



Review

Ataxia-telangiectasia (A-T): An emerging dimension of premature ageing

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ABSTRACT

A-T is a prototype genome instability syndrome and a multifaceted disease. A-T leads to neurodegeneration – primarily cerebellar atrophy, immunodeficiency, oculocutaneous telangiectasia (dilated blood vessels), vestigial thymus and gonads, endocrine abnormalities, cancer predisposition and varying sensitivity to DNA damaging agents, particularly those that induce DNA double-strand breaks. With the recent increase in life expectancy of A-T patients, the premature ageing component of this disease is gaining greater awareness. The complex A-T phenotype reflects the ever growing number of functions assigned to the protein encoded by the responsible gene – the homeostatic protein kinase, ATM. The quest to thoroughly understand the complex A-T phenotype may reveal yet elusive ATM functions.

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1. A-T and its genetic basis: a theme with many variations

1.1. The classical A-T phenotype

A-T (OMIM#208900) is an extensively documented genome instability syndrome found worldwide with incidence of 1:40,000–1:200,000 live births in different human populations. The clinical phenotype of A-T ranges from severe to milder

variants of the disease, but is usually portrayed by its classical, severe form (Chun and Gatti, 2004; Crawford, 1998; Lavin, 2008; Nissenkorn and Ben-Zeev, 2015; Perlman et al., 2012). However, awareness is growing of the broad clinical variability associated with the causative mutations (Taylor et al., 2015). The primary cause of all variants of the disease is mutations in the autosomal gene *ATM* (*A-T*, mutated) at11q22–23 (Gatti et al., 1988; Savitsky et al., 1995a), which encodes the ATM protein (Savitsky et al., 1995b; Ziv et al., 1997) – a multi-functional protein kinase (Ditch and Paull, 2012; Guleria and Chandna, 2015; Shiloh, 2014; Shiloh and Ziv, 2013).

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The prominent symptom of classical A-T is progressive cerebellar ataxia that develops into a general motor dysfunction, eventually confining most patients to a wheelchair around the end of their first decade (Boder, 1985; Boder and Sedgwick, 1958; Chun and Gatti, 2004; Crawford, 1998; Crawford et al., 2000; Gatti, 1995; Nissenkorn and Ben-Zeev, 2015; Sedgwick and Boder, 1960; Verhagen et al., 2012b). Impairment of the extrapyramidal movement system is common in A-T, as are oculomotor abnormalities such as apraxia, strabismus and nystagmus. Swallowing and articulation of speech are often abnormal, and facial expression is limited. Dysfunctional swallowing is often associated with a general nutritional problem as well as clinically unapparent aspiration, which is thought to play a role in the increasing frequency of lower respiratory tract infections in many patients (Bhatt et al., 2015; Lefton-Greif et al., 2000). An absence of deep reflexes and peripheral neuropathy are common in A-T, but usually develop relatively later than other neurological impairments (Nissenkorn and Ben-Zeev, 2015). The main underlying pathology appears to be progressive cerebellar cortical degeneration that primarily affects Purkinje and granule neurons, but also basket cells (Gatti and Vinters, 1985; Vinters et al., 1985).

Oculocutaneous telangiectasia (dilated blood vessels) appear at various ages, usually in the eyes and sometimes on the ears and facial skin (Greenberger et al., 2013; Perlman et al., 2012). Immunodeficiency is another hallmark of A-T. Typically, IgA, IgE and various IgG subclasses are reduced; a diminished lymphocyte count is common, affecting B and T but not natural killer cells, and many have impaired antibody responses to vaccines (Gatti, 1995; Gatti et al., 1982; Hartlova et al., 2015; Nowak-Wegrzyn et al., 2004; Weaver and Gatti, 1985). The thymus is typically vestigial, as are the gonads. Another prominent clinical hallmark of A-T is cancer predisposition, with most malignancies being lymphoreticular of both B cell and T cell origin, including non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, Hodgkin's lymphoma, and several forms of leukemia (Loeb et al., 2000; Murphy et al., 1999; Olsen et al., 2001; Taylor and Edwards, 1982). A wide range of carcinomas has been reported in individual cases, especially among older patients. Many children with A-T grow at a diminished rate, and puberty is often delayed; this growth retardation was suggested to result from a primary endocrine defect (Ehlayel et al., 2014; Pommerening et al., 2015; Schubert et al., 2005; Voss et al., 2014), or a primary growth defect (Nissenkorn et al., 2016), but is probably also a function of swallowing problems making eating an inefficient and exhausting task. An important endocrine abnormality in some patients is insulin-resistant diabetes (Blevins and Gebhart, 1996; Morrell et al., 1986; Nissenkorn et al., 2016; Schalch et al., 1970). Notable laboratory findings are elevation of serum alpha fetoprotein and serum carcinoembryonic antigen. Further aspects of A-T, which entail segmental premature ageing, will be discussed later in this review, after the physiological functions of ATM are described.

A-T is a prototype genome instability syndrome (Butterworth and Taylor, 1986; Chun and Gatti, 2004; Crawford, 1998; Kennaugh et al., 1986; Lavin, 2008; Perlman et al., 2012; Taylor, 1978; Taylor and Edwards, 1982; Taylor et al., 2014). A-T patients show a striking sensitivity to the cytotoxic effect of ionizing radiation (Gotoff et al., 1967; Morgan et al., 1968). Cells from A-T patients exhibit marked chromosomal instability and sensitivity to ionizing radiations and radiomimetic chemicals (Chen et al., 1978; Shiloh et al., 1982a, 1983; Taylor, 1978; Taylor et al., 1975, 1979). This acute sensitivity results from a profound defect in the cellular response to DNA double-strand breaks (DSBs), whose chief mobilizer is the ATM protein (see below). It is important to note, however, that A-T cells are also moderately sensitive to a wide array of other DNA damaging agents suggesting that these cells cope less efficiently with many other DNA lesions besides DSBs (see below).

Lymphocyte cultures from A-T patients often contain clonal translocations that mainly involve the loci of the T-cell receptor and immunoglobulin heavy-chain genes (Butterworth and Taylor, 1986; Heppell et al., 1988; Kennaugh et al., 1986; Kojis et al., 1991; Taylor and Butterworth, 1986), pointing to a defect in the maturation of these genes via V(D)J and class-switch recombination in the adaptive immune system. Such clones usually herald the onset of malignancy and expand as malignancy progresses. Cultured A-T cell strains exhibit elevated rates of chromosome end associations and reduced telomere length (Metcalf et al., 1996; Pandita et al., 1995; Smilenov et al., 1999; Vaziri, 1997; Wood et al., 2001). A-T fibroblast strains exhibit similar growth properties to wild-type cells at early passage levels but senesce prematurely (Shiloh et al., 1982b).

Increasing numbers of reports have described elevated readouts of oxidative stress in plasma of A-T patients (Reichenbach et al., 2002), in cultured A-T fibroblasts (Gatei et al., 2001; Lee et al., 2001) and lymphocytes (Ludwig et al., 2013), and in tissues and cultured cells from *Atm*-deficient mice (Barlow et al., 1999; Chen et al., 2003; Gage et al., 2001; Kamsler et al., 2001; Liu et al., 2005; McDonald et al., 2011; Reliene et al., 2004; Reliene and Schiestl, 2007; Ziv et al., 2005). Notably, the response of A-T fibroblast strains to induced oxidative stress was found defective (Ward et al., 1994; Yi et al., 1990). These observations were later linked to the role of ATM in regulating cellular oxidative stress (see below).

1.2. The *ATM* gene and *ATM* mutations underlying variations of the A-T phenotype

The *ATM* gene extends over 184 kb and contains 66 exons producing a 13 kb mRNA (Platzer et al., 1997; Uziel et al., 1996). It is extremely rich in sequence variations. Patients with the severe form of A-T are homozygous or compound heterozygous for null *ATM* alleles. The corresponding mutations usually lead to truncation of the ATM protein and subsequently to its loss due to instability of the truncated derivatives; a smaller portion of the mutations create amino acid substitutions that abolish ATM's catalytic activity (Barone et al., 2009; Gilad et al., 1996; Sandoval et al., 1999; Taylor et al., 2014) (see also http://chromium.liacs.nl/LOVD2/home.php?select_db=ATM).

Careful inspection of the neurological symptoms of A-T patients reveals variability in their age of onset and rate of progression among patients with different combinations of null *ATM* alleles (Alterman et al., 2007; Crawford et al., 2000; Taylor et al., 2015). Thus, despite the identical outcome in terms of ATM function, additional genes may affect the most cardinal symptom of A-T. Other, milder types of *ATM* mutations further extend this variability, and account for forms of the disease with extremely variable severity and age of onset of symptoms. The corresponding *ATM* genotypes are combinations of hypomorphic alleles or combinations of null and hypomorphic ones. Many of the latter are leaky splicing mutations and others are missense mutations, eventually yielding low amounts of active ATM (Alterman et al., 2007; Claes et al., 2013; Gilad et al., 1998; Meneret et al., 2014; Nakamura et al., 2014; Saunders-Pullman et al., 2012; Silvestri et al., 2010; Soresina et al., 2008; Taylor et al., 2014; Verhagen et al., 2009, 2012a; Worth et al., 2013). Notably, another distinct disorder, A-T-like disease (A-TLD) (Taylor et al., 2004), is clinically similar to mild A-T. A-TLD is caused by hypomorphic mutations in the *MRE11* gene (Stewart et al., 1999; Taylor et al., 2004), which encodes the MRE11 nuclease. MRE11 is part of the MRE11-RAD50-NBS1 (MRN) complex – a major DSB sensor (Rein and Stracker, 2014; Stracker and Petrini, 2011). The phenotypic similarity between mild A-T and A-TLD is due at least in part to the dependence of ATM activation by DSBs on MRN (Falck et al., 2005; Paull, 2015; Uziel et al., 2003).

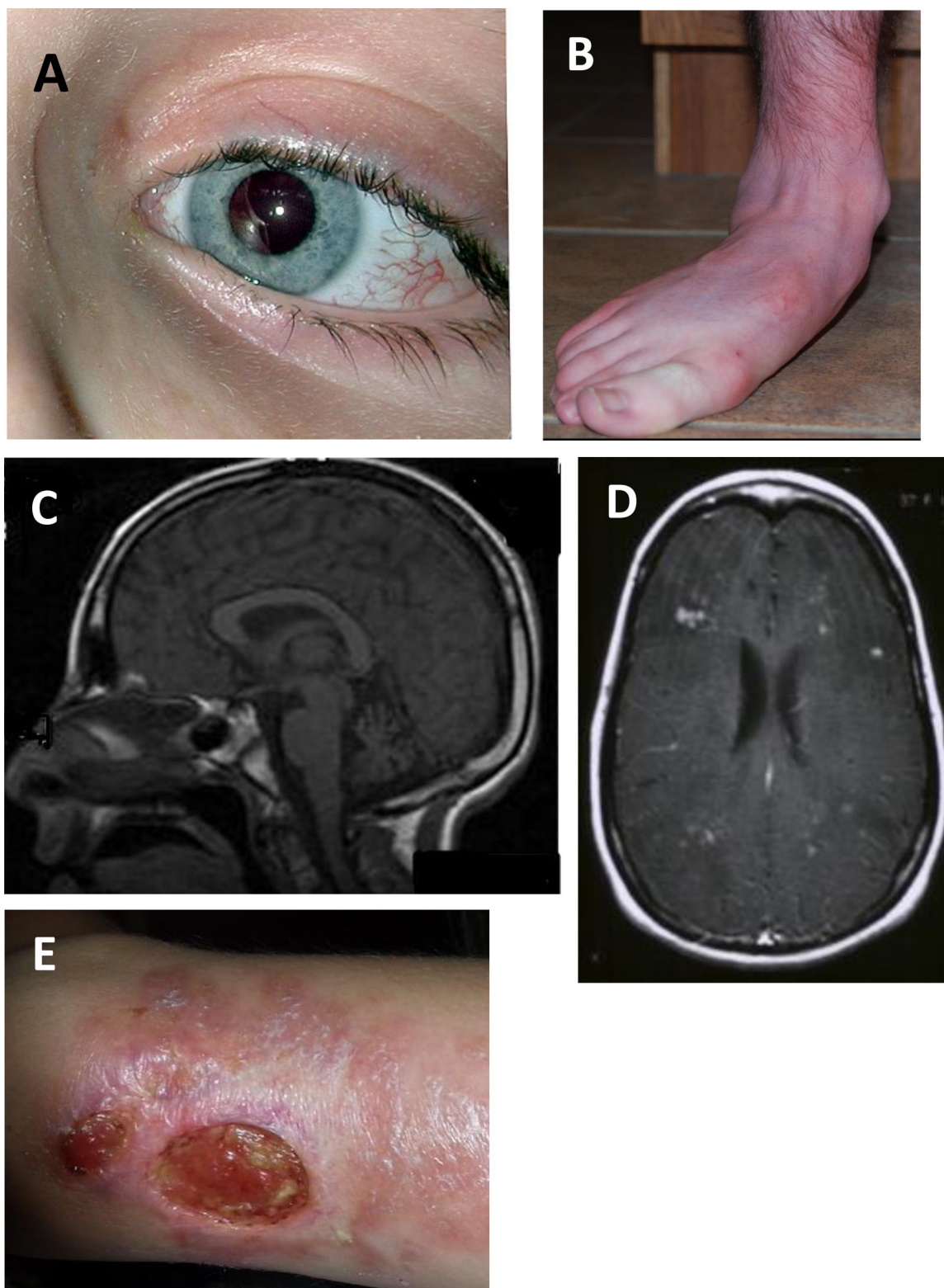


Fig. 1. Age-related abnormalities in A-T patients. A. Ocular telangiectasia. B. Foot deformity due to length-dependent neuropathy. C. Cerebellar atrophy. D. Intracerebral telangiectasia with multiple punctate hemosiderin deposits. E. Cutaneous granuloma.

2. The premature ageing facet of A-T

2.1. Segmental premature ageing in A-T patients

The name “ataxia-telangiectasia”, was coined by Elena Boder and Robert Sedgwick in the first comprehensive description of

the disease published in 1958 (Boder and Sedgwick, 1958). In an overview of A-T 27 years later (Boder, 1985), Dr. Boder wrote: “The clinical and pathological findings, including the gliovascular malformations in the CNS described recently in autopsies on older patients, reveal that A-T is characterized throughout its course by multisystemic progeric changes. It is proposed, therefore, that A-T

can serve as a model for the study of premature ageing.” Importantly, the broad immune system defects in A-T have been regarded as a reflection of premature ageing of this system in these patients (Carney et al., 2012; Exley et al., 2011). Finding ‘striking similarities between the immune system phenotypes of A-T patients and the elderly’, (Carney et al., 2012) concluded that the immune system of A-T patients is congenitally aged, and (Exley et al., 2011) suggested that A-T could be viewed as a model of immune ageing. Similarly, the resemblance between ageing-associated decline of brain functionality and neurodegeneration associated with genome instability has recently been highlighted (Barzilai et al., 2016).

Adolescents and young adults with A-T exhibit an array of health problems that are typically not seen until late middle age or later. Among 53 A-T patients with mean age of 14.6 years (range 5.9–26.1), 43% had elevated serum transaminases, 39% of those patients had fatty liver detected by ultrasound, and 33% of the latter group developed steatohepatitis, fibrosis or cirrhosis (Weiss et al., 2015). There was also an increased incidence of dyslipidemia (10/52 = 19%) and diabetes (2/52 = 4%) (Nissenkorn et al., 2016). These abnormalities together with elevated levels of C-reactive protein suggest a diagnosis of metabolic syndrome in a substantial number of young A-T patients. The most common malignancies in A-T patients of all ages are of lymphocytic origin. However, among those from 18 to 40 years old with cancer, 11/21 (52%) had cancers of solid organs (stomach, esophagus, liver, parotid gland, thyroid, skin, breast and lung) that are rarely seen in that age group among people without A-T (HM Lederman, L Chessa, unpublished observations). There is a striking incidence of gammopathy in A-T (Sadighi Akha et al., 1999), another abnormality that is rarely seen in people <30 years old. Progeric features of skin include premature greying and thinning of hair, thinning of skin, and vitiligo (Reed et al., 1966). Osteoporosis is common because of a lack of weight bearing, nutritional deficiencies, and early gonadal failure in females. Incapacitating fatigue affects a majority of A-T patients over the age of 30. The etiology of this problem is likely to be multifactorial, with contributions from the extra effort required to function with neurodegeneration, and central nervous system effects of elevated levels of pro-inflammatory cytokines including IL-6 and IL-8 (McGrath-Morrow et al., 2016) and chronic, elevated levels of Type I interferons (Hartlova et al., 2015). Finally, telangiectasia appear in the brain and other internal organs of young adults with A-T, a peculiar finding seen in people without A-T only as a late effect of treatment with ionizing radiation for cancer therapy (Lin et al., 2014). Some of the ageing-related manifestations of A-T are shown in Fig. 1.

2.2. The premature senescence component in the A-T cellular phenotype

The cellular phenotype of A-T represents genome instability, deficient DNA damage response (DDR), and elevated oxidative stress, in addition to a premature senescence component, which was noticed early on (Shiloh et al., 1982b). Examination of a model of premature ageing inevitably includes the question, whether cellular senescence is involved. The hallmark of cellular senescence is an irreversible arrest of cellular proliferation. It can be induced by various stresses, has been implicated in development, wound healing, tissue repair and ageing (reviewed in (Campisi, 2013; Campisi and Robert, 2014; Demaria et al., 2014; Loaiza and Demaria, 2016; Muñoz-Espín and Serrano, 2014; Salama et al., 2014; van Deursen, 2014; Velarde et al., 2013)). The main pathways that lead to this process are governed by two tumor suppressor axes: the p53–p21 axis and the p16^{INK4a}–pRB axis. Importantly, the senescent state was recently found to be very dynamic due to a senescence-associated secretory phenotype (SASP) – the secretion by senescent cells of an array of cytokines, growth factors and pro-

teases that promote tissue repair and regeneration or inflammation (Campisi, 2011, 2013; Demaria et al., 2014; Loaiza and Demaria, 2016; Muñoz-Espín and Serrano, 2014; Rodier et al., 2009; Salama et al., 2014). Importantly, the SASP does not depend on p53 or p16^{INK4a}, and a major regulator of this process was recently found to be stabilization of the transcription factor GATA4, which starts a process that eventually enhances an NF-κB inflammatory process (Kang et al., 2015).

Evidence is mounting that senescent cells accumulate during ageing (Adams, 2009; Bernardes de Jesus and Blasco, 2012; Bhatia-Dey et al., 2016; Byun et al., 2015; Campisi, 2011; Loaiza and Demaria, 2016; Lopez-Otin et al., 2013; Muñoz-Espín and Serrano, 2014; Ovadya and Krizhanovsky, 2014; Sharpless and Sherr, 2015; van Deursen, 2014; Zhu et al., 2014). These senescent cells are associated with many age-related pathologies, including cancer (Campisi, 2013; Di Mitri and Alimonti, 2016; Lasry and Ben-Neriah, 2015; Ovadya and Krizhanovsky, 2014; van Deursen, 2014). The primary reason for this association is that the chronic presence of senescent cells and a persistent SASP cause local and systemic inflammation, which fuels a variety of age-related diseases. Evidence for this has been obtained in a number of mouse models (Baker et al., 2011; Bhatia-Dey et al., 2016; Byun et al., 2015; Campisi, 2013; Campisi and Robert, 2014; Kennedy et al., 2014; Lasry and Ben-Neriah, 2015; Loaiza and Demaria, 2016; Ovadya and Krizhanovsky, 2014; Zhu et al., 2014, 2015). Among the most potent inducers of the SASP are genotoxic stresses and conditions that lead to persistent DNA damage signaling (Kang et al., 2015; Rodier et al., 2009). Notably, ATM-deficient tissues and cultured cells exhibit signs of persistent stress reflected as ongoing, low-level DDR (Gatei et al., 2001), stress-associated gene expression patterns (Rashi-Elkeles et al., 2006; Weizman et al., 2003) and alteration in nicotinic adenine dinucleotide balance (Stern et al., 2002). Thus, the senescence response, and particularly the SASP, is a strong candidate for linking ageing phenotypes and age-related rises in genotoxic stress (Lasry and Ben-Neriah, 2015; Maslov et al., 2013; Ovadya and Krizhanovsky, 2014; Vijg and Campisi, 2008).

The observation of accelerated telomere shortening and telomere fusions in peripheral blood lymphocytes (Metcalfe et al., 1996) and cultured fibroblasts (Smilenov et al., 1997; Xia et al., 1996) from A-T patients and cell lines expressing dominant-negative ATM fragments (Smilenov et al., 1997) exposed an important possible contributor to premature senescence of ATM-deficient cells. Ectopic expression of the catalytic subunit of telomerase (hTERT) rescued the telomere shortening and some premature senescence features of ATM-deficient cells without relieving the basic defect in the DSB response (Naka et al., 2004; Wood et al., 2001). Concomitant elimination of Atm and the telomerase RNA component (Terc) led to markedly accelerated premature ageing in mice compared to elimination of Terc alone (Wong et al., 2003). The wealth of information currently available on telomere maintenance and the role of the DDR in telomere dynamics (reviewed in (Arnoult and Karlseder, 2015; Doksan and de Lange, 2014; Webb et al., 2013)) has tightly linked ATM to telomere homeostasis and added an important component to the ageing aspect of A-T.

3. A-T carriers: enhanced morbidity?

Symptoms of autosomal, apparently recessive disorders often appear in subtle forms in carriers of the corresponding mutations. Carriers of A-T mutations have long been a focus of interest for epidemiologic geneticists. Their frequency in the US population has been estimated at 2–3% (Swift et al., 1986) but may be closer to 1%. Importantly, cells from A-T carriers show variable degrees of sensitivity to IR and radiomimetic chemicals, and chromosomal instability, intermediate between those of cells from unrelated con-

trols and cells from A-T patients (Chen et al., 1978; Cohen et al., 1975; Cole et al., 1988; Fernet et al., 2004; Neubauer et al., 2002; Parshad et al., 1985; Pernin et al., 1999; Rosin et al., 1989; Sanford et al., 1990; Scott et al., 1996; Shigeta et al., 1999; Shiloh et al., 1989, 1986, 1982a,c; Speit et al., 2000; Takai et al., 1990). This sensitivity may be expressed in the carriers as an adverse effect of radiation therapy (Varghese et al., 1999). Chromosomal breakage was noticed in epithelial tissues and peripheral blood lymphocytes of A-T carriers (Rosin and Ochs, 1986, 1989; Shiloh et al., 1986). Fibroblasts from A-T carriers show enhanced cellular senescence, which again is intermediate between that of control individuals and A-T patients (Shiloh et al., 1982b). Notably, mice heterozygous for *Atm* null mutations are more sensitive to radiation-induced cytotoxicity, cataracts and oncogenesis than animals homozygous for the wild-type *Atm* (Smilenov et al., 2001; Worgul et al., 2002, 2005).

For the past four decades the possible predisposition of A-T carriers to breast and other cancers has been extensively studied and debated, with variable and often conflicting results (d'Almeida et al., 2005; Goldgar et al., 2011; Paglia et al., 2010; Swift et al., 1990; Swift and Lukin, 2008; Thompson et al., 2005; van Os et al., 2016) and references therein. Importantly, within this wealth of publications on possible cancer predisposition of A-T carriers, two reports described increased deaths from ischemic heart disease among these individuals (Su and Swift, 2000; Swift and Chase, 1983). A recent meta-analysis of these studies (van Os et al., 2016) concluded A-T carriers have a reduced life expectancy because of mortality from cancer and ischemic heart diseases (RR 1.7, 95% CI 1.2–2.4) and an increased risk of developing cancer (RR 1.5, 95% CI 0.9–2.4), in particular breast cancer (RR women 3.0, 95% CI 2.1–4.5). These observations raise the question whether A-T carriers do indeed harbor the premature ageing aspect of A-T and call for large-scale epidemiologic studies of A-T carriers focused on ageing-associated morbidity. Notably, two reports recently linked a specific single nucleotide polymorphism (SNP) in the *ATM* gene promoter to increased longevity in Chinese and Italian populations (Chen et al., 2010; Piaceri et al., 2013).

4. Do the known ATM functions account for the A-T phenotype?

As in many genetic disorders, the responsible gene and its protein product were identified as a result of the attempt to understand the disease (Savitsky et al., 1995a). Does the information on ATM functions that has accumulated since then explain the A-T phenotype in full?

ATM is a homeostatic protein kinase with an extremely broad range of roles in various cellular circuits (Ambrose and Gatti, 2013; Awasthi et al., 2015; Cremona and Behrens, 2014; Espach et al., 2015; Guleria and Chandna, 2015; Shiloh, 2014; Shiloh and Ziv, 2013) (Fig. 2). This large polypeptide of 350 kDa and 3056 residues bears a PI3 kinase signature within its carboxy-terminal catalytic site, but has the catalytic activity of a serine-threonine protein kinase. This motif is characteristic of a protein family of which ATM is a member – the PI-3 kinase-like protein kinases (PIKKs) (Baretic and Williams, 2014; Lovejoy and Cortez, 2009). This family also contains the mTOR protein, which regulates many signaling pathways in response to nutrient levels, growth factors and energy balance (Alayev and Holz, 2013; Cornu et al., 2013); the catalytic subunit of the DNA-dependent protein kinase (DNA-PKcs), which is involved in the NHEJ pathway of DSB repair and other genotoxic stress responses (Davis et al., 2014; Jette and Lees-Miller, 2015), SMG-1, which plays a key role in nonsense-mediated mRNA decay (Yamashita et al., 2005); and ATR, which responds to stalled replication forks and a variety of DNA lesions that lead to the formation of single-stranded DNA, including deeply resected DSBs (Awasthi

et al., 2016; Errico and Costanzo, 2012; Marechal and Zou, 2013). The redundancy, crosstalk and collaboration between the latter three PIKKs, which collectively respond to a broad spectrum of genotoxic stresses, are being extensively investigated (Chen et al., 2012; Gobbini et al., 2013; Lovejoy and Cortez, 2009; Marechal and Zou, 2013; Sirbu and Cortez, 2013; Thompson, 2012).

It should be noted that in A-T patients, the two PIKKs that converse and cooperate with ATM in the response to genotoxic stress, ATR and DNA-PK, remain active. In view of the functional relationships between the three protein kinases, some of ATM's duties are probably carried out to a certain extent by ATR and/or DNA-PK, in A-T cells. On the other hand, the lack of a very versatile member of this trio may lead to some suboptimal responses of the other two, if they depend on the crosstalk with ATM. This interesting question is a subject of intensive research.

The most widely documented function of ATM, and the one associated with its most vigorous activation, is the mobilization of the complex signaling network that responds to DSBs in the DNA (Awasthi et al., 2015; Cremona and Behrens, 2014; McKinnon, 2012; Shiloh and Ziv, 2013; Thompson, 2012). DSBs are induced by exogenous DNA breaking agents or endogenous reactive oxygen species (Schieber and Chandel, 2014), and are an integral part of physiological processes including meiotic recombination (Borde and de Massy, 2013; Lange et al., 2011) and the rearrangement of antigen receptor genes in the adaptive immune system (Alt et al., 2013). DSBs are repaired via nonhomologous end-joining (NHEJ), or homologous recombination repair (HRR) (Chapman et al., 2012; Jasin and Rothstein, 2013; Radhakrishnan et al., 2014; Shibata and Jeggo, 2014). DSBs also activates the DDR, a vast signaling network that mobilizes special cell cycle checkpoints, extensively alters the cellular transcriptome, and changes the turnover, activity and function of numerous proteins that ultimately leads to modulation of numerous cellular circuits. This network is based on a core of dedicated DDR players and the *ad-hoc* recruitment of proteins from many other arenas of cellular metabolism, which typically undergo special, damage-induced post-translational modifications (PTMs) (Goodarzi and Jeggo, 2013; Panier and Durocher, 2013; Polo and Jackson, 2011; Shiloh and Ziv, 2013; Sirbu and Cortez, 2013; Thompson, 2012). Once ATM mobilizes the vast DDR network in response to a DSB (Bhatti et al., 2011; McKinnon, 2012; Shiloh and Ziv, 2013), its protein kinase activity is rapidly enhanced, and PTMs on the ATM molecule are induced, including several autophosphorylations and an acetylation (Bakkenist and Kastan, 2003; Bensimon et al., 2010; Bhatti et al., 2011; Kaidi and Jackson, 2013; Kozlov et al., 2006; Paull, 2015; Shiloh and Ziv, 2013; Sun et al., 2007). ATM subsequently phosphorylates key players in various arms of the DSB response network (Bensimon et al., 2011, 2010; Matsuoka et al., 2007; Mu et al., 2007; Shiloh and Ziv, 2013), including other protein kinases that in turn phosphorylate still other targets (Bensimon et al., 2011).

A broader, overarching role for ATM in maintaining genome stability was recently suggested by one of us (YS) in addition to mobilizing the DSB response (Shiloh, 2014). According to this conjecture, ATM supports other DNA repair pathways that respond to various genotoxic stresses, among them single-strand break repair (SSBR) (Khoronenkova and Dianov, 2015) and base excision repair (BER) – a cardinal pathway in dealing with the daily nuclear and mitochondrial DNA damage caused by endogenous agents (Bauer et al., 2015; Wallace, 2014). ATM's involvement in these processes is based on its ability to phosphorylate proteins that function in these pathways. In this way ATM also takes part also in resolving non-canonical DNA structures that arise in DNA metabolism, and in regulating other aspects of genome integrity such as nucleotide metabolism, the response to replication stress, and resolution of the occasional conflicts that arise between DNA damage and the transcription machinery. ATM is not critical for any of these processes

in the same way it is for the DSB response, but rather contributes to their regulation (in most cases, their enhancement) when the need arises (Segal-Raz et al., 2011; Shiloh, 2014; Zolner et al., 2011).

This function of ATM may explain the moderate, variable sensitivity of ATM-deficient cells to a broad range of DNA damaging agents. Among them are UV radiation, alkylating agents, crosslinking agents, hydrogen peroxide, 4-Nitroquinoline 1-oxide, phorbol-12-myristate-13-acetate and topoisomerase 1 poisons (Alagoz et al., 2013; Barfknecht and Little, 1982; Fedier et al., 2003; Hannan et al., 2002; Henderson and Ribbecky, 1980; Hoar and Sargent, 1976; Jaspers et al., 1982; Kataly et al., 2014; Lee et al., 2006; Leonard et al., 2004; Mirzayans et al., 1989; Paterson et al., 1976; Scudiero, 1980; Shiloh et al., 1985; Smith et al., 1989; Smith and Paterson, 1980; Speit et al., 2000; Teo and Arlett, 1982; Ward et al., 1994; Yi et al., 1990; Zhang et al., 1996). ATM-deficient cells also exhibit reduced efficiency in resolving Topoisomerase I-DNA covalent intermediates (Alagoz et al., 2013; Kataly et al., 2014).

This ongoing role of ATM is its routine function in the daily maintenance of genome stability, while its powerful role in the DSB response is reserved for when this harmful lesion interferes with the daily life of a cell. Thus, when ATM is missing, not only is there markedly reduced response to DSBs, the ongoing modulation of numerous pathways in response to occasional stresses becomes suboptimal. All of these lesions are part of the daily wear and tear on the genome that contributes to ageing.

An additional role for ATM in genome dynamics was proposed following evidence that ATM is involved in shaping the epigenome in neurons by regulating the localization of the histone deacetylase 4 (HDAC4) (Herrup, 2013; Herrup et al., 2013; Li et al., 2012), targeting the EZH2 component of the polycomb repressive complex 2 (Li et al., 2013), and regulating the levels of 5-hydroxymethylcytosine in Purkinje cells (Jiang et al., 2015).

ATM's role in cellular homeostasis is further expanded by its cytoplasmic fraction. Specifically, cytoplasmic ATM was found to be associated with peroxisomes (Tripathi and Walker, 2016; Watters et al., 1999; Zhang et al., 2015) and mitochondria (Valentin-Vega et al., 2012). In view of the evidence of increased oxidative stress in ATM-deficient cells, it has long been suspected that ATM senses and responds to oxidative stress (Alexander et al., 2010a; Barzilai et al., 2002; Gatei et al., 2001; Rotman and Shiloh, 1997a,b; Takao et al., 2000; Watters, 2003). This conjecture was validated by work from the Paull lab (Guo et al., 2010b), which identified an MRN-independent mode of ATM activation, differentiating it from DSB-induced activation, stimulated by reactive oxygen species (ROS) and leading to ATM oxidation (Guo et al., 2010a,b; Lee et al., 2014; Paull, 2015). ATM was also found to be involved specifically in the protection against oxidative stress induced by oxidized low-density lipoprotein (Semlitsch et al., 2011). It has thus assumed the role of a redox sensor (Ditch and Paull, 2012; Kruger and Ralser, 2011; Tripathi and Walker, 2016). Recently, the first phospho-proteomic screen was carried out to identify substrates of ROS-activated ATM (Kozlov et al., 2015).

An important arm of the ATM-mediated response to ROS extends to peroxisomes (Tripathi and Walker, 2016). Work from the Walker lab showed that ROS-mediated activation of peroxisomal ATM leads to ATM-mediated phosphorylation of LKB and subsequent activation of AMPK and TSC2, which dampens mTORC1-mediated signaling, eventually decreasing protein synthesis and enhancing autophagy (Alexander et al., 2010a,b; Alexander and Walker, 2010; Tripathi et al., 2013; Zhang et al., 2013). Further work from this lab (Zhang et al., 2015) showed that ATM also phosphorylates the peroxisomal protein PEX5, flagging it for ubiquitylation and subsequent binding to the autophagy adapter, p62, in the process of autophagy-associated peroxisome degradation (pexophagy) – a critical process in peroxisome homeostasis (Till et al., 2012).

Still another arm of the ATM-mediated response to oxidative stress operates in the mitochondrial fraction of ATM. ATM is thus emerging also as a regulator of mitochondrial homeostasis. Evidence is accumulating of its involvement in mitochondrial function, mitophagy, and the integrity of mitochondrial DNA (Ambrose et al., 2007; D'Souza et al., 2013; Eaton et al., 2007; Fu et al., 2008; Sharma et al., 2014; Valentin-Vega and Kastan, 2012; Valentin-Vega et al., 2012) and further work is needed to identify its substrates in mitochondria and the mechanistic aspects of its action in this arena. Several laboratories recently described direct links between ATM and the SASP – a cardinal feature of cell senescence. Work from the Gamble lab (Chen et al., 2015) showed that the histone variant macroH2A.1 is required for full transcriptional activation of SASP-promoting genes, driving a positive feedback loop that enhances cell senescence. This response is countered by a negative feedback loop that involves ATM activation by endoplasmic reticulum stress, elevated ROS levels or DNA damage. ATM's activity is required for the removal of macroH2A.1 from sites of SASP genes, thus leading to SASP gene repression. The Elledge lab identified a major SASP activator – the transcription factor GATA4, whose stabilization drives this process (Kang et al., 2015). Importantly, the activation of this pathway was dependent on both ATM and ATR, as was senescence-associated activation of p53 and p16^{INK4a}. On the other hand, the Zhang lab (Aird et al., 2015) recently showed that when cell senescence is induced by replication stress (e.g., following nucleotide deficiency), ATM inactivation allows the cell to bypass senescence by shifting cellular metabolism: upon ATM loss, dNTP levels rise due to up-regulation of the pentose phosphate pathway, whose key regulator, glucose-6-phosphate dehydrogenase (G6PD) is under functional regulation by ATM (Aird et al., 2015; Cosentino et al., 2011).

Other metabolic arenas in which ATM involvement is gaining attention are insulin response and lipoprotein metabolism, clinically represented by the metabolic syndrome. This role of ATM in cellular physiology was recently thoroughly and convincingly reviewed (Espach et al., 2015). Briefly, ATM was found to participate in several signaling pathways mediated by insulin (Halaby et al., 2008; Jeong et al., 2010; Miles et al., 2007; Viniegra et al., 2005; Yang and Kastan, 2000); and heterozygosity for *Atm* null allele in ApoE-deficient mice was found to aggravate their metabolic syndrome (Mercer et al., 2010; Schneider et al., 2006; Wu et al., 2005) – an effect that was partly relieved by the mitochondria-targeted antioxidant MitQ (Mercer et al., 2012).

Another pathway by which ATM may impact on cellular senescence is the dependence of IGF-1 receptor expression on ATM (Ching et al., 2013; Goetz et al., 2011; Peretz et al., 2001); the mechanism remains to be elucidated, but ATM impacts on IGF-1-mediated pathways, including those that affect cellular senescence (Luo et al., 2014). Another series of observations assigned ATM a protective role in cardiac myocyte apoptosis stimulated by β -adrenergic receptor and myocardial remodeling. Loss of *Atm* in mice induced myocardial fibrosis and myocyte hypertrophy and interfered with cardiac remodeling following myocardial infarction (Daniel et al., 2014; Foster et al., 2013, 2011, 2012). The mechanistic aspects of these effects are still unclear, but ATM's apparent involvement in myocardial homeostasis might be relevant to the observation of elevated arteriosclerosis in A-T carriers (Su and Swift, 2000; Swift and Chase, 1983).

The cardinal function of ATM in the DSB response explains the radiation sensitivity and genome instability. The immunodeficiency, the nature of the clonal translocations in the lymphoid system and the predisposition to lymphoid malignancies are explained by the involvement of ATM in the response to the physiologic DSBs formed in the maturation of the adaptive immune system genes during lymphocyte development (reviewed in (Alt et al., 2013; Bednarski and Sleckman, 2012; Boboila et al., 2012)).

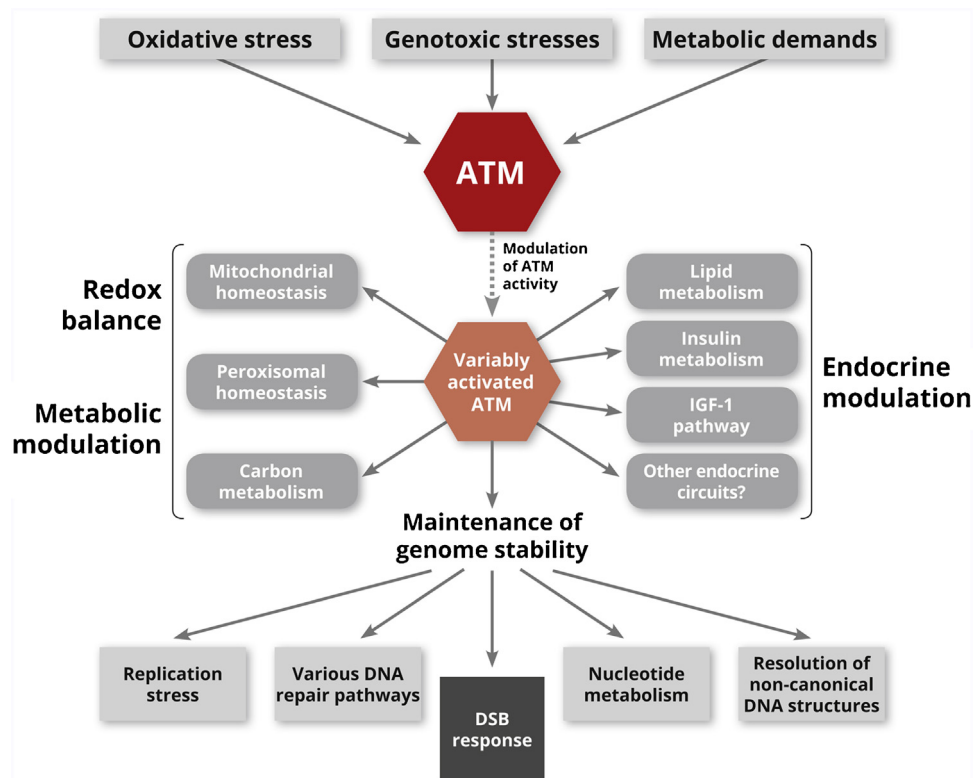


Fig. 2. Current view of ATM functions as a homeostatic protein kinase.

Likewise, the gonadal dysgenesis reflects the role of the DSB response in the processing of physiologic DSBs formed during the first meiosis (reviewed in (Borde and de Massy, 2013; Kim et al., 2016)). Explanation of the cerebellar atrophy – the cardinal clinical symptom of A-T – is still a subject of intense discussion. Is the ATM function whose loss contributes to this process associated with maintenance of genome stability, or with epigenome dynamics, or is it not associated at all with genome stability and is not nuclear (Guleria and Chandna, 2015; Herrup, 2013; Hoche et al., 2012; Shiloh, 2014; Shiloh and Ziv, 2013)? We attribute special importance in the cerebellar demise in A-T to ATM's comprehensive role in maintaining genome homeostasis (Shiloh, 2014), but will not elaborate on this here since this review is focused primarily on the ageing aspects of A-T.

From the foregoing summary of ATM functions it is clear that most of them impinge on physiological processes that have been tied to ageing (Ahlqvist et al., 2015; Bolt and Bergman, 2015; Feltes et al., 2015; Goldsmith, 2012; Jenny, 2012; Jones, 2015; Pinto and Moraes, 2015; Sergiev et al., 2015; Xi et al., 2013); the link between genome instability and ageing is solid (Behrens et al., 2014; Castells-Roca et al., 2015; Edifizi and Schumacher, 2015; Franzke et al., 2015; Gorbunova and Seluanov, 2016; Klement and Goodarzi, 2014; Maynard et al., 2015; Ribezzo et al., 2016; Vermeij et al., 2016; Vijg and Suh, 2013) and well reflected in the segmental, accelerated ageing observed in many genome instability syndromes and in mouse models of DNA repair deficiencies (Cleaver et al., 2009; Edifizi and Schumacher, 2015; Gregg et al., 2011; Gurkar and Niedernhofer, 2015; Maynard et al., 2015; Vermeij et al., 2014, 2016). The combination of defective maintenance of genome stability and impairment of other physiological functions caused by ATM loss (Fig. 2) is expected to yield a premature ageing phenotype: defective DDR, abnormal telomere dynamics, suboptimal regulation of redox balance

and subsequent oxidative stress, defective peroxisomal and mitochondrial homeostasis, and defects in pathways that have been linked directly to ageing such as the IGF-1-mediated circuits (Kenyon, 2011). Notably, other endocrine abnormalities observed in A-T patients (Ehlayel et al., 2014; Pommerening et al., 2015; Schubert et al., 2005; Voss et al., 2014) may also enhance the detrimental effect of the above combination (Edifizi and Schumacher, 2015; Schiewer and Knudsen, 2016; Vermeij et al., 2016).

5. Future perspectives

The cross-talk between A-T patients' bedside and the laboratory bench has been extremely instrumental for understanding both the A-T phenotype and the physiological functions of ATM. In the early years of life, the A-T phenotype is dominated by devastating neurodegeneration, immunodeficiency and cancer predisposition, while the features of ageing are seen only later. Now that advances in care have increased the survival of many A-T patients into the third decade of life and beyond, this emerging aspect of the disease is demanding our attention. Further work on ATM biochemistry and the ever expanding network of ATM substrates, within and outside of the genome stability circle, is expected to identify ATM-dependent processes that affect ageing. Investigation of the ageing hallmarks that appear in adolescent A-T patients and the subtle premature ageing of A-T carriers is very timely now. The premature senescence of primary A-T fibroblasts requires deeper characterization using high-throughput 'omics' technologies. Mouse models combining *Atm* mutations with mutations in other genes that modulate ageing via various physiological circuits should also be instrumental in this regard. All in all, it is time to reconsider Dr. Boder's statement from 1985 (Boder, 1985): "A-T can serve as a model for the study of premature ageing".

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