustering.

Whole genome alignments were carried out in MAUVE version 2.3.1 (Darling *et al.*, 2010) using automatically calculated seed weights and minimum Locally Collinear Blocks (LCB) scores. LCB positions with gaps were removed and the edited LCB were concatenated in Geneious v.10 (www.geneious.com). Average nucleotide identities (ANI) were calculated at <http://enve-omics.ce.gatech.edu/ani/> (Goris *et al.*, 2007).

Recombination detection

The relative rate of recombination to mutation within lineages, as well as the average recombination tract length, were assessed using the LDhat package (McVean *et al.*, 2002; Jolley, 2004) as described by Nesbø *et al.* (2015) on concatenated alignments (including LCB > 10,000 bp) of genomes from the W and the A lineage separately. Recombinant fragments between lineages were detected using LikeWind Version 1.0 (Archibald 2002) on the concatenated MAUVE alignment (above), using a sliding window of 1000 bp with 100-bp increments.

RNAseq analysis

RNA isolation from a culture of *M. prima* (grown at 45°C for 73 h in 0.5% yeast extract, 0.01 M thiosulfate and 0.5% xylose) and subsequent sequencing as one of five barcoded

libraries were performed as described by Pollo et al. (2017). RNAseq analysis was carried out in CLC Genomics Workbench version 7.0.4 as described by Pollo *et al.*(2017).

H₂ and H₂S measurements

Standard gas chromatographic analysis of culture headspace gas was performed using an Agilent CP4900 Micro Gas Chromatograph to detect H₂ production by the cultures, as described in Supplementary Information. Dissolved sulfide concentrations were measured using a VACUettes® Visual High Range Kit (Chemetrics), following the manufacturer's recommendations.

Results and Discussion

Phylogenetic and genomic analyses of isolates and single cells reveal three distinct *Mesotoga* lineages

We generated draft genomes for eight newly isolated *Mesotoga* strains from two Albertan oil reservoirs (H and B), and one *Mesotoga* strain from a PCB-degrading enrichment culture from Baltimore Harbor, Maryland (Table 1). Seven partial SAGs were obtained from cells sorted from produced water from an Albertan oil reservoir (PW), a naphtha-degrading enrichment culture inoculated with sediments from an Albertan oil sands tailings pond (NAPDC), and a toluene-degrading enrichment culture inoculated with sediments from a contaminated aquifer in Colorado (TOLDC). We also included in our analyses the draft genome of PhosAc3, previously isolated in Tunisia (Hania *et al.*, 2015) and the closed genome of *M. prima* (Nesbo *et al.*, 2012) from Baltimore Harbor.

The 16S rRNA genes of all 17 genomes had $\geq 99\%$ identity to *M. prima*; phylogenetic trees revealed three distinct lineages (Figure 1a). Genome networks based on core SNPs also had topologies consistent with 16S rRNA gene phylogeny, with three distinct lineages being evident (Figure 1b). Two lineages have a widespread geographical distribution: the World lineage (W; found in all regions represented) and the lineage found in locations in USA (US; found in Baltimore Harbor and Colorado). The Alberta (A) lineage was observed in the Albertan samples only. Interestingly, *M. prima* has one 16S rRNA from the W lineage and one from the US lineage, suggesting one copy has been acquired laterally.

Very little reticulate evolution was observed among the three *Mesotoga* lineages (Figure 1b) and the A lineage in particular showed very little connection with the other two groups, suggesting that the three lineages have evolved independently for a relatively long time. The same pattern was observed for the pan-genome, with most lateral connections occurring within groups (Figure 1c).

A high level of recombination was detected, with the majority (> 200) of recombination events involving genomes from the same lineage (Figure S1). For the W and A lineages, respectively, the average recombination tract length was estimated to be 36,000 – 56,000 bp and 17,000–23,000 bp; the population mutation rate (θ) was estimated to be 0.022 and 0.013, and the population recombination rate (γ) to be 1.8 (1.5–2.2) and 1.5 (1.3–1.7). The resulting high γ/θ ratios of ~ 82 – 115 indicate high levels of recombination and are similar to estimates for *Thermotoga* spp. (Nesbø *et al.*, 2015).

Phylogenetic analysis identified 52 regions with recombination likely occurring between lineages: 39 regions showed evidence of recombination between *Mesotoga* sp.

BH458 and the W lineage, eight regions suggested recombination between *Mesotoga* sp. BH458 and the A lineage, and only five regions showed possible recombination between A- and W-lineage genomes (Figure 2). The regions with recombination involving the A lineage were relatively short (range 230–530 bp) and the sequences more divergent, whereas several of the fragments involving the W lineage and *Mesotoga* sp. BH458 were > 5 kb (average 3000 bp, range 260–20,000), suggesting that recombination events between the W lineage and *Mesotoga* sp. BH458 are more recent than those involving the A lineage. Very high levels of recombination were observed for a few genes. Among these is Theba_0319 in *M. prima*, the fourth most highly expressed gene (Supplementary Table S1) that encodes the OmpB protein (Petrus *et al.*, 2012), a major component of the toga of Thermotogae. This high level of recombination is consistent with strong diversifying selective pressure on surface proteins, commonly observed in pathogenic bacteria (e.g., Wachter and Hill, 2016).

The observation of several recent recombination events between the W and US lineages, which currently co-exist in at least one location (i.e., Baltimore Harbor), demonstrate that recombination between lineages is possible. We therefore suggest that the three *Mesotoga* lineages have evolved independently due to geographical, not genetic, isolation. Although it may seem counterintuitive that mesophilic *Mesotoga* would be more affected by geographical separation than hyperthermophilic *Thermotoga*, this may be a consequence of their strictly anaerobic metabolism. Chakraborty *et al.* (2018) showed that bacteria are dispersed out of deep hot subsurface oil reservoirs and into the ocean through hydrocarbon seeps, and this might serve as a major route of migration between these environments. Hyperthermophilic *Thermotoga* cells will be inactive in

cold aerobic ocean water, but mesophilic *Mesotoga* cells will be active at these temperatures and therefore may quickly succumb to oxygen exposure, limiting viable dispersal. In support of this observation, many *Mesotoga*-specific genes appear to be involved in O₂ or H₂O₂ detoxification (see below).

***Mesotoga* lineages have conserved core genomes and diverse pan-genomes**

Comparative analysis of *Mesotoga* genomes revealed greater gene-content diversity than was observed in hyperthermophilic Thermotogae (Nesbø *et al.*, 2015). The pan-genome of the *Mesotoga* isolates and SAGs was estimated to be 7,452,537 bp with an accessory genome of 5,664,475 bp; each genome contained a considerable amount of lineage-specific DNA (Figure S1; see Supplementary Information for additional details of the pan-genome and within-sample site diversity). In pairwise comparisons, the genomes shared on average 76% of their genes (Supplementary Table S2). Genomes from each lineage defined in Figure 1 shared, on average, 81% - 89% of their genes whereas in pairwise comparisons *Thermotoga* spp. share > 90% of their genes (Nesbø *et al.*, 2015). Comparing genomes from different lineages, the US lineage had an intermediate position, sharing more genes with the A and W lineages: on average, genomes from A and W share 69% of genes, W and US share 73%, and A and US share 75% of their genes.

Comparing nucleotide divergence within the core genomes revealed ‘species-level’ divergence among the three lineages detected (ANI < 86%), whereas ANI within the A and W lineages was very high at 98.6% and 97.9%, respectively (Supplementary Table S3). In comparison, ANI among *Thermotoga* genomes was 95.3% (Nesbø *et al.*, 2015). Thus *Mesotoga* spp., particularly those from the W lineage, appears to have more

conserved core genomes and more diverse pan-genomes than their hyperthermophilic relatives.

Nesbø *et al.* (2015) suggested that high levels of recombination may be responsible for homogenizing the *Thermotoga* spp. genomes. However, since we observed similar high levels of recombination within the *Mesotoga* W and A lineages, additional forces must be responsible for the differences in pan-genome sizes. Perhaps more cryptic niches are available in low-temperature than in high-temperature subsurface environments (McInerney *et al.*, 2017), or *Mesotoga* may have larger effective population sizes *in situ* than the hyperthermophiles (Andreani *et al.*, 2017). *Mesotoga* spp. might also interact with viruses more frequently, which may drive population diversity (Koskella and Brockhurst, 2014).

Phylogeographic patterns of the three *Mesotoga* lineages: isolation by distance, range expansion and burial with isolation

To challenge our interim conclusions about genome structure and geographic distribution, we expanded the *Mesotoga* sequence dataset by searching IMG/M (in JGI) and SRA (in NCBI) databases for metagenomes containing *Mesotoga* spp. sequences. Fifteen metagenomes containing sequences closely related to the *Mesotoga* genomes investigated here were identified, arising from two environments already described (tailings pond and oil reservoir in Alberta), as well as oil reservoirs, contaminated sediments, wastewaters and hot spring sediments across the continental USA, and wastewaters in China (Table 2 and Supplementary Information).

246 ***Recent range expansion of the W-lineage:*** Blastn comparisons confirmed wide
 247 distribution of the *Mesotoga* W lineage in wastewater treatment systems. A network
 248 including *Mesotoga* contigs from three metagenomes dominated by W lineage sequences
 249 (Long Beach, Boston and Hong Kong) revealed no geographical structuring, which,
 250 together with high identity in core sequences (Figure S3a), suggests a recent range
 251 expansion of this lineage (Choudoir *et al.*, 2017). Interestingly, W lineage *Mesotoga* have
 252 been detected only at sites heavily influenced by human activities (e.g., drilling,
 253 contamination), suggesting an anthropogenic role in their dispersal. One of the genes
 254 specific to the W lineage (Theba_0620, Supplementary Information) is involved in
 255 synthesis of poly-gamma-glutamate, which has been implicated in cell survival under
 256 harsh conditions and may have contributed to this lineage's wide distribution.

257 ***Isolation by distance can explain the distribution of US-genomes:*** The
 258 metagenome data greatly expanded the observed distribution of the US lineage. As
 259 expected, metagenome IMG 15764 from Albertan oil reservoir E (the source of *Mesotoga*
 260 sp. SC_PW1-3) contained sequences with high identity to the A lineage. However, it also
 261 contained many sequences with high identity to the US lineage (Table 2), and sequence
 262 binning yielded two *Mesotoga* metagenome-assembled genomes (MAGs): one most
 263 similar to NA-genomes (Figure S3b) and one with a mix of sequences from the A lineage
 264 and US lineage (not shown). The intermediate position of US between the A- and W-
 265 lineages noted above may therefore be due to this lineage co-existing with both the W
 266 and A lineages.

267 The network of NA-*Mesotoga* including the metagenomes in Table 2 revealed
 268 three groups (Figure S3b) where metagenomes from New York and Blank Spring

(California) form a cluster that does not contain any genomes sequenced by us. The remaining metagenomes clustered according to geography as well as by environment type: the MAG assembled from oil reservoir E (Alberta), two MAGs from an Alaskan oil reservoir, and the *Mesotoga* sequences from Alameda (California) clustered with SC_TOLDC from Colorado (western North America), while the *Mesotoga* sequences from New Jersey clustered with *Mesotoga* sp. BH458 from Baltimore Harbor (eastern North America). We therefore suggest that the divergence patterns seen for this lineage can be explained at least partly by an isolation-by-distance model.

Evolution of the A-lineage in isolation in North-American oil reservoirs: The metagenome sequences revealed that the A lineage is not restricted to Alberta, nor is it specific to oil reservoirs (Table 2), with substantial numbers of A-lineage sequences detected in wastewater metagenomes. For this lineage, MAGs were available from the same oil reservoir in Alaska as where we observed the NA-lineage (Hu *et al.*, 2016), an anaerobic wastewater digester in Oakland (California), and one, assembled by us, from a PCB-fed culture inoculated with sediments from Liangjiang River, China (Wang and He, 2013). Network analysis revealed that the genome from the Alaskan oil reservoir is most similar to those from the Albertan oil reservoir B, whereas the genomes from China and California show high similarity (> 99%) to each other and to *Mesotoga* sp. SC_NapDC from a northern Albertan oil sands tailings pond (Figure S3c). In fact, these genomes show the second highest level of pairwise identity among the A lineage genomes (Figure S3d), suggesting a recent dispersal possibly due to human activities in the last decades.

The A lineage is more isolated from the other lineages (Figure 1 and 2), which might suggest that this clade evolved in isolation since the formation of oil reservoir

sediments in Alberta 55–120 Ma (Head, 2014; Schaefer, 2005; Selby, 2005)). The high similarity of the MAGs from the Alaskan oil field to the Albertan genomes and MAGs from the A and NA lineages (Figure S3) could be due to these oil reservoir sediments being laid down around the same time (~100 Ma Hu *et al.*, 2016). However, the position of these MAG in the genome networks could also be explained by these oil reservoirs being colonized by the same subsurface population, as suggested for *Thermotoga* spp. (Nesbø *et al.*, 2015). Additional indigenous oil reservoir genomes are needed to resolve this question.

Distinct metabolism in mesophilic *Thermotogae*

Phylogeographic analyses provided intriguing evidence that *Mesotoga*'s lower growth temperature has influenced its distribution patterns. However, the *Mesotoga* genus also displays additional lineage-specific phenotypes. We therefore examined the newly available genomes for metabolic insights, which may be linked to *Mesotoga*'s lower growth temperatures and may influence the role(s) *Mesotoga* play in their environments.

***Mesotoga*-specific genes:** Comparing the *Mesotoga* isolate genomes to other *Thermotogae* genomes in IMG (Markowitz *et al.*, 2014) revealed 200 *M. prima* genes found in all *Mesotoga* genomes (including the more distantly related *M. infera* not included in the phylogenomic analyses), but in no other *Thermotogae* genomes. The majority of these genes were hypothetical proteins (N=119, Supplementary Table S1). When *Mesotoga*-specific genes with a predicted function were classified according to Clusters of Orthologous Groups (COG) categories, the largest category was 'Amino Acid metabolism and transport' with 11 genes, most of which were dipeptidases (COG4690,

N=6). Interestingly, amino acid metabolism genes were up-regulated during growth at low temperatures in *Mesotoga*'s closest relative *Kosmotoga olearia* (Pollo *et al.*, 2017), suggesting a role in low temperature adaptations.

Reducing equivalents and thiosulfate reduction: *Mesotoga*'s core metabolism differs from that of other characterized Thermotogae. While growth of most Thermotogae is stimulated by adding thiosulfate, sulfur, or other reduced sulfur compounds to the medium (Ravot *et al.*, 1995; Boileau *et al.*, 2016), reduction of sulfur compounds appears to be essential for growth of *Mesotoga* in pure culture (Hania *et al.*, 2011; 2013; Fadhlouai *et al.*, 2017). The first description of *M. prima* (Nesbø *et al.*, 2012) reported that growth was only slightly stimulated by the presence of thiosulfate and sulfur. However, here we observed growth of this isolate only with sulfur or thiosulfate (Supplementary Table S4 and Table S5), confirming that this is a general trait of *Mesotoga* spp. Additionally, while other Thermotogae produce H₂ (and H₂S if grown with partially reduced sulfur compounds) *Mesotoga* spp. produce large amounts of H₂S and no or little H₂ (Supplementary Table S5). Fadhlouai *et al.*, (2017) suggested that *Mesotoga*'s inability to ferment sugars without sulfur compounds is due to the lack of a bifurcating hydrogenase observed, for instance, in *Thermotoga* spp. However, *K. olearia* also lacks this enzyme yet produces large amounts of H₂ while fermenting pyruvate by using a Fe-hydrogenase (Kole_0172) (Pollo *et al.*, 2017).

To reconcile these observations with genomic data, transcriptome analysis was performed using a culture of *M. prima* grown with 0.5% yeast extract, xylose and thiosulfate. RNAseq analysis revealed high expression of Theba_0443 (RPKM of 3650; Supplementary Tables S1 and S6) encoding a Fe-hydrogenase homologous to the one

used by *K. olearia* (Kole_0172). Hydrogenases are indeed essential in Thermotogae for recycling of ferredoxins (Schut *et al.*, 2013); therefore, finding the same hydrogenase to be highly expressed in *M. prima* and *K. olearia*, and conserved in all *Mesotoga* genomes investigated here, suggests that *Mesotoga* possesses a mechanism relying on oxidized sulfur compounds, efficiently converting all intracellularly produced H_2 to H_2S . Notably, there was no change in the culture headspace gas $H_2:N_2$ ratio after incubating *Mesotoga* spp. in a 1:9 $H_2:N_2$ atmosphere for > 5 months (Supplementary Table S5), suggesting that *Mesotoga* neither produces nor takes up externally supplied H_2 .

No homologs of characterized thiosulfate reductases were identified, although the *Mesotoga* genomes carry homologs (Theba_0076; Theba_0077 in *M. prima*) of an archaeal intracellular ferredoxin:NADP oxidoreductase (SudAB; Hagen *et al.*, 2000) capable of acting as a sulfide dehydrogenase in the presence of elemental sulfur or polysulfide (Figure 3). Both genes were transcribed at moderate levels in *M. prima* grown with thiosulfate (RPKM 341 and 243, respectively), while the *K. olearia* homologs (Kole_1827, Kole_1828) were highly expressed under similar conditions (RPKM > 1000, (Pollo *et al.*, 2017). SudAB complexes, however, are not known to be involved in thiosulfate reduction. This is probably due to an unfavorable $E^\circ = 82$ mV for the reaction when NADH acts as electron donor: $E^\circ [S_2O_3^{2-}/HS^- + SO_3^{2-}] = -402$ mV and $E^\circ [NAD^+/NADH] = -320$ mV. The E° of $[Fd_{Ox}/Fd_{Red}]$ is similarly high at -390 mV. Comparable endergonic reactions are catalyzed by the *Salmonella enterica* thiosulfate reductase Phs by utilizing proton-motive force (Stoffels *et al.*, 2012). However, the cytoplasmic SudAB complex cannot couple proton-motive force and reduction of an external electron acceptor. Thus, neither NADH nor Fd_{Red} can function as electron donors

for thiosulfate reduction by *M. prima*. Instead molecular H₂ with $E^{\circ} [2\text{H}^+ / \text{H}_2] = -410$ mV appears to be a thermodynamically preferable electron donor for thiosulfate reduction. The only hydrogenase present in the *M. prima* genome is the highly expressed FeFe-hydrogenase (Theba_0443), which usually is involved in Fd-dependent H₂ production (Vignais and Billoud, 2007). A cluster of five highly transcribed genes (Theba_0461 – 0465, RPKM 1203-3697, Supplementary Tables S1 and S6) encode proteins homologous to all subunits of the NADP-reducing hydrogenase Hnd of *Desulfovibrio fructosovorans* (Nouailler *et al.*, 2006) except the catalytic subunit (HndD). These proteins may work together with Theba_0443 to form a FeFe-hydrogenase complex (Figure 3). We hypothesize that this complex is involved in intracellular synthesis of molecular hydrogen for thiosulfate reduction by SudAB coupled to NADH oxidation (Fd_{red}, Figure 3). The Hnd genes have homologs in other Thermotogae, however, similar genomic context is observed only in genomes of other *Mesotoga* and *Kosmotoga* spp. (Supplementary Table S7).

Mesotoga cells require enzymes that re-oxidize Fd_{red} formed during sugar oxidation. This might be carried out by either the NADP:ferredoxin oxidoreductase complex (Mbx; Theba_1796-1808 in *M. prima*. Schut *et al.*, 2013) or the Rnf ion-motive electron transport complex (Theba_1343-1348; Müller *et al.*, 2008). Conserved motifs (Mulikidjanian *et al.*, 2008) suggested a Na⁺-translocating F-type ATP synthase operating in *M. prima*. As a consequence, both MbX and Rnf complexes are predicted to export Na⁺ generating sodium- motive force instead of protein-motive force. Genes encoding MbX and Rnf show low and moderate expression (RPKM 37-88 and 236-478, respectively) during growth on thiosulfate, and the expression values suggests that Rnf is the main

complex involved. The model shown in Figure 3 accounts for the observed dependence of *M. prima* on sulfur or thiosulfate for growth, the lack of H₂ production, and involves genes already implicated in hydrogen and sulfur metabolism. Importantly, however, currently there are no known enzymes that couple H₂ oxidation and thiosulfate/sulfur reduction. It is therefore possible that *M. prima* SudAB uses NADH as the electron donor and it is much more effective than the hydrogenase which results in almost no H₂ as growth product (Figure 3 panel C).

Alternatively, thiosulfate reduction coupled to H₂ oxidation (i.e., the postulated role of SudAB; Figure 3a) may be performed solely by one of the highly-transcribed hypothetical *Mesotoga* protein with no match to genes in *Kosmotoga* and other Thermotogae, or in combination with SudAB (Figure 3 panel b). Several candidate genes listed in Supplementary Table S6 encode proteins with unknown functions. Functional studies of these genes, as well as the gene products shown in Figure 3, are needed to assess their role, if any, in thiosulfate reduction. Additional genes that may be involved in thiosulfate uptake and electron transfer are also discussed in Supplementary Information.

Interestingly, PhosAc3 and *M. infera* were found to reduce only elemental sulfur (Hania *et al.*, 2015; 2013) whereas the strains isolated by us also reduce thiosulfate. These differences may reflect selection during isolation; all the isolates obtained in the current study were from enrichment cultures containing thiosulfate, whereas PhosAc3 and *M. infera* were enriched with sulfur. This suggests that the sulfur-compound-preference may be a variable and flexible phenotype in *Mesotoga* populations.

Acetate and xylose utilization: Growth on acetate was reported for *Mesotoga* PhosAc3 (Hania *et al.*, 2015), and we observed weak stimulation of growth of its close

relative *M. prima* on acetate (day 5-10 in Supplementary Figure S4 and Table S4). Nobu
 $et al.$ (2015) suggested that Ca. “*Mesotoga acetoxidans*”, a MAG closely related to *M.*
infera, oxidizes acetate by using a novel pathway even though the genes comprising the
pathway are conserved in all Thermotogae genomes. Yet, this phenotype is uncommon
among Thermotogae and has been reported only for *Pseudothermotoga lettingae* (Balk,
2002). Instead, many Thermotogae are inhibited by acetate, including one of *Mesotoga*’s
closest relatives, *K. olearia* (Dipippo $et al.$, 2009). Our search for *Mesotoga*-specific
genes that may be responsible for their observed growth on acetate revealed candidate
gene encoding a bacterial homodimeric pyruvate:ferredoxin oxidoreductase (PFOR;
Theba_1954). Its close homologs were found only in *Kosmotoga pacifica* (L’Haridon et
 $al.$, 2013) and *Mesoaciditoga lauensis* (Reysenbach $et al.$, 2013). Unfortunately, the
description of these two species did not investigate growth on acetate. The *pfor* gene is
distantly related to the archaeal multi-subunit-type used by other Thermotogae (Ragsdale,
2003) and almost all its close homologs fall within the *Clostridia* (Supplementary Figure
S5). Genes having 97-99% identity to *pfor* from *M. infera*, and 83-85% identity to the *M.*
prima homolog, were found in both the metagenome and metatranscriptome published by
Nobu $et al.$; 2015) (locus tag JGI12104J13512_10052834 and
JGI11944J13513_10066464) but were not included in their model. We propose that
PFOR may work with the acetate kinase (Theba_0428 in *M. prima*) and
phosphotransacetylase (Theba_0782 in *M. prima*) found in all Thermotogae to enable
Mesotoga to grow on acetate. At high extracellular acetate concentrations we suggest that
PFOR shifts the balance favoring the production of pyruvate from acetyl-CoA (i.e. serves
as an acetate switch Wolfe, 2005).

M. prima grows optimally on xylose, a sugar fermented by many Thermotogae (Bhandari and Gupta, 2014). The D-xylose utilization pathway is similar to that observed in Firmicutes (Gu *et al.*, 2010)(Figure 3). Several possible xylulose kinases genes were found co-localized with genes encoding xylosidases, sugar transporters and kinases, suggesting their synergetic activities in xylan hydrolysis, xylose import and utilization.

Mesotoga-specific genes related to O₂ exposure: Several *Mesotoga*-specific genes are predicted to be involved in oxygen-radical defense (Supplementary Table S6). One of the most highly conserved genes across all the *Mesotoga* genomes (Theba_1553; average pairwise identity 96.3%) shows similarity to peroxiredoxin and alkyl hydroperoxide reductase domain-encoding genes. Moreover, a catalase gene (Theba_0075) is found in all isolate genomes except those from oil reservoir H.

The higher abundance of oxygen-radical defense may be linked to the lower growth temperatures of *Mesotoga* versus thermophilic Thermotogae. O₂ solubility in water is greater and free radicals are stabilized at low temperatures, and organisms living at low temperatures are therefore exposed to higher concentrations of reactive oxygen species (Piette *et al.*, 2010). It should be noted that the transcriptome of *M. prima* grown anaerobically revealed that some of the genes possibly involved in O₂ or H₂O₂ defense (e.g., catalase) were highly expressed (top 5% of expressed genes; Supplementary Table S1 and S6), suggesting that these genes may have additional or alternative functions under anaerobic conditions. Further investigation is needed to clarify the transcriptional responses of these genes and identify the targets of their enzymes.

Concluding remarks.

Our genomic analyses show that the lower growth temperature of *Mesotoga* spp. compared to the hyperthermophilic *Thermotoga* likely has significantly influenced *Mesotoga* phylogeography, with geographic separation having a greater influence than genetic separation, possibly due to the damaging effects of oxygen exposure during dispersal. Whether this is a general feature of strictly anaerobic organisms remains to be resolved. There is also some indication of possible eco-type differentiation among the *Mesotoga* lineages, with the US lineage being common in communities degrading aromatic pollutants (PCB, toluene) and the A lineage in hydrocarbon-impacted sites. However, for both of these lineages, inspection of metagenomes revealed they are not restricted to these environments.

The ecological role of *Mesotoga in situ* may differ from their thermophilic relatives. For instance, hydrogen-producing *Thermotoga* spp. have been shown to grow in syntrophy with hydrogenotrophic methanogens (e.g., Johnson *et al.*, 2005) but this is likely not the case for *Mesotoga* that produce only trace amounts or no detectable H₂. Supporting this proposal, we were unable to establish co-cultures of *M. prima* and a hydrogenotrophic methanogen (not shown). Instead Fadhloui *et al.* (2017) showed that *Mesotoga* spp. prefer to grow in syntrophy with hydrogenotrophic sulfate-reducing bacteria. This, together with the ability to both produce and consume acetate, suggests that *Mesotoga* will assume different environmental roles than their thermophilic relatives, for instance by supporting the growth of sulfate reducers rather than methanogens. An interesting question is whether they also grow syntrophically with other common hydrogenotrophic organisms in their niches, such as organohalide-respiring Dehalococcoides (e.g. Fagervold *et al.*, 2007). Finally, the large amounts of H₂S

produced by *Mesotoga* could have detrimental effects on oil reservoirs, production facilities and pipelines where *Mesotoga* is commonly found. Monitoring the presence of *Mesotoga* spp. in addition to the more commonly targeted sulfate reducers in these industrial environments (Lee *et al.*, 1995) may be informative and valuable.

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670

671

Figure legends

Figure 1. Phylogenetic relationships among *Mesotoga* genomes based on (a) 16SrRNA genes, (b) core SNPs and (c) presence/absence of shared 500-bp genomic fragments. The 16S rRNA maximum likelihood phylogeny was estimated using RAxML in Geneious v 10. For networks shown in (b) and (c), data were obtained using PanSeq (Laing *et al.*, 2010). Core SNPs in (b) were required to be present in 14 of 18 genomes (including SAGs), and genomic fragments were considered shared if they were at least 70% identical. The network in (c) was constructed using only genomes from isolates; shared fragments were required to be present in all 9 genomes and be at least 70% identical in sequence. Networks were calculated in SplitsTree using NeighborNet algorithm (Huson and Bryant, 2006) from uncorrected distances. The three lineages are indicated by W, US and A.

Figure 2. Visualization of recombination events detected among *Mesotoga* genomes from different lineages. The genomes are color-coded according to lineage and arranged on the circumference of the circle; W lineage, blue; US lineage, orange; A lineage, green. The recombination events with predicted donor and recipient are shown as lines connecting the two genomes and the locations of recombined regions, where line color reflects the donor lineage and the width of the line is proportional to the length of the recombinant region. Predicted events were required to be significant in at least 3 of 4 algorithms in RDP (Martin *et al.*, 2010). The diagram was generated using Circos Version circos-0.69 (Krzywinski *et al.*, 2009).

Figure 3. Model of energy generation pathway in *Mesotoga prima* during growth on xylose and thiosulfate. Glucose and xylose poly- and oligosaccharides are hydrolyzed by various intracellular and interstitial glycosidases (GHs). Glucose oxidation occurs via the glycolytic Embden-Meyerhof-Parnas pathway, whereas xylose is utilized via xylose isomerase (*XylA*, Theba_1394), xylulose kinase (*XylB*, Theba_1395, Theba_2230, Theba

700 2429, Theba 2518, Theba 2544, Theba 2588), ribulose phosphate 3-epimerase
701 (Theba_0639) and enzymes of the pentose-phosphate pathway. Specifically, xylose
702 isomerase converts D-xylose to D-xylulose, which is phosphorylated by the set of
703 xylulose kinases to D-xylulose 5-phosphate, and further to ribulose 5-phosphate by the
704 ribulose-phosphate 3-epimerase. Both xylulose 5-phosphate and ribulose 5-phosphate
705 produced by this pathway are common metabolic intermediate in the pentose-phosphate
706 pathway. The xylose isomerase Theba_1394 was among the most highly transcribed
707 genes during cultivation of *M. prima* on xylose and thiosulfate (Supplementary Table S5).
708 Acetyl-CoA formation occurs by means of pyruvate-ferredoxin oxidoreductase (PFOR,
709 Theba_1954). In the possible case of growth on acetate, its activation occurs by means of
710 acetate kinase (ACKA, Theba_0428) and phosphotransacetylase (PTA, Theba_0782),
711 acting in reverse. The model includes gene products hypothesized to be involved in
712 thiosulfate reduction. Na^+ refers to Na^+ ions involved in generating the generating the
713 sodium motive force. A: The FeFe hydrogenase (Theba_0443 and Theba_0461 – 0465)
714 reduces NADH to form H_2 , which is used as an electron donor for thiosulfate reduction
715 catalyzed by SudAB (Theba_0076, Theba_0077). Mbx (Theba_1796-1808) and/or Rnf
716 (Theba_1343-1348) complexes provide additional NADH along with the oxidation of
717 excessive reducing equivalents (Fd_{red}) and generation of a sodium-motive force. B and C:
718 other possible scenarios of H_2 oxidation and thiosulfate reduction.
719

Table 1. List of genomes analyzed. All genomes, except those of *Mesotoga prima*, *M. prima* PhosAc3 and *Mesotoga infera*, were sequenced as part of the current study.

Name and Source	Short Name	Genome Size	% GC	Ref. for description of sample site / accession no. in Genbank	% completeness of SAG ^a
Isolates					
Produced water from oil field B near Brooks, Alberta, Canada ^b				(Hulecki <i>et al.</i> , 2009)	
<i>Mesotoga</i> sp. Brooks.08.YT.4.2.5.1 ^c	BR5.1	2,957,195	45.9	AYTX01000000	
<i>Mesotoga</i> sp. Brooks.08.YT.4.2.5.2	BR5.2	2,953,308	45.9	JPGZ00000000	
<i>Mesotoga</i> sp. Brooks.08.YT.4.2.5.4 ^c	BR5.4	3,002,147	45.9	ATCT01000000	
<i>Mesotoga</i> sp. Brooks.08.YT.105.5.1	BR105.1	2,992,699	45.9	AYTW01000000	
<i>Mesotoga</i> sp. Brooks.08.YT.105.6.4	BR105.4	3,205,299	45.9	JWIM00000000	
Free water knockout fluids from oil field H near Stettler, Alberta ^d				(Eckford and Fedorak, 2002)	
<i>Mesotoga</i> sp. HF07.pep.5.2 ^c	HF5.2	2,838,813	45.3	JFHJ01000000	
<i>Mesotoga</i> sp. HF07.pep.5.3	HF5.3	2,934,282	45.3	AYTV01000000	
<i>Mesotoga</i> sp. HF07.pep.5.4	HF5.4	2,968,642	45.3	JFHM01000000	
Sediments from Baltimore Harbour, Maryland, USA				(Holoman <i>et al.</i> , 1998)	
<i>Mesotoga prima</i> MesG1.Ag.4.2 ^e	<i>M.prima</i>	2,974,229	45.5	NC_017934	
<i>Mesotoga</i> sp. BH458.6.3.2.1 ^f	BH458	3,234,409	45.7	JFHL01000000	
Wastewater treatment plant, Tunisia				(Hania <i>et al.</i> , 2011)	
<i>Mesotoga prima</i> PhosAc3	PhosAc3	3,108,267	45.2	NZ_CARH01000000	

(continued)

Genomes assembled from single cell amplified genomes (SAGs)

Produced water from oil field E near Medicine Hat, Alberta ^g				(Voordouw <i>et al.</i> , 2009)	
<i>Mesotoga</i> sp. 3PWK154PWL11	SC_PW.1	876,625	46.8	JMRN01000000	21%
<i>Mesotoga</i> sp. 3PWM13N19	SC_PW.2	1,886,634	45.8	JMRM01000000	78%
<i>Mesotoga</i> sp. 4PWA21	SC_PW.3	1,541,163	45.9	JMQL01000000	34%
Oil sands tailings pond sediments near Fort McMurray, Alberta				(Tan <i>et al.</i> , 2015)	
<i>Mesotoga</i> sp. NapDC	SC_NapDC	1,885,291	45.8	JNFM01000000	88%
<i>Mesotoga</i> sp. NapDC2	SC_NapDC2	1,337,305	45.6	JQSC01000000	53%
<i>Mesotoga</i> sp. NapDC3	SC_NapDC3	1,828,922	45.6	JWIP00000000	66%
Contaminated aquifer fluids from Colorado, USA				(Fowler <i>et al.</i> , 2012; Gieg <i>et al.</i> , 1999)	
<i>Mesotoga</i> sp. TolDC ^h	SC_TOLDC	2,257,992	46.1	AYSI01000000	74%

^a Completeness of single cell genomes was calculated based on HMM hits to 119 single copy marker genes (see Supplementary Material).

^b Belongs geologically to the Glauconitic formation.

^c These genomes were sequenced using IonTorrent PGM; all other genomes and single cells were sequenced using Illumina MiSeq

^d Belongs geologically to the Upper Mannville Group – Cretaceous age.

^e The *M. prima* genome was sequenced by Zhaxybayeva *et al.* (2012).

^f This is a sister-culture of the enrichment culture that yielded *M. prima* MesG1.Ag.4.2 (Nesbø *et al.*, 2006; 2012).

^g Belongs geologically to the Western Canadian Sedimentary Basin.

^h In addition to the SAG sequences, 39 *Mesotoga* fosmid clones prepared from the same culture were included in the assembly (<http://hmp.ucalgary.ca/HMP/metagenomes/isolates.html>).

Table 2. *Mesotoga* sequences recovered from publicly available metagenomes. For the sequences obtained from the IMG (JGI) database, only sequences classified as Thermotogae were downloaded. The predominant *Mesotoga* lineage in each metagenome is shown in boldface. Metagenomes dominated by sequences similar to *Mesotoga infera* were not included.

Metagenome origin ^a	IMG, Genbank or SRA accession nos.	<i>Mesotoga</i> sequences (no. contigs)	<i>Mesotoga</i> sequences with best match to lineage A, W or US (no. contigs)	% average pairwise identity (range)
Alberta				
MLSB tailings pond	IMG: 26785	491,657 bp (1,707)	A: 485,638 bp (1,694) W: 2,455 bp (8) US: 634 bp (2)	99.8% (98.5-100%) 93.9% (88.7-99.6) 86.4% (89.7-95%)
Oil reservoir E	IMG: 15764	5,190,293 bp (4,833)	A: 3,137,228 bp (3,259) W: 195,159 bp (317) US: 1,693,057 bp (1,308)	98.6% (71.3-100%) 94.5% (79.7-100%) 95.3% (82.2-100%)
USA				
California				
Alameda Naval Air Station: Soil contaminated with Chloroethene	IMG: 5776	407,588 bp (453)	A: 17,955 bp (23) W: 47,017 bp (61) US: 297,011 bp (360)	92% (85.3-99.5%) 93.4% (83-99.1%) 94.2% (83.6-100%)
Blank Spring hotspring sediment	IMG: 94476	4,060,664 bp (2,037)	A: 920,911 bp (924) W: 226,161 bp (176) US: 2,025,524 bp (825)	91.6% (64.3-100%) 85.4% (64.3-99.1%) 89.3% (66.1-99.6 %)
Long Beach Municipal wastewater AD_UKC097	IMG: 89744	2,339,863 bp (1,810)	A: 390,020 bp (588) W: 710,377 bp (914) US: 202,508 bp (207)	96.1% (65-100%) 94.1% (64.3-100%) 88.4% (63.6-100%)

(continued)

Illinois				
Decatur municipal wastewater AD_UKC034 ^b	IMG: 89745	4,031,397 bp (2,218)	A: 2,085,927 bp (1,162) W: 820,163 bp (588) US: 271,756 bp (260)	96.5% (65.1-100%) 92.7% (64.6-100%) 89.0% (65.0-100%)
New York Sulfidogenic MTBE-NYH ^c	IMG: 62988	5,195,092 bp ⁱ (1,727)	A: 421,552 bp (261) W: 209,518 bp (218) US: 1,825,787 bp (450)	85.8% (63.8-99.2%) 84.6% (64.5-99.8%) 89.2% (65.9-100%)
New Jersey Methanogenic MTBE-AKM ^d	IMG: 62224	2,464,953 bp (4,206)	A: 31,663 bp (104) W: 122,392 bp (320) US: 1,154,398 bp (2,706)	87.2% (66.8-100%) 93.8% (65.0-100%) 98.0% (66.5-100%)
Sulfidogenic MTBE-AKS2 ^e	IMG: 62223	4,971,880 (3,215)	A: 152,359 bp (276) W: 240,489 bp (307) US: 2,665,479 bp (1,575)	86.3% (65.9-99.3%) 86.6% (65.6-100%) 94.3% (65.8-100%)
Boston Wastewater AD_UKC077 ^f	IMG: 89805	5,651,655 ⁱ (1,386)	A: 149,486 bp (212) W: 1,379,334 bp (326) US: 141,168 bp (150)	80.2% (63.4-100%) 88.2% (63.7-100%) 77.6% (64.4-99.7%)
Hong Kong				
Wastewater AD_UKC109 ^f 2015-03-06	IMG: 89888	4,071,190 bp (4,096)	A: 415,727 bp (615) W: 1,189,447 bp (2,476) US: 632,042 bp (902)	92.8% (64.7-100%) 93.6% (64.3-100%) 91.9% (63-100%)
Wastewater AD_UKC119 ^f 2015-01-26	IMG: 89894	5,462,335 bp (2,499)	A: 2,347,962 bp (853) W: 586,387 bp (497) US: 1,521,681 (1,071)	95.7% (65.4-100%) 89.4% (64.3-100%) 93.0% (63.9-100%)

(continued)

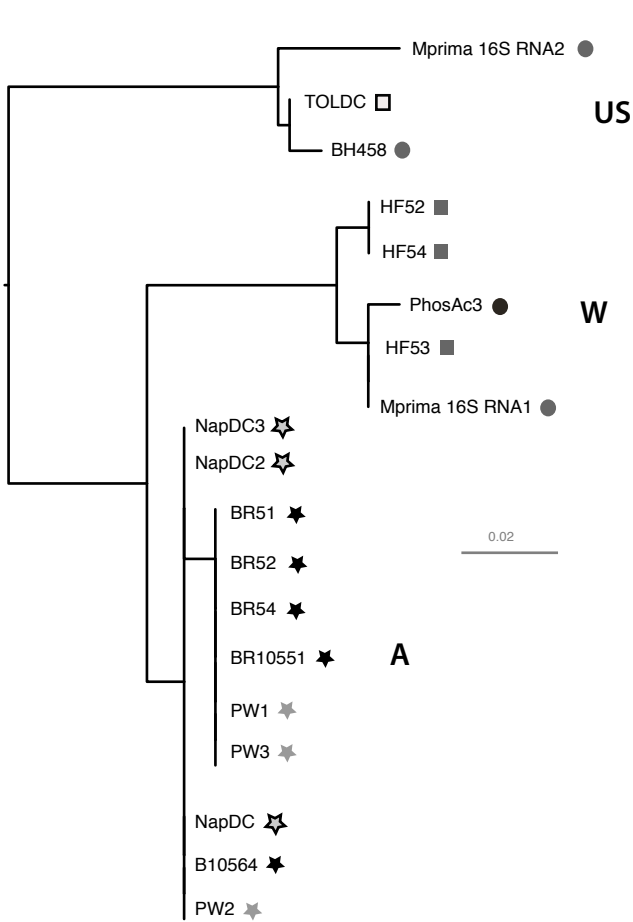
Metagenome-assembled genomes (MAGs)

Alaska Oil reservoir LGGP01 ^g	Genbank: GCA_001508515	1,712,609 bp (440)	A: 1,470,927 bp (384) W: 80,31 bp (30) US: 47,775 bp (21)	98.5% (71.3-100%) 92.3% (70.0-99.6%) 88.9% (71.9-100%)
LGGH01 ^g	GCA_001508435	1,225,111 bp (267)	A: 48,008 bp (13) W: 63,609 bp (21) US: 1,009,462 bp (233)	89.9% (78.8-99.6%) 92.5% (80.4-100%) 94.5% (80.9-99.6)
LGGW01 ^g	GCA_001509115	1,622,264 bp (264)	A: 85,486 bp (20) W: 104,756 bp (25) US: 1,139,439 (211)	87.3% (67.8-99.6%) 92.3% (82.6-99.9%) 94.5% (83.6-99.8%)
California Anaerobic digester in Oakland ^h	IMG: 81407 (Unclassified Thermotogales bacterium Bin 13)	3,480,910 bp (395)	A: 2,287,852 bp (247) W: 109,011 bp (48) US: 118,885 bp (33)	93.6% (64.5-100%) 83.1% (64.4-100%) 79.1% (65.8-96.5)
China PCB-fed mixed <i>Dehalococcoides</i> culture CG1 from sand and silt near Liangjiang River ⁱ	SRA: SRX392467	2,727,841bp (379)	A: 2,226,7034 bp (345) W: 22,520 bp (14) US: 40,010 bp (20)	98.0% (84.6-100%) 90.2% (68.2-97.4%) 90.7% (78.2-99.8%)

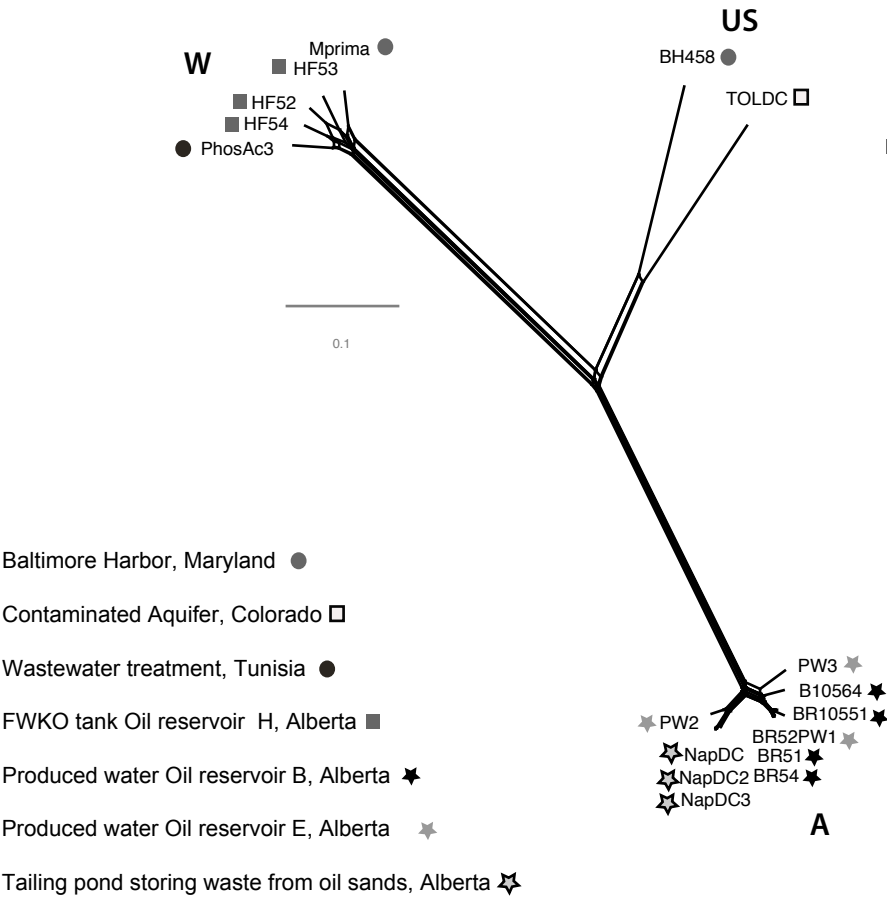
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- a) *Mesotoga* sequences were identified by performing blastn searches using a database containing all the *Mesotoga* spp. genomes listed in Table 1. We used word size =11 and expected = e^{-10} . Sequences with matches were then sorted according to the *Mesotoga* lineage with the best match (A, W or US; see main text).
- b) Nine metagenomes and three transcriptomes are available from the same system; only one was selected as representative.
- c) Sulfidogenic MTBE-degrading enrichment culture microbial communities from New York harbour sediments
- d) Methanogenic MTBE-degrading enrichment culture microbial communities from Arthur Kill sediments

- e) Sulfidogenic MTBE-degrading enrichment culture microbial communities from Arthur Kill sediments. Two very similar metagenomes are available (Figure S3b); only one is included here.
- f) Wastewater treatment anaerobic digesters. Additional metagenomes with similar *Mesotoga* lineage composition are available from this site and the ones included here were chosen as representatives.
- g) Metagenome assembled genomes from (Hu *et al.*, 2016). LGGP01 and LGGH01 were from oil reservoir sample SB1 and LGGW01 was from oil reservoir sample SB2.
- h) Sludge microbial communities from wastewater, phosphite and CO₂-enriched.
- i) Genome extracted and assembled by us

a 16S rRNA



b Core SNPs



c Pangenome

