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SOD activity and extremophilicity: a screening of various plant species

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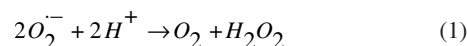
All aerobes are dependent on enzymatic and non-enzymatic antioxidants to withstand the presence of reactive oxygen species (ROS). Superoxide dismutase (SOD) is a part of the enzymatic antioxidant system. It is one of the most important antioxidant enzymes, enabling organisms to survive in an oxygen containing atmosphere. A disorder in the oxidative and antioxidative balance can be associated with the occurrence of diseases in human organisms. Little data exist on the relevance of SOD in plants. Moreover, it is not known whether there is any association between a plant's origin and its SOD activity. Our screening of 27 different plant species was intended to expose whether there is a connection. The highest SOD activities were found for extremophile plants. Especially the Crassulaceae *Aeonium haworthii* SALM-DYCK EX WEBB & BERTHEL. and *Crassula multiflora* SCHÖNLAND & BAKER F. were highly active. Nevertheless, we did not find unambiguous evidence for a correlation between extremophilicity and SOD activity.

1. Introduction

In general, reactive oxygen species (ROS) are important in physiological intracellular messaging or in defense against diseases (Bae et al. 1997; Apel and Hirt 2004). Elevated concentrations of ROS, however, can cause oxidative stress. Oxidative stress is the shift of physiological steady state between oxidant and antioxidant processes in favor of oxidants (Sies 1991; Gill and Tuteja 2010). It can cause various damages on cell-structures and thus malfunction of the cell (Chopra and Wallace 1998; Matés et al. 1999).

It is thought that superoxide dismutase (SOD) is one of the most important enzymes enabling organisms to survive the presence of molecular oxygen (McCord et al. 1971). Because of the high importance of SOD for aerobes, we focused on this agent as a representative of the enzymatic antioxidant system.

The disproportionation of superoxide (O_2^-) can be summarized into Eq. (1) (McCord and Fridovich 1969).



Different SOD isozymes can be classified by their metal co-factor. The following metal ions have been found in the active sites of SODs: copper and zinc (CuZnSOD), manganese (MnSOD), iron (FeSOD) and nickel (NiSOD) (Alscher et al. 2002; Manaa et al. 2014; Sheng et al. 2014).

The dismutation of O_2^- is very similar in all isozymes. It follows a so called “ping-pong-mechanism” as shown in Fig. 1 for a CuZnSOD, selected as a representative. Since the oxidation number of the metal co-factor switches back and forth, it is called

“ping-pong-mechanism” (Sheng et al. 2014). Different investigations have shown that SOD activity can be induced by environmental factors, such as UV light (Jenkins 2009; Rybus-Zajac and Kubiś 2010), low temperature (Spychalla and Desborough 1990; Nayyar and Chander 2004), salt stress (Manaa et al. 2014), heavy metals (Gratão et al. 2006), or paraquat (Alscher et al. 2002). In this study, we evaluated whether extremophile plants show higher SOD activities compared to plants originating from tempered climate zones (in this investigation plants are called “extremophile” when they originate from a cold zone, tropical or subtropic zone, or from great altitude).

An imbalance between ROS and antioxidants plays a role in the pathogenesis in a row of human diseases such as ischemia/reperfusion injury, atherosclerosis, neurodegenerative diseases, and cancer (Matés et al. 1999). Danno et al. (1984) showed that SOD reduces the occurrence of sunburn cells in mice, when injected either before or after UV-irradiation. Topical application of SOD containing creams possibly bears beneficial effects for the skin, protecting it from oxidative damage. Thus, SOD could be a promising agent in prevention and therapy of distinct skin disorders, e.g. photoaging, sunburn, and cancer (Benyahia et al. 1996; Chen et al. 2016; Ichihashi et al. 2003; Mizushima et al. 1991; Wenk et al. 2001; Zhao et al. 2001).

2. Investigations and results

SOD activities are presented as two different values. On the one hand, we estimated SOD activity per gram plant material (SAPM). On the other hand, we determined the “normalized SOD activity” (NSA). We defined NSA as SOD activity per mg total protein. SAPMs of the 27 investigated plants ranged from 0.5–297 μ Kat/g. NSAs did not scatter as broad as SAPMs. They ranged from 0.08–1.25 μ Kat/mg total protein. SOD activities are shown in Fig. 2. Further we investigated the induction of SOD activity by UV stress and cold. Therefore, we irradiated *Mesembryanthemum crystallinum* L. with UV light (254 and 366 nm of wavelength) over 8 days for one hour per day. Irradiance was 600 μ W/cm² at 254 nm and 1100 μ W/cm² at 366 nm, in the adjusted average-distance of 17 cm (UV-lamp was received from CAMAG, Muttenz, Switzerland). Another plant was stored in the dark at 4 °C. For control a third plant was stored at room temperature. Determination of SOD

Abbreviations:

BCA bicinchoninic acid;
FCR Folin Ciocalteu's reagent;
NSA normalized SOD activity;
ROS reactive oxygen species;
SAPM SOD activity per gram plant material;
SOD superoxide dismutase;
WST water-soluble tetrazolium;
X xanthine;
XO xanthine oxidase.

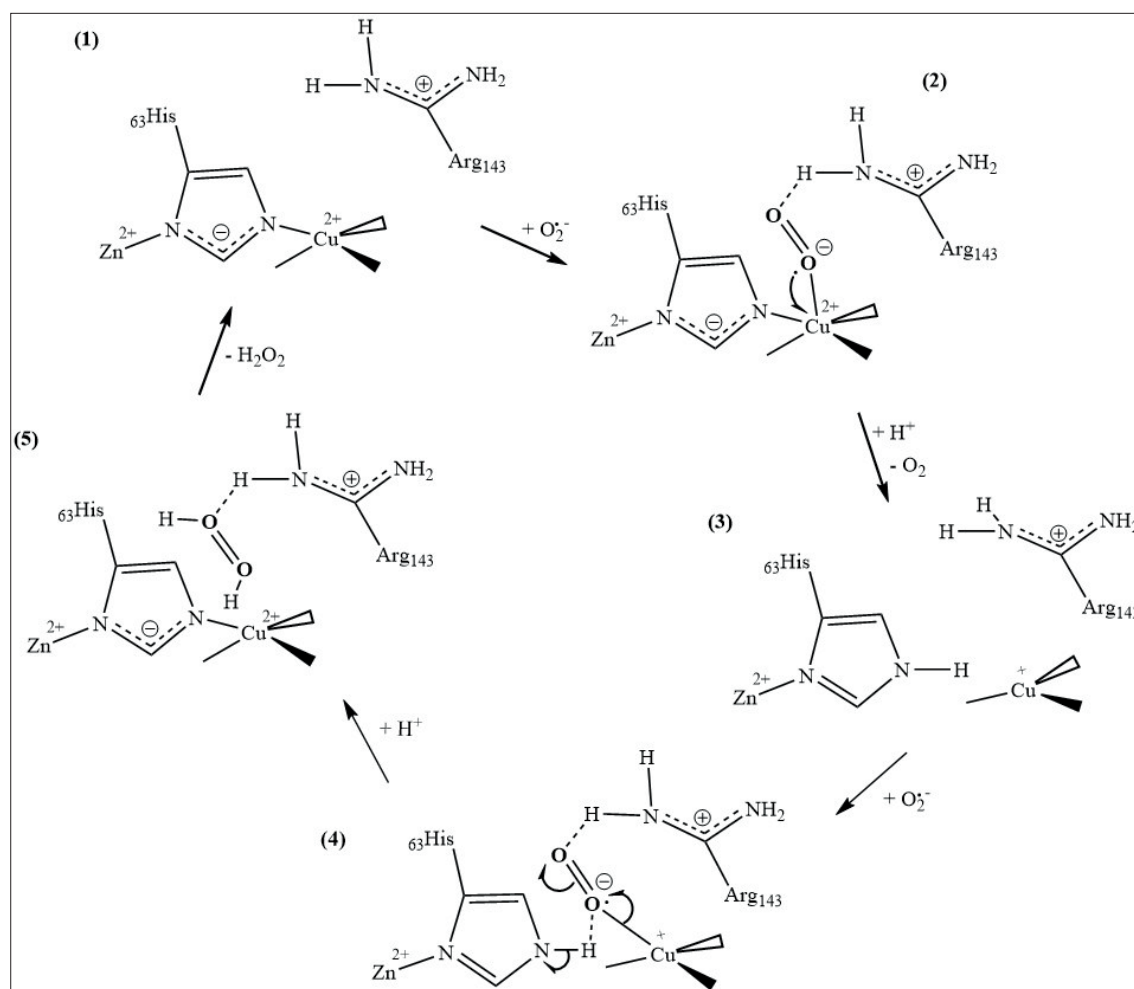


Fig. 1: Mechanism of superoxide scavenging by CuZnSOD, modified after (Tainer et al. 1983; Hart et al. 1999): (1) resting state (oxidized form)- active site empty (2) superoxide enters active site and reduces Cu(II) to Cu(I) under formation of oxygen (3) resting state (reduced form) (4) second superoxide enters active site and oxidizes Cu(I) to Cu(II) (5) formation and release of hydrogen peroxide

activity was accomplished on day 9. In order to test whether the rise of SOD activity was statistically significant, we conducted an one-sided Mann-Whitney U test ($p \leq 0.05$). SOD activities increased approximately 2.5 fold after UV-irradiation and 1.5 fold when stored cold. The results are shown in Fig. 3.

M. crystallinum was selected as a representative extremophile plant. Pharmaceutical or dermocosmetic formulations of *M. crystallinum* show antioxidant and antibacterial properties and benefit skin hydration. Therefore, they are of therapeutic interest (Schario et al. 2014). Further, due to the low content of phenolic compounds (Falleh et al. 2009), interactions to SOD Assay Kit were negligible (see also 3.1).

3. Discussion

3.1. Interactions between SOD Assay Kit and phenolic compounds

It is known that flavonoids inhibit xanthineoxidase (Iio et al. 1985). Further phenols can stabilize unpaired electrons in their π -electron-cloud (Rice-Evans et al. 1996). Both mechanisms would lead to false positive results for SOD activity. For this reason, we investigated the influence of rutoside (Sigma Aldrich, St. Louis, USA) and quercetin (Carl Roth, Karlsruhe, Germany) on SOD Assay Kit-WST (water-soluble tetrazolium). We found that final rutoside- or quercetin-concentrations of 1-4 μM interfered slightly with the SOD Assay Kit-WST. Thus, we defined three categories for the plants: category A - no interference expected (final phenol-concentration less than 1 μM , calculated as rutoside),

category B - interference negligible (final phenol-concentration between 1 and 4 μM) and category C - interference very likely (final phenol-concentration higher than 4 μM). Categories of the investigated plants are shown in the Table. Since we could not find any correlation between phenol-content and determined SOD activity, we expect our data of category A and B-plants to be very reliable, whereby SOD activities of plants in category C rather show a "superoxide scavenging capacity".

3.2. Adaptations on abiotic stress in plants

As already mentioned, some environmental factors can trigger the rise of SOD activity. In our study, intensified UV-irradiation and cold storage resulted in increased levels of SOD activity. This is probably due to the fact that UV-irradiation (Hideg and Vass 1996; Rybus-Zajac and Kubiś 2010; Nawkar et al. 2013; Yokawa et al. 2016) and cold (Spychalla and Desborough 1990; Sala 1998; Nayyar and Chander 2004) cause higher amounts of ROS and thus oxidative stress in plants. Plant cells seem to respond to this oxidative stress by upregulation of SOD expression.

Being sessile, plants have developed a set of physiological adaptation mechanisms to cope with stress, among which is SOD (Dat et al. 2000; Gill and Tuteja 2010). Sychalla and Desborough (1990) could show that cold storage of potato tubers induces not only SOD activity, but also the content of α -tocopherol and catalase activity, while the content of soluble proteins decreased. In response to UV-irradiation, plants can produce higher amounts of non-enzymatic antioxidants (e.g. flavonoids and carotenoids (Middleton and Teramura 1993; Solovchenko and Schmitz-Eiberger 2003)), as

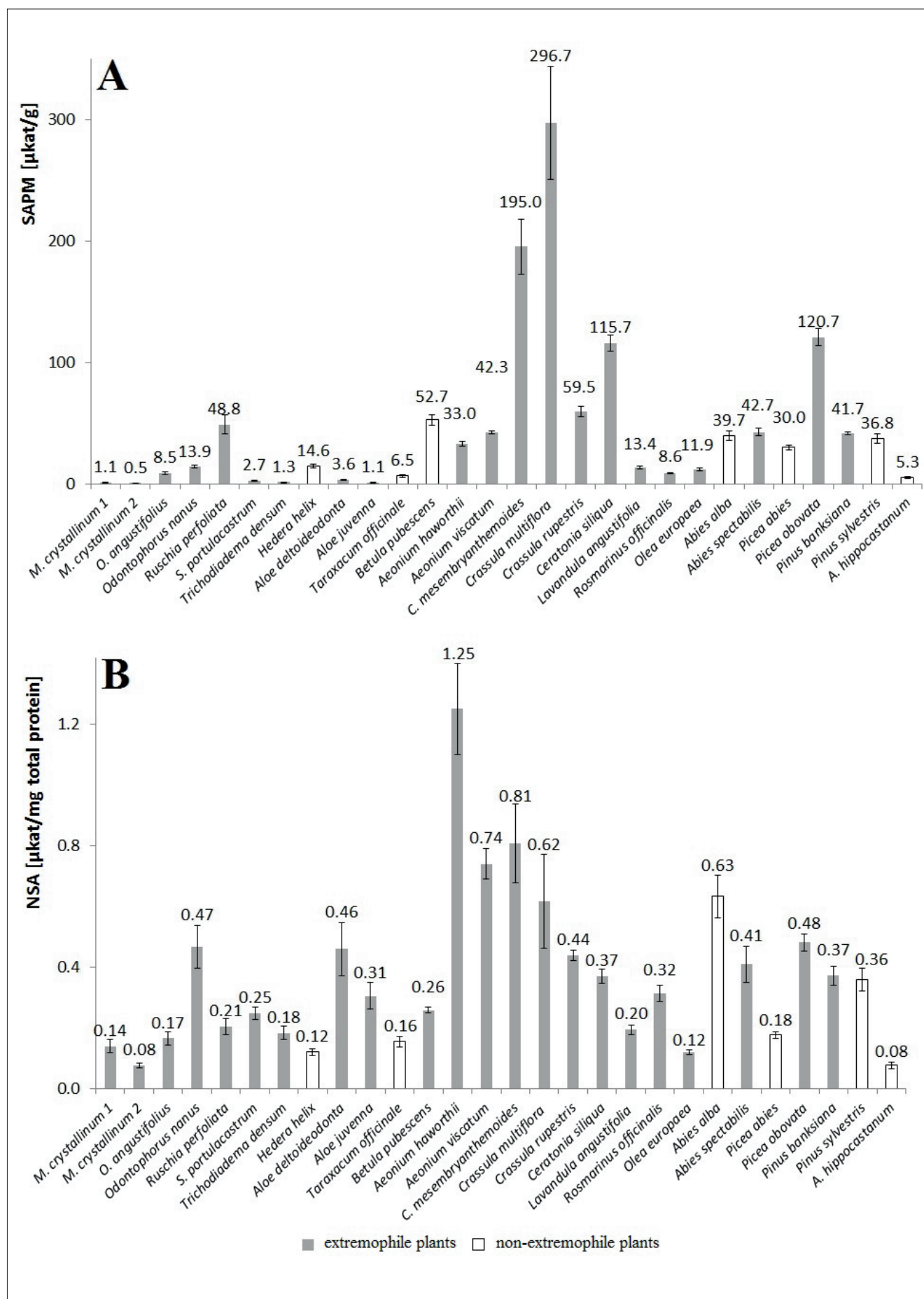


Fig. 2: Mean SAPM (A) and NSA (B) \pm standard deviation (n= 9); 1- South Africa, 2- Tenerife

Table: Plant material - species, family, place of collection, and category of potential interaction of phenols to SOD assay Kit-WST

Plant	Family	Place of collection	Accession number*	Category**
<i>Mesembryanthemum crystallinum</i> L. ^e	Aizoaceae MARTINOV	1- South Africa (culture) 2- Tenerife (wild)	-	B
<i>Odontophorus angustifolius</i> L. BOLUS ^e	Aizoaceae MARTINOV	Botanical Garden Berlin	134-77-74-80/1	B
<i>Odontophorus nanus</i> L. BOLUS ^e	Aizoaceae MARTINOV	Botanical Garden Berlin	213-16-90-10/1	C
<i>Ruschia perfoliata</i> SCHWANTES ^e	Aizoaceae MARTINOV	Botanical Garden Berlin	134-83-74-80/1	B
<i>Sesuvium portulacastrum</i> (L.) L. ^e	Aizoaceae MARTINOV	Botanical Garden Berlin	304-04-95-30/1	B
<i>Trichodiadema densum</i> SCHWANTES ^e	Aizoaceae MARTINOV	Botanical Garden Berlin	134-97-74-80/1	B
<i>Hedera helix</i> L. ⁿ	Araliaceae JUSS.	Institute of Pharmacy	-	B
<i>Aloe deltoideodonta</i> BAKER ^e	Asphodelaceae JUSS.	Botanical Garden Berlin	125-40-74-80	A
<i>Aloe juvenna</i> BRANDHAM & S. CARTER ^e	Asphodelaceae JUSS.	Botanical Garden Berlin	124-01-04-80/1	A
<i>Taraxacum officinale</i> L. ⁿ	Asteraceae BERCHT. & J. PRESL	Institute of Pharmacy, Berlin	-	B
<i>Betula pubescens</i> EHRH. ⁿ	Betulaceae GRAY	Institute of Pharmacy, Berlin	-	B
<i>Aeonium haworthii</i> SALM-DYCK EX WEBB & BERTHEL. ^e	Crassulaceae J. ST.-HIL.	Botanical Garden Berlin	124-03-94-30/1	A
<i>Aeonium viscatum</i> BOLLE ^e	Crassulaceae J. ST.-HIL.	Botanical Garden Berlin	233-02-11-30/1	A
<i>Crassula mesembryanthemoides</i> D. DIETR. ^e	Crassulaceae J. ST.-HIL.	Botanical Garden Berlin	125-97-74-80/1	A
<i>Crassula multiflora</i> SCHÖNLAND & BAKER F. ^e	Crassulaceae J. ST.-HIL.	Botanical Garden Berlin	001-32-74-80/1	A
<i>Crassula rupestris</i> L. ^e	Crassulaceae J. ST.-HIL.	Botanical Garden Berlin	061-62-74-80/1	A
<i>Ceratonia siliqua</i> L. ^e	Fabaceae LINDL.	Cyprus (wild)	-	B
<i>Lavandula angustifolia</i> MILL. ^e	Lamiaceae MARTINOV	Cyprus (wild)	-	B
<i>Rosmarinus officinalis</i> L. ^e	Lamiaceae MARTINOV	local supermarket	-	B
<i>Olea europaea</i> L. ^e	Oleaceae HOFFMANNS. & LINK	Cyprus (wild)	-	C
<i>Abies alba</i> MILL. ⁿ	Pinaceae SPRENG. EX RUDOLPHI	Botanical Garden Berlin	100-63-74-80	B
<i>Abies spectabilis</i> (D. DON) SPACH ^e	Pinaceae SPRENG. EX RUDOLPHI	Botanical Garden Berlin	309-22-85-10/247	B
<i>Picea abies</i> (L.) H. KARST. ⁿ	Pinaceae SPRENG. EX RUDOLPHI	Botanical Garden Berlin	181-52-74-80/302	B
<i>Picea obovata</i> LEDEB. ^e	Pinaceae SPRENG. EX RUDOLPHI	Botanical Garden Berlin	181-64-74-80	B
<i>Pinus banksiana</i> LAMB. ^e	Pinaceae SPRENG. EX RUDOLPHI	Botanical Garden Berlin	060-02-99-10/101	B
<i>Pinus sylvestris</i> L. ⁿ	Pinaceae SPRENG. EX RUDOLPHI	Botanical Garden Berlin	182-01-74-80/255	B
<i>Aesculus hippocastanum</i> L. ⁿ	Sapindaceae JUSS.	private garden	-	C

^e species evaluated as extremophile

ⁿ species evaluated as non-extremophile

* plant species without accession number of the Botanical Garden Berlin were confirmed by comparison to the herbaria of the Institute of Pharmacy, Freie Universität Berlin and Botanical Museum Berlin

**category A –
no interference expected

category B –
interference negligible

category C –
interference very likely

well as antioxidant enzymes like ascorbate peroxidase, glutathione reductase, and peroxidase (Rao et al. 1996). Plants are also known to respond to abiotic conditions by expressing heat-shock proteins and chaperones. Such abiotic conditions can be e.g. elevated or decreased temperature, as well as drought or osmotic stress (Vierling 1991; Boston et al. 1996; Waters et al. 1996; Wang et al. 2004).

3.3. SOD activity and extremophilicity

We determined that SOD activities varied widely between distinct species. Further, especially depending on the habitat, SOD activity can variegated in one and the same plant as well, as we could show for *M. crystallinum*. This plant's SOD activity can rise about 2.5 fold when irradiated with UV light. This demonstrates that the presented data are one snapshot of a fluctuating biologic system. In this study, the highest SOD activities were found for plants of the genera *Aeonium* WEBB & BERTHEL. and *Crassula* L. (*Crassulaceae* J. ST.-HIL.). Although we evaluated these genera as extremophile, we could not find a clear association between extremophilicity and the SOD activity. This conclusion is reinforced by the fact that some extremophile species (e.g. *M. crystallinum*, *Sesuvium portulacastrum* (L.) L. and *Trichodiadema densum* SCHWANTES) yielded comparatively low values - even lower than in typical species of the tempered zone like *Hedera helix* L., *Betula pubescens* EHRH. or *Taraxacum officinale* L. In our collected data, we did not recognize any consistent systematics between a plant's

origin and its SOD activity. Further work is needed to clarify the relevance of SOD in plants.

4. Experimental

4.1. Plant material

Leaves of 27 different plant species, belonging to 11 families were investigated. We screened aqueous extracts of the plant material for SOD activity and total protein. Methanolic extracts were screened for content of phenols. The analyzed plant species are listed in the Table with their family, place of collection, and categories of potential interaction of phenols to SOD assay Kit-WST. The evaluations, whether the species were evaluated as extremophile or non-extremophile, are also indicated.

4.2. Extract preparation

Aqueous extracts were prepared in triplicates by freezing leaves in liquid nitrogen and grinding in a nitrogen cooled mortar and pestle. Then 25±2 mg powdered plant material were passed into reaction tubes. Subsequently, 1.0 ml of TRIS-buffer (50 mM TRIS + 1 mM EDTA, pH 7.8 adjusted with HCl) was added. TRIS was received from Merck, Darmstadt, Germany; EDTA was provided by Carl Roth, Karlsruhe, Germany; and HCl by VWR, Darmstadt, Germany.

For determination of phenols, a methanolic extract was prepared from 5 g powdered plant material in 200 ml methanol by boiling for 60 min under reflux. Crude extract was concentrated in rotavapor (IKA, Staufen, Germany), filtered into volumetric flask, and volume adjusted to 50 ml.

4.3. SOD activity

SOD activities were screened in the aqueous extracts of 27 different plant species listed in the Table. For screening, we used the SOD Assay Kit-WST (Donjindo,

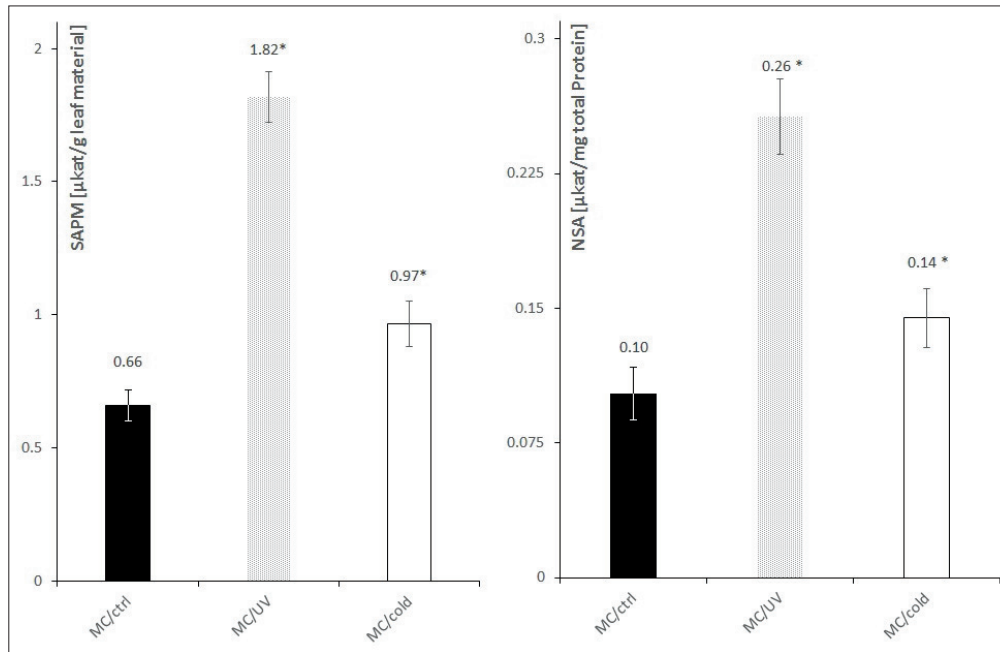


Fig. 3: Mean SAPM and NSA \pm standard deviation (n= 9) of *Mesembryanthemum crystallinum* (MC) in untreated plant (ctrl), after UV-irradiation (UV) and cold storage (cold); * significant rise of SOD activity (one-sided Mann-Whitney U test, $p \leq 0.05$)

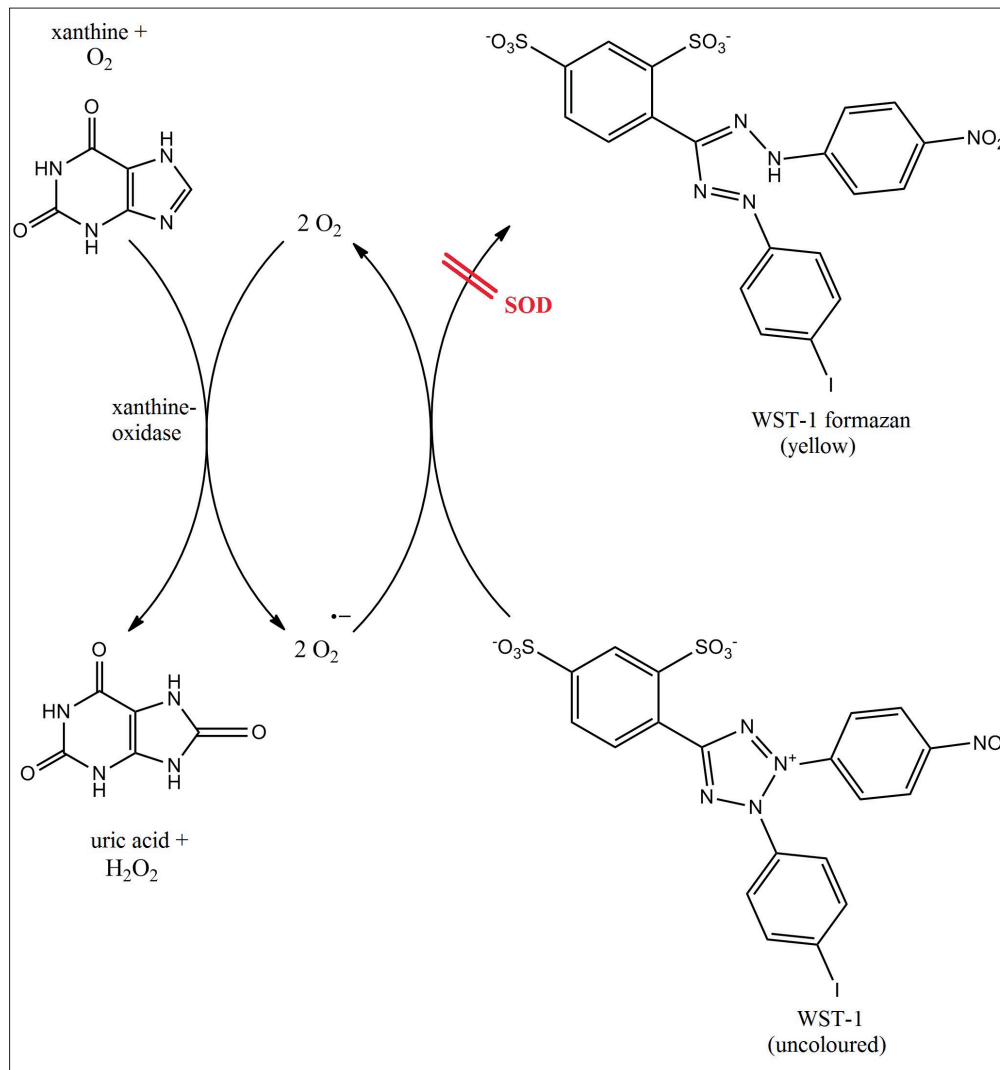


Fig. 4: Mechanism of SOD Assay Kit-WST, modified after (Dojindo-Laboratories 2011)

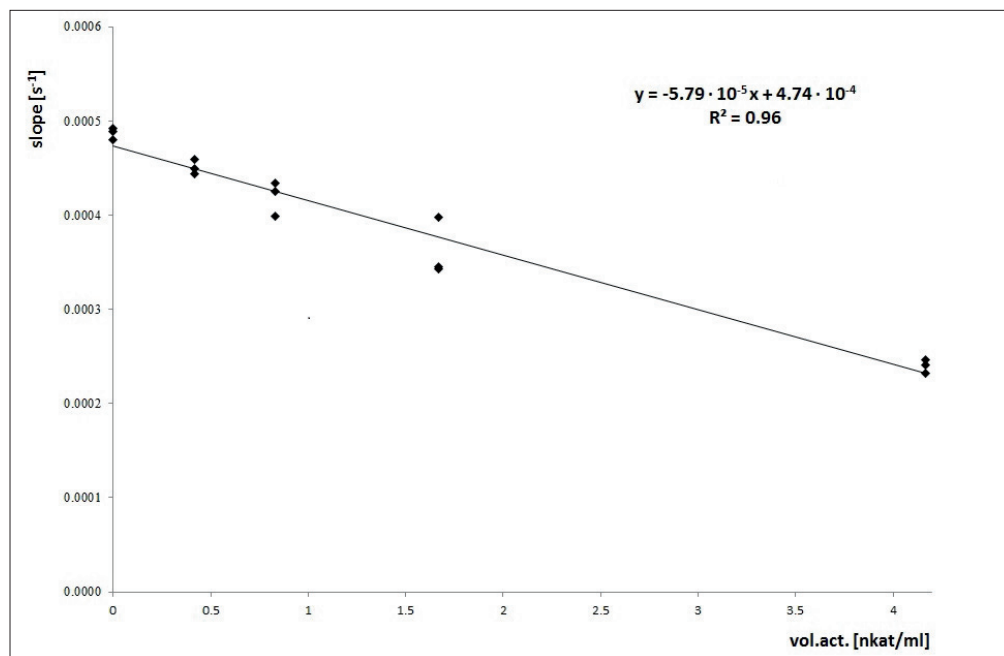


Fig. 5: Calibration of SOD Assay Kit-WST

Kumamoto, Japan) with SOD from bovine erythrocytes as standard (Sigma Aldrich, St. Louis, USA). The kit uses xanthine/xanthine oxidase (X/ XO) to generate superoxide. O_2^- reduces uncolored WST-1 to the yellow WST-1 formazan dye. SOD inhibits this reduction by scavenging O_2^- . The mechanism of SOD Assay Kit-WST is shown in Fig. 4.

For calibration, SOD standard was diluted with TRIS-buffer to volume-activities between $4.17 \cdot 10^{-4}$ nkat/ml and $4.17 \cdot 10^{-3}$ nkat/ml. Dilution of aqueous plant extracts was adjusted into calibration range by preliminary tests. Measurement was performed on 96-well microplates (Carl Roth, Karlsruhe, Germany), absorbance at 450 nm was detected every minute by a Tecan Infinite F200 Microplate Reader (Tecan Group, Maennedorf, Switzerland), temperature was set to 37 °C. Reaction volumes were added as specified in the kit's manual (Dojindo-Laboratories 2011). Measurement was terminated after 16 minutes (optimization of measuring time was performed in preliminary tests). Calculation of SOD activities was conducted by plotting slopes against concentrations, as shown in Fig. 5. All solutions were surveyed in triplicates, for blank we exchanged enzyme working solution with TRIS-buffer.

4.4. Protein content

For determination of protein content, we used Pierce bicinchoninic acid (BCA) assay kit (Thermo Fisher, Waltham, USA). All measurements were performed as specified in distributor's manual (Thermo-Scientific 2013). For calibration, we used bovine serum albumin as standard (Carl Roth, Karlsruhe, Germany).

4.5. Total phenols

To determine the phenolic content of the plant material we used Folin Ciocalteu's reagent (FCR), received from Sigma Aldrich (St. Louis, USA). We adapted the method to our lab conditions, after various templates (Singleton and Rossi 1965; Ainsworth and Gillespie 2007; Cicco et al. 2009; Agbor et al. 2014). As standard we used rutin in concentrations between 25 and 750 μ M. FCR was diluted one to ten with demineralized water. To avoid precipitation of FCR we diluted methanolic solutions and extracts in equal volumes of demineralized water. A solution of 7.5% sodium carbonate in distilled water (w/v) was added to start the reaction. 210 μ l reaction volume was composed by 20 μ l sample + 40 μ l diluted FCR + 150 μ l sodium carbonate solution. Microplates were shaken and then incubated at room temperature in the dark for 30 min. Absorbance was measured with microplate reader at 620 nm. All solutions were investigated in triplicates, for blanks FCR was replaced by demineralized water.

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Conflicts of interest: None declared.

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