The role of the novel demethylase KERS complex in fungal development and secondary metabolism

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Declaration of Authorship

This thesis has not previously been submitted to this, or any other University, for any other degree. This thesis is the sole work of the author with the exception of *A. nidulans* RpdA HDAC activity which was carried out by Dr. Ingo Bauer at Medical University of Innsbruck.

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Abbreviations

Summary

Filamentous fungi can be found almost everywhere around the world including soil and food sources. They are capable of producing various secondary metabolites (SM) such as penicillin and carcinogenic mycotoxins. Aflatoxin B1 is the most notorious mycotoxins causing liver cancer which is produced by a filamentous fungus *Aspergillus flavus*. Although it has been shown at the genetic level that chromatin regulation is critical for controlling the expression of SM genes in fungi, a mechanistic view is not well-understood. In this work, a novel tetrameric histone modifying complex ("KERS" complex), containing JARID1-type H3K4 demethylase KdmB, putative cohesin acetyltransferase (EcoA), a class I type histone deacetylase RpdA and a ring finger protein StnB was discovered in model organism *Aspergillus nidulans* and pathogenic fungus *Aspergillus flavus*. Protein similarity analysis revealed that the KERS subunits are conserved from yeast to complex eukaryotes and mammals. The KERS complex couples chromatin regulation of SM gene clusters, fungal development, pathogenicity, and mycotoxin production. The KERS complex assembles in the nucleus and affects the expression of several gene clusters. The first part of this thesis addresses the role of KERS complex in *A. nidulans*. *ecoA* and *rpdA* are essential for *A. nidulans* viability. To study the functions of EcoA and RpdA in fungal light responses, promoters were replaced with tuneable Tet-ON constructs. KdmB and EcoA depletions resulted in increased sexual development indicating their role as negative-regulators of cleistothecia formation, while the loss of RpdA, and SntB completely abolished cleistothecia development presenting them as positive-regulators of sexual development. It was also shown that KdmB is required for EcoA protein stability, while SntB mediates EcoA proteasomal degradation to control nuclear levels. Post-translational modification analysis revealed that EcoA down-regulation results in the abrogation of conserved cohesin subunit yeast Smc3 ortholog SudA acetylation. Interdependence studies revealed that KdmB acts as a scaffold for binding EcoA to the heterodimer RpdA-SntB, whereas SntB recruits RpdA to

the KdmB-EcoA heterodimer. Interestingly, SntB is required for the recruitment of RpdA to the KdmB-EcoA heterodimer, however, RpdA HDAC activity does not require functional SntB or KdmB.

The second part of this work focuses on the role of KERS complex on pathogenic fungus *A. flavus*. The KERS complex was found to be conserved in *A. flavus,* comprising tetrameric KdmB, EcoA, RpdA, and SntB subunits. Similar to *A. nidulans*, *ecoA* was found to be essential for viability in *A. flavus*. In contrast with *A. nidulans*, *rpdA* was deleted successfully in pathogenic fungi. Developmental assays showed that both *kdmB* and *rpdA* are required for sclerotia production, aflatoxin biosynthesis and crop seed contamination in *A. flavus* through the *nsdC*, *nsdD* and *afl* pathways respectively. KdmB/RpdA affected the transcript levels of nearly 80% of the analysed secondary metabolism backbone gene clusters required for the transcription of polyketide synthetases (PKSs), non-ribosomal peptide synthetases (NRPSs) and dimethylallyl tryptophan synthetases (DMATs). It was also shown that both KdmB and RpdA regulate tri-methylation of H3K4me3 and H3K9me3 residues, while RpdA mainly acts on H3K14ac residues as well as H3K36me3. Hence, chromatin modifiers, KdmB and RpdA, are essential for fungal development, aflatoxin production and are key global regulators of SM gene clusters.

The findings in this thesis provide insight into how chromatin modifier protein complexes can have broad effects on growth, development and natural product biosynthesis by regulating epigenetic marks. These results suggest that similar epigenetic mechanisms mediated by the KERS complex are likely conserved in eukaryotes, including pathogenic fungi. Thus, this study will provide support for the development of new strategies to reduce mycotoxin contamination, crop spoilage, disease and to improve yields of valuable fungal natural drugs which will benefit the pharmaceutical industry and improve economic growth.

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Eukaryotic chromatin structure

DNA is the building blocks of cells and is organized within nucleosomes which form the eukaryotic chromatin architecture. 146 bp of DNA is wrapped around two sets of four core histone proteins, namely H2A, H2B, H3 and H4. Each histone octamer is linked with linker histone H1, forming the nucleosome, which becomes folded into higher-order structures (Ausio, 2006, Libertini et al., 1988). Chromatin structure enables highly dense DNA to be extensively packed in a more compact and dense shape, thus preventing possible DNA damage, regulating gene expression and assisting the cell cycle (Venkatesh and Workman, 2015). More densely packed chromatin regions are known as heterochromatin and less densely regions which are accessible for RNA polymerases are termed as euchromatin (Gottesfeld and Carey, 2018). Heterochromatin regions are usually associated with silent DNA regions that are not transcribed (Grunstein and Gasser, 2013). For instance, centromere regions regulate precise segregation of chromosomes during the cell cycle. Additionally, telomeres are also heterochromatin DNA regions which are crucial for chromosome stability and DNA replication (Franzke et al., 2015, Fortuny and Polo, 2018). As opposed to heterochromatin, euchromatin regions are usually associated with actively transcribed genomic regions, easily accessible by certain RNA polymerases for transcription of genes (Lindsay, 2007). Positively charged histones provide an energy in the form of electrostatic interaction to aid the negatively charged DNA folding within the nucleus, thus, nucleic acids are packed into much smaller sizes as a result of DNA coiling (Figure 1.1) (Chandler and Wolffe, 1999). With the advances of electron microscopy technology, there is a better understanding on how histone octamers form hundreds of thousands of nucleosomes to generate repeating histone-containing units in the chromatin fibre (Finch et al., 1975).

Figure 1.1. From double-stranded helical DNA molecule to chromatid structure. Long eukaryotic genomic nucleic acids possess a dynamic mechanism to pack-up DNA into chromosomes via histones. Positively charged histones condense negatively charged DNA molecules within nuclei to form the chromatin architecture. DNA wraps around eight histone proteins 1.65 times, forming the nucleosome. Groups of nucleosomes by the aid of the linker H1 form chromatin, thus shaping the chromatid of a chromosome (Luger et al., 1997).

1.2 Control of gene expression by chromatin remodeling

DNA accessibility can be regulated in various distinctive ways which are not necessarily mutually exclusive but can cooperate to potentially increase the exposure of DNA for DNAbinding proteins and transcription factors (Travers et al., 2012). ATP-dependent complexes use ATP hydrolysis to disrupt and alter the physical association of histones from DNA molecules. These complexes contain the ATPase subunit required for the hydrolysis reaction which belongs to the SNF2 superfamily of proteins that are divided into two main groups, namely SWI2/SNF2 and the SWI (Zhang et al., 2017). These ATPase subunits are highly conserved from yeast to *Drosophila* and human (Vignali et al., 2000a). Additionally, transcription factors like forkhead box protein A1 (FOXA1) and GATA4 can act on inaccessible chromatin regions to foster loosening of heterochromatin to generate more accessible structures for other transcription factors (Li et al., 2007). Histone chaperons play vital roles in the control of the supply of available histones cooperating with chromatin remodelers during histone deposition. These chaperones are responsible for nucleosome assembly which functions at multiple steps during nucleosome formation. Asf1, CAF-1, and Rtt106 mediate the transport of newly synthesized histone H3–H4 into the nucleus, HIRA and Daxx coordinate replication-independent nucleosome assembly of H3.3-H4 as well as deposition of H3.3-H4 at telomeres (Burgess and Zhang, 2013). Histone variants, other than canonical histones are replication-independent molecules which are present during whole stages of the cell cycle and are required for nucleosome stability and chromatin fibre dynamics (Ausio, 2006).

1.3 Post-translational modifications of histones

Epigenetic regulation contributes to gene activation or repression by initiating or maintaining stable patterns of histone modifications with respect to the environmental signals (Vu et al., 2018). Such modifications can occur on histone N-terminal tail residues which protrude from the nucleosome (Allshire and Ekwall, 2015, Bannister and Kouzarides, 2011). Aberrant histone modifications have been attributed to several disorders and carcinogenesis (Singh et al., 2018, Mochizuki et al., 2017, Nebbioso et al., 2018). Covalent histone post-translational modifications (PTMs) include methylation, acetylation, phosphorylation, ubiquitylation and sumoylation. The chromatin structure can be altered by such modifications resulting in gene silencing or induction. For instance, most histone acetylation sites occur on lysines 9, 14, 18, 23 or 56 located usually at or near promoter regions (Tvardovskiy et al., 2015). Acetylation of histone lysine residues is related to gene activation rendering chromosomal domains more accessible (Deckert and Struhl, 2001). Histone lysine residues can also be mono, di or tri-methylated at their arginine or lysine residues. The most common methylations can occur at histone arginine 2 and lysine 4, 9, 27, 36 and 79 sites. Methylation of H3K4 residue is generally linked with gene activation, while methylation of H3K9 residue is linked with gene repression (Rose and Klose, 2014). Histone phosphorylation mediates the response to DNA damage as well as chromatin remodeling for other nuclear processes (Clayton et al., 2000). In mammals, these modifications occur at serine 139 of the H2AX variant histone which is known as γH2AX. In yeast, similar phosphorylation occurs at serine 129 of H2A. During a mutation leading to the transition of the serine residue to a non-phosphorylatable alanine residue, DNA-damage hypersensitivity increases against agents such as phleomycin and methyl methane-sulphonate (MMS), emphasizing the γH2AX role in DNA repair. This type of modification occurs in all phases of the cell cycle as a response to DNA-damage pathways (Rossetto et al., 2012).

Ubiquitination is an ATP-dependent reaction involving multiple enzymes such as the ubiquitin-activating enzyme (E1), ubiquitin-conjugating enzyme (E2) and ubiquitinprotein isopeptide ligase (E3). H2A and H2B mono-ubiquitination catalysed by these enzymes are important for the regulation of many processes such as transcription initiation, transcription elongation, silencing and DNA repair (Weake and Workman, 2008). Histone ubiquitination processes are reversible where certain ubiquitin-specific proteases can remove these marks by the process known as deubiquitination (Wang et al., 2018). It has been shown that ubiquitination such as H2B monoubiquitination can be a pre-requisite for H3K4 and H3K79 methylation by the Set1 mediated COMPASS complex (Weake and Workman, 2008). Additionally, H2B ubiquitination was shown to affect di- and trimethylation of H3K4 and H3K79 residues (Weake and Workman, 2008). Members of the small ubiquitin-related modifier (SUMO) protein family are responsible for the sumoylation of histone residues which have similar processes as ubiquitination. It was shown that sumoylation is associated with transcription repression where histone deacetylases and heterochromatin protein1 (HP1) are recruited to all core histones (Shiio and Eisenman, 2003). In another study performed using *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* as a model organism, sumoylation was shown to negatively affect gene expression, mostly occurring at telomeres (Nathan et al., 2006). Sumoylation was shown to have dynamic interplay with histone acetylation and ubiquitination serving as a negative histone modification blocking the occurrence of activating modifications. Histone glycosylation is another less studied histone PTM which targets unique histone residues to bridge nutrient-sensing O-GlcNAc glycosylation with epigenetic regulation (Dehennaut et al., 2014). Histone mono- or poly-ADP-ribosylation is required for DNA repair, replication, and transcription processes. This reversible PTM process can occur in all core histones which mediate nucleosome structure dynamics (Messner and Hottiger, 2011).

1.4 Chromatin Modifiers

1.4.1 Histone acetyltransferases

Histone acetylation is carried out by a protein family called histone acetyl-transferases (HATs) which can occur either at nuclei or in the cytoplasm (Voss and Thomas, 2018). Chromatin regions targeted by HATs enable DNA to be exposed and easily accessible for certain transcription factors required for the initiation of gene expression. For instance, some of the housekeeping genes such as ß-globin loci, which need to be frequently expressed during all stages of growth are acetylated across a broad chromatin domain (Litt et al., 2001). Other examples include male *Drosophila* X chromosome H4K16 acetylation (Gu et al., 1998). Usually, HATs are recruited by multi-subunit transcription factor complexes to the target sites on the chromatin regions. In yeast, HAT complexes can co-ordinately target specific loci with the activators such as VP16, Gcn4, Gal4 and Hap4 (Steger et al., 1998, Eberharter et al., 1998). Such multimeric complex subunits are also conserved in human. Yeast SAGA and NuA4 HAT-containing complexes are recruited by Tra1, which is a TRRAP human ortholog (McMahon et al., 2000). Genome target regions of HAT complexes depends on the type of activators/repressors that are recruited by (Deckert and Struhl, 2001). For instance, SAGA is directed to local H3 acetylation near promoters by VP16, while H4 acetylation occurs in broad acetylation of H4 over 3 kb domain by VP16 recruiting NuA4 complex (Vignali et al., 2000b). Not only are HATs required for transcription initiation by acetylating promoter regions, but they may also assist transcription elongation by facilitating RNA polymerase passage through DNA regions (John et al., 2000). Some early genes in eukaryotes are regulated by HATs and kinases synergistically where certain phosphorylation cascades are required for HAT targeting. An example includes the phosphorylation of serine 10 on H3 followed by acetylation of H3K14 on the same histone tail (Clayton et al., 2000).

Histone acetyltransferases can be classified as "writer" enzymes due to the fact that they can add acetyl residues onto histone residues (Gillette and Hill, 2015).

1.4.2 Histone deacetylases

Histone deacetylases (HDACs) are a superfamily of enzymes which target acetylated histone marks for deacetylation, thus, down-regulating gene expression at the chromatin level (Trojer et al., 2003, Seto and Yoshida, 2014). Since HDACs remove the acetylated histone residues, they can be classified as "eraser" enzymes (Seto and Yoshida, 2014). HDACs fall into two main families, namely Class I HDACs and Class II HDACs. Rpd3 is an example of a Class I HDAC which is highly conserved among eukaryotes, sharing homology with HDAC1, 2, 3, and 8. This class of highly expressed HDACs can act on all histone substrates which retain a highly conserved deacetylase domain. Class I HDACs 1 and 2 share similarity and can act together in some of the chromatin-modifying complexes such as the Sin3, NuRD, CoREST and PRC2 complexes (Yang and Seto, 2003, Meier and Brehm, 2014). Unlike HDAC8, HDAC3 was also shown to be present as a part of the chromatin binding complexes like the N-CoR–SMRT (Yang and Seto, 2008).

Class I HDACs play essential roles during the early development stages of mice. HDAC1 mutant mice cannot survive and show severe proliferation defects and growth retardation (Montgomery et al., 2007). *rpdA* was shown to be essential for growth and development of filamentous fungi *Aspergillus nidulans* and *Aspergillus fumigatus*, whereas deletion of this gene does not cause lethality in budding yeast *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* emphasizing its distinct functional role in yeast (Tribus et al., 2010). It was shown that the RpdA C-terminal is required for its catalytic activity and nuclear localization. Plantpathogenic fungus *Cochliobolus carbonum* virulence is mediated by another Class I HDAC HosA homologue HDC1, where mutations diminish pathogenicity against maize plants (Baidyaroy et al., 2001). HDACs can be inhibited by a metabolite known as trichostatin A (TSA), produced by *Streptomyces sp*. This metabolite serves as a potential anticancer drug, which was shown to delay germination and reduce growth and sporulation of pathogenic fungus *A. fumigatus*, making RpdA a promising target for antifungal drug development (Bauer et al., 2016).

1.4.3 Histone methyltransferases

Histone methyltransferases (HMTases) fall into an enzyme family which catalyses the addition of methyl groups onto histone lysine or arginine residues from the *S*adenosylmethionine (SAM) donor (Murray, 1964). The three classes belonging to the histone methyltransferase family are SET-domain containing proteins, DOT1-like proteins and arginine N-methyltransferase proteins (Trievel, 2004). The first two methyltransferase classes can methylate lysine residues and N-methyltransferase proteins can methylate arginine residues. (Feng et al., 2002, Bannister and Kouzarides, 2011). All three methyltransferase classes have been shown to be capable of methylating histones within chromatin, as well as free histones and non-histone proteins (Huang and Berger, 2008). The first characterized SET-domain methyltransferases were in *Drosophila* SU(VAR)3-9, the Polycomb-group protein E(Z) and the trithorax-group protein TRX (Jones and Gelbart, 1993, Tschiersch et al., 1994). These proteins consist of evolutionary conserved SET and chromatin-associated "chromo" domains. For instance, SUV39H1 or Suv39h proteins are mammalian H3K9 HMTases which are SET-domain-dependent required for heterochromatin formation (Rea et al., 2000). Approximately 130 residues accounting for SET-domain catalytic activity is required for the addition of methyl groups from SAMs as well as recognition and binding to histones. H3K4 methyltransferase CclA is a member of a conserved COMPASS complex required for the regulation of growth and secondary metabolite production in human pathogen *Aspergillus fumigatus* (Palmer et al., 2013). In cancer patients, mutations in HMTases have been reported resulting in deleterious effects (Meyer et al., 2017). Similarly, overexpression of HMTases were shown to cause diseases (Chen et al., 2018). HMTases and heterochromatin protein 1 (HP1) mutually target H3K9 residues for full repression of transcription of certain genes. The stability of heterochromatin structure is maintained by binding HP1 to H3K9me3. For instance, it was revealed that HP1 is required for the recruitment of HMTases SUV39H1 to H3K9 histone marks by physical interaction in yeast (Yamamoto and Sonoda, 2003). HP1 contains a conserved histonebinding region namely a chromo shadow domain essential for H3K9me3 recognition which maintains full transcription repression and telomere stability (Mishima et al., 2013). Histone methylations were once thought to be irreversible until the discovery of the first H3K4me3 lysine-specific demethylase 1A, LSD1 or KDM1A (Shi et al., 2004). In general, histone acetylation corresponds to the activation of transcription while deacetylation results in gene repression. In comparison to acetylation and deacetylation, methylation has rather mixed and dual function with either activation or repression of SM gene expression (Figure 1.2). Nevertheless, like HATs, HMTases are also considered as "writer" enzymes.

Figure 1.2 The general overview of the processes during histone acetylation and methylation in chromatin biology. Acetylation is usually required for the activation of gene expression, while methylation is histone context-dependent where H3K4 methylation is related to euchromatin formation i.e. activation, H3K9 methylation is related to heterochromatin formation i.e. gene repression (Yao and Li, 2015).

1.4.4 Histone demethylases

Histone demethylases are a group of conserved enzymes required for the removal of histone mono-, di- or tri-methylated lysine or mono-methylated arginine residues. Two families of histone demethylases have been discovered, containing catalytic domains for demethylation activity: the amine oxidases and jumonji C (JmjC) domain-containing, iron-dependent dioxygenases (Tsukada et al., 2006, Whetstine et al., 2006, Cloos et al., 2006). Amine

oxidases use flavin adenine dinucleotide (FAD) as a cofactor while jumonji family demethylases are 2-oxoglutarate-dependent demethylases (Shi et al., 2004, Tsukada et al., 2006). These enzymes are highly conserved from yeast to human consisting of multi-domain regions required for chromatin recognition, methylated histone-binding and catalytic activity (Weaver et al., 2018, Pedersen and Helin, 2010) (Figure 1.3). Plant homeodomain (PHD) fingers and Tudor domains are commonly found in histone demethylases. Other domains include ARID (AT-rich interaction domain), SWIRM (Swi3p, Rsc8p and Moira domain), TPR (tetratricopeptide repeat region) and ZF (Zinc finger) DNA binding domain. The ZF domain is important for demethylase catalytic activity as well as for cofactor binding (Tsukada et al., 2006). TPR, Tudor and PHD domains are considered as "reader" domains as they are not required for catalytic activity of histone demethylases (Weaver et al., 2018). KDM5 H3K4 demethylases contain two PHD domains that are capable of recognizing both unmethylated H3K4 and methylated H3K4 residues, suggesting that these demethylases can identify both their substrate and their products for demethylation reaction (Klein et al., 2014, Gillette and Hill, 2015). Thus, since demethylases are capable of carrying the catalytic reaction for the removal of methyl groups from histones, they are often classified as "eraser" enzymes (Gillette and Hill, 2015).

Phylogenetic tree	Protein domains	Name	Synonyms	Specificity
	-0 . The set of \sim \rightarrow 0 and	KDM1A KDM1B	AOF2/BHC110/LSD1 AOF1/LSD2	H3K4me2/me1 H3K9me2/me1 H3K4me2/me1
		JMJD7 HIF1AN HSPBAP1 JMJD5 JMJD4		
	$+ + +$ - +#	JMJD6 JMJD8 KDM2B KDM2A	PSR/PTDSR JHDM1B/FBXL10 JHDM1A/FBXL11	H3R2 H4R3 H3K36me2/me1 H3K4me3 H3K36me2/me1
		JHDM1D PHF8 PHF ₂	KIAA1718 JHDM1F JHDM1E	H3K9me2/me1 H3K27me2/me1 H3K9me2/me1
		HR KDM3B KDM3A JMJD1C	JHDM2A/JMJD1A/TSGA	H3K9me2/me1
	$\bullet\bullet\bullet\bullet$	KDM6B KDM6A UTY KDM4A	JMJD3 UTX JHDM3A/JMJD2A	H3K27me3/me2
	1-644 $\bullet\bullet\bullet\bullet$	KDM4C KDM4B KDM4D	JHDM3C/JMJD2C/GASC1 JHDM3B/JMJD2B JHDM3D/JMJD2D	H3K9me3/me2 H3K36me3/me2
		KDM5B KDM5C KDM5D KDM5A	JARID1B/PLU1 JARID1C/SMCX JARID1D/SMCY JARID1A/RBP2	H3K4me3/me2
		JARID ₂ MINA NO66		H3K4me3/me2 H3K36me3/me2
Key: Amino oxidase SWIRM \blacktriangleright CW CXXC OPHD FBOX LRR I TPR Jm jN ● TUDOR \triangle ARID \triangle C5HC2 JmjC				

Figure 1.3 Two classes of histone demethylases in humans and phylogenetic tree of JmjC domain containing enzymes. Many histone demethylases possess multi-domain structures necessary for the enzymatic activity, cofactor-binding, histone recognition, and DNAbinding. KDM5 family enzymes catalyse the demethylation of H3K4 di- and tri- methylated residues. (Pedersen and Helin, 2010).

Interestingly, it was shown that demethylases can also scan DNA regions nonspecifically for possible target sites. KDM1A was found to interact randomly with DNA regions for scanning and activating the enzyme *in vivo* (Pilotto et al., 2015, Kim et al., 2015). Although these multi-domain enzymes are capable of reading and scanning target regions and can act individually for histone demethylation, recent proteomics data suggest that many characterized demethylases can be recruited by or physically interact with other large protein complexes during demethylation processes (Figure 1.4). For instance, CoREST is a highly conserved protein complex found in many eukaryotes which not only contains histone demethylase activity by KDM1A but also contains a histone deacetylase enzyme essential for transcription repression (Forneris et al., 2006, Ouyang et al., 2009). This complex was considered a repressive protein complex due to the fact that they act on active histone marks such as removing methyl groups from actively transcribed H3K4me1/2 regions. However, studies also suggested that KDM1A may distinctly interact with another protein complex with an androgen receptor (AR) by targeting repressive histone PTM marks H3K9me1/2 to switch to a transcriptionally active state (Metzger et al., 2005). It was soon discovered that the KDM1A switch from repressive mode to activating mode was a result of a splice variant of KDM1A, known as KDM1A+8a which can interact with the SVIL protein targeting H3K9me1/2 marks (Laurent et al., 2015). Additionally, some demethylases lacking reader domains could still target unmodified histone marks via their Tudor domains by interacting with other protein partners containing multiple functional PHD domains. Examples include vertebrate demethylase complexes KDM5A/JARID1A/RBP2 and KDM5B/JARID1B/PLU1 as well as the repressive deacetylase complex SIN3 (Klose et al., 2006, Klein et al., 2014, van Oevelen et al., 2008). Some initially non-functional demethylases rely on phosphorylating activity of other kinases in order to become fully active. For instance, H3K9me2 demethylase KDM7C/PHF2/JHDM1E becomes active once phosphorylated by PKA which enables the demethylase to interact with another DNA binding protein ARID5B for targeting chromatin regions (Baba et al., 2011).

Figure 1.4 Demethylases can act individually or as large protein complexes to modify histone residues. (**A)** Demethylases can scan random regions by their reader domains or by the aid of protein complexes containing multiple-reader domains. (**B)** DNA-binding transcription factors, protein complexes or non-coding RNAs can direct histone demethylases to specific locations on the chromatin. Both pathways can either activate or repress transcription regulation (Dimitrova et al., 2015).

In some other cases, demethylases function alongside SCF E3 ubiquitin ligases for polyubiquitination and proteasomal degradation to control histone demethylase protein levels during appropriate developmental stages (Han et al., 2014, Van Rechem et al., 2011). For instance, Jhd2 is polyubiquitinated by the E3 ligase Not4 for proteasomal degradation in yeast (Huang et al., 2015). Apart from the examples of demethylases interacting with HDACs, KDM6 was shown to interact with MLL H3K4 histone methyltransferase for gene activation. While KDM6 removes repressive H3K27me2/3 marks, SET-containing MLL

methylate H3K4, a dual mechanism for activating and repressing chromatin regions (Issaeva et al., 2007, Cho et al., 2007).

H3K4 methylation usually occurs at promoter and enhancer regions enabling transcription up-regulation which can be altered by KDM5 family demethylases. Recent studies have shown that rather than a repressive role for transcription, these H3K4me demethylases are required to maintain the normal levels of transcription by regulating H3K4me levels at promoter and enhancer regions (Outchkourov et al., 2013). For instance, although H3K4me2/3 marks are transcription activating marks, the same PTM marks are negative transcription marks in enhancer chromatin loci, suggesting dual roles of KDM5 demethylases for switching on/off gene regulation (Kidder et al., 2014). Histone demethylases not only play a role in epigenetic regulation for the cell cycle, development, proliferation, DNA damage response, and chromosome organisation but also they are found to demethylate non-histone related proteins to achieve similar responses. For instance, KDM1A was shown to demethylate P53 which results in alteration of its interaction with 53BP1, a cell cycle regulator (Huang et al., 2007). The same demethylase can remove methyl groups from transcription factor E2F1 as a response to DNA damage by stabilizing E2F1 which in turn leads to apoptosis via induction of E2F1 target genes (Kontaki and Talianidis, 2010, Xie et al., 2011).

In *Drosophila* and *C. elegans*, KDM5 was shown to function during developmental stages. For instance, mutations in the JmjC domain of H3K4 demethylase RBP-2 (retinoblastoma binding protein related 2) result in defective vulva formation in *C. elegans* (Christensen et al., 2007). Mutations in the *Drosophila* counterpart Lid2 (little imaginal discs), a member of the TrxG (trithorax group) of genes maintaining the transcriptional activity of HOX (homeotic) genes, resulted in larval lethality as well as developmental defects (Gildea et al., 2000). In yeast, Jhd2 is responsible for the regulation of genome-wide transcription levels and control of nucleosome turnover and occupancy as well as mitotic rDNA condensation (Ramakrishnan et al., 2016, Ryu and Ahn, 2014). It was also shown that PHD-H2A interaction was essential for transcriptional regulatory functions of Jhd2 (Huang et al., 2015). Furthermore, PHD finger domain is required for Jhd2 chromatin association and stability is maintained by the JmjN-terminal domain (Huang et al., 2010).

1.5 Fungi as model organisms for studying eukaryotic biology

Fungi and complex eukaryotes have common biochemical pathways which make fungal systems good systems for resolving similar mechanisms in higher eukaryotes. Moreover, some of the medically important fungal organisms have been used to treat certain microbial infections, and many others have contributed to food and agriculture (Brooks, 1949, Alazi and Ram, 2018). Moulds, mushrooms, lichens, rusts, smuts and yeasts fall into this kingdom. Fungi are ubiquitously found throughout the environment and are considered to be large reservoirs for producing various types of natural products known as secondary metabolites (Kobayashi et al., 2007). It is estimated that around 1.5 million fungal species exist in nature and 100,000 have been described so far (Dang et al., 2005, Choi and Kim, 2017). The genome size of typical fungi are around 30-40 Mbp which make them easier for genetic manipulations and transformations due to their genome sizes being smaller than most higher eukaryotes (Meyer, 2008). Dikarya is the sub-kingdom of fungi which hosts almost 98% of known fungi comprising Ascomycota and Basidiomycota phyla (Heitman, 2011). Several Ascomycota species are well-known and thoroughly studied organisms in laboratory research. For instance, genomes of many *Penicillium*, *Neurospora*, *Saccharomyces*, *Schizosaccharomyces* and *Aspergilli* species have been sequenced and they have been widely studied model organisms since they are capable of producing many types of beneficial as well as toxic natural products (Bills and Gloer, 2016). Some of these natural products have been used as pharmaceutically useful drugs such as penicillin whereas others such as sterigmatocystin or the more toxic compound aflatoxin have been devoted to fungal pathogenicity causing diseases (Hedayati et al., 2007, Kumar et al., 2016). Approximately 10% of known fungi have been classified as being pathogenic to plants, animals or humans (Ziaee et al., 2018). For instance, *Aspergillus fumigatus* is a widely studied organism due to its occurrence in immunocompromised patients causing aspergillosis (van der Linden et al., 2013). *Candida albicans* is another fungus which can colonize and affect patient's gastrointestinal and genitourinary tracts causing candidiasis (Nobile and Johnson, 2015). Despite the presence of many beneficial uses of certain fungi in food biotechnology, pathogenic fungi can cause crop spoilage and mycotoxin contamination leading to massive crop losses each year. Mycotoxins produced by these fungi cause disease in animals and humans when contaminated crops are consumed (Hedayati et al., 2007).

1.5.1 Filamentous fungi

Filamentous fungi can be found almost everywhere around the world, especially in soil or food. They are also commonly found on decaying food or vegetables and can survive in extremely harsh environmental conditions (Powers-Fletcher et al., 2016, Chavez et al., 2015). They are able to grow as vegetative hyphae and can switch between asexual and sexual life cycles. Moulds can be easily grown in laboratory conditions using simple or more complex media and crop seeds (Christensen et al., 2012). They can be selected using various types of selective agents such as vitamins as the auxotrophic markers, or antifungal drugs like antibiotics (Eckert et al., 1999). Fungal optimal growth temperature ranges between 4ºC to 40ºC degrees with an average of 30ºC as the optimal. During favourable conditions, they can germinate and grow rapidly forming white hyphae in the first 24 h, which grows into darker spores with the age of the colony (Adams et al., 1998). In the human host, *Aspergilli* species can grow within 1-3 weeks causing several types of diseases related to aspergillosis with the most common species being *A. fumigatus*, *A. niger* and *A. flavus* (Powers-Fletcher et al., 2016).

1.5.2 *Aspergillus nidulans***; a model organism for fungal development and secondary metabolism**

A. nidulans has been a widely studied organism for understanding fungal cell biology (Goldman and Kafer, 2004). This fungus can undergo three distinct differentiation (Yu, 2010). Spores can germinate to form hyphae and mycelia during vegetative growth (Dynesen and Nielsen, 2003). Both asexual and sexual life-cycles require vegetative growth of hyphae initially. Asexual reproduction occurs in the presence of illumination forming conidial spores from conidiophores which are required for long-term viability as well as spore invasiveness. Thick-walled hyphal cells, alternatively known as foot cells, play major roles in conidiophore formation (Jung et al., 2014). After formation of the foot cells, hyphae aggregates start forming aerial stalks which further create multinucleate vesicles. On top of these vesicles, two types of uninucleate reproductive cells are produced; the metulae and the phialides. Continuous mitotic reproduction of phialides form bunches of conidia spores attached to conidiophores which can be released and dispersed via the air (Adams et al., 1998).

Conidiation is light-induced asexual development regulated by signalling cascades comprising transcription factors required for spore induction (Ruger-Herreros et al., 2011). *brlA* is a conidiation activating gene which encodes the zinc finger transcription factor BrlA (Bristle), which must be expressed in order to activate other genes required for asexual sporulation (Lee and Adams, 1994). Prior to *brlA* expression, the activation of *fluG, flbA,*

flbB, flbC, flbD, and flbE upstream elements are required for the initiation of asexual sporulation (Adams et al., 1998, Lee and Adams, 1996, Alkhayyat et al., 2015). BrlA is required for conidiophore formation and *abaA* (Abacus) activation. *brlA* mutants were shown to lack conidiophore formation, a prerequisite for conidia production (Adams et al., 1988). *abaA*, activated by BrlA, is required for the induction of conidia inducing regulators in the middle phases of the conidiation process during 10-12 h growth phase. *abaA* mutants are not able to undergo asexual reproduction, suggesting a key role of this transcription activator for phialide differentiation and asexual sporulation (Clutterbuck, 1969). AbaA activates *wetA* expression required for conidia pigmentation, and WetA subsequently activates conidium-specific gene expression during activation of late conidia-inducing genes (Andrianopoulos and Timberlake, 1994). VosA is another regulator which couples trehalose biogenesis and conidia activation by repressing *brlA* via feedback regulation for the maturation of conidia (Figure 1.5). Recently, novel regulator AslA for conidia production was discovered in *A. nidulans*. It was shown that AslA is an upstream element of *blrA* upregulation required for conidiation start-up (Kim et al., 2017).

A. nidulans conidiophore development

Figure 1.5 Activation of asexual conidiation in *A. nidulans* begins with conidia activating signalling cascades involving transcription factors and activators such as *fluG*, *brlA*, *abaA*, *wetA* and *vosA*. BrlA and AbaA are key regulators of conidia formation (Yu, 2010).

Unlike asexual development, the sexual life-cycle is more complicated and dynamically regulated in *A. nidulans*, which requires highly specialized differentiated cells (Vienken and Fischer, 2006). Genetic recombination in *Aspergilli* species occurs through sexual reproduction from which initially four meiotic ascospore progeny are produced and further mitotic division of these result in eight ascospore progeny within each ascus. Fused hyphae develop cleistothecia surrounded by Hulle cells within fruiting bodies which contain asci (Dyer and O'Gorman, 2012). Since *A. nidulans* is a homothallic species, it can enter sexual reproduction without the need for a compatible partner for crossing. However, this does not necessarily mean that they cannot outcross (Paoletti et al., 2007).

Highly conserved *velvet* family proteins *veA*, *velB*, *velC, vosA,* and *laeA* play essential roles in development and mycotoxin production in *Aspergilli* species (Sarikaya-Bayram et al., 2015) (Figure 1.6). During vegetative growth, VeA-VelB heterodimers are required for sexual development and sterigmatocystin (ST) production by physically interacting with LaeA, a global regulator of secondary metabolism containing a methyltransferase domain (Bayram et al., 2008b, Bayram and Braus, 2012). LaeA is required for the formation of highly specialized types of Hulle cells which play roles in nursing developing fruiting bodies during the dark conditions (Sarikaya Bayram et al., 2010). It was shown that VelC is a positive regulator of sexual development and is required for normal levels of cleistothecia production in *A. nidulans* (Park et al., 2014). In addition to this, a cryptochrome/photolyase-encoding gene, *cryA*, was shown to be a negative regulator of sexual development, repressing fruiting body formation when appropriate environmental conditions are not met (Bayram et al., 2008a). Velvet proteins regulate *A. nidulans* development and SM production by synchronizing with the light receptor phytochrome. Nuclear velvet protein VeA binds to phytochrome, however, in the absence of light, VeA translocates into the nucleus forming a VeA-VelB heterodimer upon its phosphorylation by the MAPK AnFus3 promoting sexual development (Stinnett et al., 2007, Bayram and Braus, 2012). VipC and VapB are nuclear heterodimeric methyltransferases which form the membrane-bound VapA-VipC-VapB complex. Upon release of the heterodimer methyltransferase VipC-VapB into the nucleus, they interact with VeA, inhibiting its nuclear accumulation which negatively regulates sexual development and secondary metabolism and activates asexual differentiation by reducing repressive K3K9me3 levels (Sarikaya-Bayram et al., 2014).

Figure 1.6 A dynamic model illustrating molecular complexes formed by the velvet family proteins and methyltransferases for the control of development and secondary metabolite production as a response to environmental signals in the model fungus *A. nidulans* (Sarikaya-Bayram et al., 2015).

1.5.3 *Aspergillus flavus***: Producer of carcinogenic aflatoxin**

The filamentous fungus *Aspergillus flavus* is a plant and human pathogen that is predominantly found in soil as spores or sclerotia structures and is capable of producing a carcinogenic mycotoxin known as aflatoxin (Hedayati et al., 2007). It can contaminate oilrich seeds such as corn, maize or peanuts during pre or post-harvest (Mitchell et al., 2016).

Every year, approximately \$1 billion of economic loss is caused due to aflatoxin contamination in the US alone (Amare and Keller, 2014). Furthermore, it is estimated that around five billion people are susceptible to this fungal poison's threat (Faustinelli et al., 2016). Once aflatoxin is consumed, it is metabolized by the liver, generating reactive epoxide intermediates which create mutations in the tumour suppressor gene *p53*, resulting in liver cancer (Hsu et al., 1991). Among the different types of aflatoxins, B1 is known to be the most toxic carcinogenic compound. *A. flavus* is also an allergen leading to allergic bronchopulmonary aspergillosis in several species. For instance, it can cause Stonebrood (Aspergillosis larvae apium) in honeybees (Scully and Bidochka, 2005, Foley et al., 2014). During favourable conditions, *A. flavus* sporulates producing conidia, while sclerotia, aggregates of hyphal tissue, are formed during starvation to protect the fungus from harsh environmental conditions. The *A. flavus* genome (37Mb) encodes approximately 12,000 functional genes in 8 chromosomes (Rokas et al., 2007). The asexual reproduction mechanism of *A. flavus* is similar to model organism *A. nidulans*. *blrA* and *abaA* play essential roles in the light-stimulated induction of asexual regulatory genes (Cary et al., 2017). The sexual life-cycle, however, is quite different in *A. flavus*. Sclerotia may harbour sexual ascospore depending on the field they occur, although previously it was thought that sclerotia can contain ascospore only in special laboratory conditions (Horn et al., 2016, Horn et al., 2009, Horn et al., 2014). Since *A. flavus* is heterothallic, they contain two mating type alleles *MAT1-1* and *MAT1-2* (Ramirez-Prado et al., 2008). The crosses between individual mating types promote the induction of indehiscent ascospore-bearing ascocarps within the sclerotia structure. However, sclerotia formation does not require two mating types as they can be produced when favourable conditions are met to survive harsh environment (Horn et al., 2009, Horn et al., 2014). Although there is not much information provided for the *A. flavus* sclerotia regulatory mechanism, it was shown that transcription factors NsdC and NsdD are essential for sclerotia formation as well as conidiophore development (Horn et al., 2016). *A. nidulans* nuclear complexes VeA, velB, and LaeA were found to be conserved in *A. flavus* which mediate development as well as SM production in pathogenic fungus (Chang et al., 2013). LaeA is a negative regulator of VeA and is required for seed pathogenesis. In addition to LaeA, VeA was also shown to be an important factor for seed colonization (Amaike and Keller, 2009).

1.6 Secondary metabolism in filamentous fungi

Development and secondary metabolism are co-dependent, balanced and tightly regulated in filamentous fungi (Calvo et al., 2002). Tremendous research has been performed so far to characterize and study the regulatory mechanisms of secondary metabolite biosynthesis as well as to discover novel metabolites produced by fungi (Gerke and Braus, 2014). Melanins, colourful pigments of the spores, sclerotia and other differentiated structures are the most evident natural products produced by fungi which serve as plant or animal survival factors for UV protectants, antigrowth deterrents, or ROS scavengers. Phytotoxins and mycotoxins are virulence factors produced by fungi, causing a severe and economic loss in agriculture crops (Ahn and Walton, 1997, Bennett and Klich, 2003, Scheu and Simmerling, 2004, Pitkin et al., 2000). Secondary metabolite genes for the biosynthesis of natural products are clustered in fungal genomes (Osbourn, 2010). Penicillin, sterigmatocystin, and aflatoxin gene clusters are widely studied due to their industrially important nature. Both carcinogenic sterigmatocystin and aflatoxin clusters are found in many *Aspergilli* species. Sterigmatocystin, a precursor of aflatoxin, is regulated by a transcription factor and an activator AflR in both *A. nidulans* and *A. flavus* which share common biosynthetic pathways (Yu et al., 1996). *aflR* encodes the binuclear zinc cluster $(Zn(II)_2Cys_6)$ transcription factor essential for mycotoxin production (Fernandes et al., 1998). Upstream signalling mechanisms for sterigmatocystin and aflatoxin production involve many regulatory
pathways as a response to environmental factors such as nutrients, hormones and environmental stresses (Yu and Keller, 2005). These signals can be translated to the nucleus by mitogen-activated protein kinase (MAPK) cascades and the cAMP-mediated PkaA cascade for the activation of CreA (carbon metabolism), AreA (nitrogen metabolism) and PacC (pH sensor) regulators (Yu and Keller, 2005, Atoui et al., 2008, Bayram et al., 2009). Mycotoxin productions can be regulated by G-proteins FadA and FlbA through multiple downstream signalling cascades (Hicks et al., 1997). Sterigmatocystin production was found to be completely lost in a *flbA* mutant and FlbA is required for the inactivation of FadA to promote development and SM production (Hicks et al., 1997, Lee and Adams, 1994). It was also shown that FlbA is required for the activation of AlfR for the induction of sterigmatocystin biosynthesis (Hicks et al., 1997). A similar mechanism is also conserved in *A. parasiticus* and *A. flavus* species, with FadA being a negative regulator of aflatoxin biosynthesis. Protein kinase A, PkaA, functions downstream of the FlbA/FadA pathway and is required for normal induction of fungal development and sterigmatocystin production. PkaA acts as a negative regulator of mycotoxin production by inhibiting LaeA, which is essential for sterigmatocystin, penicillin and lovastatin production (Bok and Keller, 2004). Similarly, a small GTP-binding protein (RasA) negatively regulates sterigmatocystin production via *aflR* expression (Shimizu et al., 2003). Velvet protein VeA is also required for mycotoxin production and *aflR* expression in *A. nidulans* (Kato et al., 2003). Furthermore, VeA is conserved and essential for aflatoxin production and sclerotia development in both *A. flavus* and *A. parasiticus* (Cary et al., 2007, Calvo et al., 2004). Penicillin biosynthesis is also dependent on VeA, in which VeA is required for the activation of *acvA*, a delta- (L-alpha-aminoadipyl)-L-cysteinyl-D-valine synthetase (Kato et al., 2003). It is estimated that around 50 gene clusters correspond to secondary metabolite production in *A. nidulans* (Andersen et al., 2013). In *A. flavus*, most likely there are more than 56 gene clusters which correspond to secondary metabolite production, however, the exact number is still unknown (Umemura et al., 2013). Apart from aflatoxin, *A. flavus* is capable of producing a neural mycotoxin aflatrem, cyclopiazonic acid, piperazine and a cosmetic product kojic acid (Gallagher and Wilson, 1979, Parrish et al., 1966). Despite the biosynthetic pathways of many of these secondary metabolites being well-studied, the epigenetic control mechanisms are still uncertain.

1.7 Role of chromatin in fungal development and secondary metabolite production

Epigenetics play fundamental roles in growth and development from yeast to human (Grunstein and Gasser, 2013). Fungal development and SM production are tightly regulated and quick epigenetic responses are needed for survival against environmental stress responses (Gacek and Strauss, 2012). In fungi, many secondary metabolite gene clusters are found to be located at the sub-telomeric regions suggesting that there must be epigenetic regulation for the activation and repression of certain gene clusters to adapt to a changing environment (Brakhage, 2013, Bok et al., 2009, Rokas et al., 2018). It is also known that the location of gene clusters is a key determining factor for their expression levels being controlled by the state of chromatin structural tension. Several studies have been carried out to prove this phenomenon by transforming gene clusters to different locations on the genome and to analyse their expression level shifts. For instance, a member of the aflatoxin gene cluster in *A. parasiticus*, *ver-1*, was around 500-fold down-regulated when the chromosomal location of this gene was re-located to a different region. On the other hand, chromosomal relocation of *nor-1* caused total loss of expression in two different positions emphasizing the importance of allelic location for the normal expression of secondary metabolism biosynthetic clusters (Liang et al., 1997, Chiou et al., 2002). Chromatin remodellers LaeA, CclA, ClrD, and HepA have been previously shown to play major roles in mediating the activity of secondary metabolism gene clusters (Bok et al., 2009, Palmer et al., 2013). LaeA, the global regulator of fungal development and secondary metabolism has always been under investigation for whether it is capable of altering post-translational modifications on histone residues due to the fact that LaeA has an S-adenosyl-L-methionine (SAM) domain which is a characteristic feature of methyltransferases, transferring a methyl group from the ubiquitous SAM to either nitrogen, oxygen or carbon atoms (Bok and Keller, 2004). This hypothesis is still not proven yet, however, it is thought that epigenetic marks may be affected in *laeA* mutants which show reduced SM production and increased levels of H3K9 methylation (Bok et al., 2006, Reyes-Dominguez et al., 2010). Normally a *laeA* mutant is unable to produce sterigmatocystin or aflatoxin, however, simultaneous deletions of HDACs and *laeA* were shown to partially recover sterigmatocystin production, suggesting LaeA may have direct or indirect roles on H3K9 acetylation levels (Shwab et al., 2007). Additionally, lack of *laeA* was shown to reduce the pathogenicity of *A. fumigatus* in murine models by reducing the expression levels of SM biosynthetic genes (Sugui et al., 2007). Furthermore, many HDAC inhibitors have been shown to increase SM production by affecting H3K9 acetylation levels which are usually present abundantly in SM gene clusters (Shwab et al., 2007). Penicillin production was positively affected in an HDAC HdaA (Shaaban et al., 2010) deletion. H3K9me3 marks are abundant at heterochromatin regions and they are substrates for heterochromatin protein 1 (HP-1) binding. In fact, HP-1 is essential for heterochromatin formation and for maintaining full transcription repression (Kwon and Workman, 2011). The *A. nidulans* HP-1 homolog, HepA, plays a key role in mediating H3K9me3 repression. It was shown that the deletion of *hepA* resulted in activation of several SM gene clusters emphasizing the repressive role of this protein (Reyes-Dominguez et al., 2010). Another key epigenetic regulator of secondary metabolism biosynthetic gene clusters is a macromolecular protein complex containing the Set1 methyltransferase COMPASS which acts on H3K4 residues (Palmer et al., 2013). Deletion of Set1 *cclA* methyltransferase encoding gene of *A. nidulans* caused significant alteration of the secondary metabolite profile as well as activation of additional eight metabolites such as monodictyphenone (MDP), emodin and four emodin analogs (Bok et al., 2009). However, deletions of other subunits of the COMPASS complex did not have the same effects. ChIP analysis indicated that H3K4me2/3 marks were reduced which were mostly present at promoter regions of secondary metabolism clusters (Bok et al., 2009).

1.8 Aim of this project

Chromatin modifier complexes play essential roles in proliferation, survival and cellular pathways by regulating histone post-translational modifications epigenetically. Proper transcriptional regulation of fungal development, mycotoxin production, and pathogenicity can be regulated by histone marks. However, mechanism of chromatin control of development and secondary metabolism in fungi is poorly understood. Recently, an H3K4 demethylase, KdmB, was proposed to be a key player of fungal secondary metabolism in *A. nidulans*. Therefore, it was intriguing to know how KdmB controls fungal secondary metabolism and development. The first aim of this thesis was to characterize the protein complexes where KdmB is involved. The second aim of the thesis was to examine how these protein complexes influence the fungal development and secondary metabolite production.

In this thesis, a novel tetrameric histone demethylase complex comprising KdmB-EcoA-RpdA-SntB (KERS complex) was discovered by using various affinity purification methods coupled with Mass Spectrometry (MS) and extensively studied in the model organism *A. nidulans* and pathogenic fungus *A. flavus*.

Overall, this work serves to understand how fungal development, secondary metabolite production, and pathogenicity is controlled at chromatin level by providing a mechanistic view of the functions of the KERS complex using *A. nidulans* and *A. flavus*. By doing so, this study will help to control mycotoxin contamination, reduce crop spoilage, reduce disease and improve the yield of valuable fungal natural drugs which will support the pharmaceutical industry and economic growth.

Chapter 2

Materials & Methods

2.1 Strains, culture and growth conditions of *A. nidulans*

Oligonucleotides (Sigma) and plasmids used in this study are listed in Table 2.1 and Table 2.2. Strains used in this study are listed in Table 2.3. *A. nidulans* AGB551 was used as a host strain for genetic manipulations. Fungal strains were grown in GMM (glucose minimal media): 1 % D-glucose, 1x AspA (70 mM NaNO₃, 7 mM KCl, 11.2 mM KH₂PO₄, pH 5.5), 2 mM MgSO₄, 1x trace elements (76 μ M ZnSO₄, 178 μ M H₃BO₃, 25 μ M MnCl₂, 18 μ M FeSO₄, 7.1 µM CoCl₂, 6.4 µM CuSO₄, 6.2 µM Na₂MoO₄, 174 µM EDTA). When needed, complete media (GMM with 0.1% yeast extract, 0.2% peptone, 0.1% tryptone and required supplements) was used as a rich culture. For selective media either pyrithiamine $(100 \mu g/ml)$ or nourseothricin (100 μg/ml) were added where necessary. Biotin (0.02 μg·ml⁻¹), uracil (50 μ g·ml⁻¹), pyridoxine (0.05 μ g·ml⁻¹) were used as supplements when required. Stressinducing agents for growth tests of mutant strains supplemented into GMM agar plates were as following; 0.3 µg/ml benomyl for microtubule-stress, 0.3 mM 3-amino 1.2.4 triazol (3- AT) for amino-acid starvation, 1 M KCl, 1 M NaCL, 1.2 M sorbitol for inducing osmotic stress and SDS (0.005%), congo red (20 µg/ml) for inducing cell wall stress. Culture and transformation procedures of *A. nidulans* and *E. coli* used in this study were performed as previously described (Punt and van den Hondel, 1992; Sarikaya Bayram et al., 2010).

For bacterial transformation, DH5α or MACH1 (Invitrogen) *E. coli* competent strains were used to create recombinant plasmids as described previously (Bayram *et al*., 2008b). LB media was supplemented with ampicillin (100 µg/ml) where required.

2.2 Strains, culture and growth conditions of *A. flavus*

Plasmids and oligonucleotides used in this study are listed in Table 2.4 and 2.5 respectively. *Aspergillus flavus* strains used in this study are listed in Table 2.6. For spore cultivation, strains were grown in GMM glucose minimal media with required supplements at 30°C in

1% glucose as the carbon source and nitrate as the nitrogen source. Uracil (50 μg·ml⁻¹) and phleomycin (100 µg/ml) were supplemented when required. For phenotypic analysis, 5μl $(5x10³$ spores) of spore suspensions were spot inoculated onto petri dishes. Asexual conidiation was quantified at the end of 4 days grown in Potato Dextrose Agar (PDA) supplemented with uridine, uracil under light conditions at 30°C. 0.5 cm diameter of agar surface was removed and resuspended in 500 μl PBS solution prior to counting spores on haemocytometers. For sclerotia analysis, spore suspensions were spot inoculated onto Wickerham medium (Chang et al., 2012) for 21 days under the dark conditions at 30°C. Sclerotia quantification was performed by manually counting the surface of each petri dish. For aflatoxin production, 5μl $(5x10^3$ spores) were spot inoculated onto YES agar medium (20 g yeast extract, 150 g sucrose, 1 g MgSO₄7H₂O, 20 g agar) for 7 days in the absence of light at 30°C. Stress-inducing agents for growth tests of WT and deletion strains were as following; 0.3 µg/ml Benomyl and 0.1 µg/ml Nocodazole for microtubule-stress, SDS (0.005%), Congo Red (20 μ g/ml) and Calcoflour (5 μ g/ml) for inducing cell wall stress, CPT (75 μ M), Menadione (0.06 mM) and H₂O₂ (2 mM) for inducing oxidative stress.

2.3 Protein extraction and Western blotting

Strains grown in GMM or complete media for 24h at 30°C (for *A. flavus*) and 37°C (for *A. nidulans*) were filtered and washed with PBS using miracloth before harvesting mycelia in liquid nitrogen. Grinded mycelia were lysed using lysis buffer B300; 50 mM Tris [pH 7.6], 300 mM NaCl, 1 mM EDTA, 0.1% NP-40, 10% glycerol, 1 mM dithiothreitol. For nuclear enrichment experiments, nuclei were isolated as described previously (Palmer et al., 2008). The amount of proteins were measured by Bradford assay. 100 µg of total protein was loaded into an SDS-PAGE for whole cell-lysate analysis. For nuclear protein detection, 10 µg of protein was loaded into gels. For primary and secondary antibodies, the following conditions were used; 1:1000 dilution of Mouse monoclonal α -GFP (Santa Cruz, sc-9996), 1:1,000 dilution of α -HA (Sigma, H9658), 1:2,000 dilution of Goat α -mouse (BioRad, 1706516), rabbit polyclonal α -SkpA (raised in Genescript) 1:2,000 and 1:2,000 Goats α -Rabbit (BioRad, 1706515) antibodies were used in 5% non-fat milk in TBS (0.1% Tween-20). Luminata Crescendo (Millipore, WBLUR0100) was used as a Western HRP substrate. Membrane images were captured by a G-Box (Syngene) and later were stripped off in stripping buffer (Ponceau S Reagent 0.2%, TCA 3%) overnight for SkpA or H3 control experiments. For *A. nidulans* nuclear isolation, approximately $2x10⁶$ spores were inoculated onto GMM media for 24 h at 37ºC submerged culture. For *A. flavus* nuclear isolation, approximately $2x10^6$ spores were inoculated into complete media with required supplements for 24 h at 30ºC submerged culture. Solutions and extraction protocol were performed as described previously (Soukup and Keller, 2013). Antibodies (1:2,000 dilution in blocking solution) used for histone PTMs were as following; α -H3 (Abcam; AB1791), α -H3K4me3 (Active Motif; 39159), α -H3K9 (Abcam; ab8899), α -H3K36me3 (Abcam; ab9050), α -H3K9ac (Merck; 07-352), a-H3K14ac (Merck; 07-353).

2.4 RNA extraction and quantitative real time PCR analysis

100 mg of mycelia were collected and mRNA was isolated according to the 'RNeasy Plant Mini Kit' manufacturer's protocol (Qiagen). mRNA was quantified using 'Qubit RNA BR Assay Kit' Protocol (Thermo Fisher). cDNA was synthesised from 1µg of total mRNA using the 'Transcriptor First Strand cDNA Synthesis Kit' (Roche). qPCR reaction mixtures were prepared using LightCycler 480 SYBR Green I Master mix and a LightCycler 480 qPCR (Roche) was used to determine gene expression levels. Beta-tubulin (*benA*) control was used as a housekeeping gene. Bar charts represent the mean data of two combined biological replicates and 6 combined technical replicates per strain.

2.5 Tandem affinity purification (TAP) coupled with liquid chromatography-mass spectrometry

2.5.1 IgG Immobilization onto NHS-activated magnetic beads

5.0 mg of IgG (Sigma, I4506) was dissolved in 3 ml Coupling Buffer (50 mM Borate) and vortexed vigorously. 300 µl magnetic beads were added into 1.5 ml microcentrifuge tubes and supernatant was discarded using DynaMag™-2 Magnet (ThermoFisher, 12321D). Magnetic beads were washed with Wash Buffer A (1 ml of ice-cold 1 mM HCl) and vortexed gently for 15 seconds. Then, supernatant was discarded using DynaMag™-2 Magnet. 300 µl protein solution (IgG in Coupling Buffer) was added to the magnetic beads and vortexed for 30 seconds. Tubes were incubated at room temperature by rotation for 2 h, vortexed vigorously every 5 minutes for 15 seconds during the first 30 minutes of incubation. Then, tubes were vortexed every 15 minutes. At the end of 2 hours of incubation, beads were collected and supernatant was saved into another tube for future quality control. Samples were washed with 1 ml Wash Buffer B (0.1M glycine, pH 2.0) and vortexed for 15 seconds. Beads were collected and supernatant was removed. This step was repeated one more time. Then, 1 ml ultrapure water was added to the beads and vortexed for 15 seconds. Beads were collected and supernatant was discarded. 1 ml of Quenching Buffer was added to the beads, vortexed for 30 seconds and incubated at room temperature on a rotator for 2 h. Then, beads were collected and supernatant was removed. This step was repeated using ultrapure water and 1 ml Storage Buffer was added to the tubes and mixed well. Beads were collected and supernatant was discarded. This step was repeated two additional times. 300 µl storage buffer was added to the beads, mixed well and stored at 4 ºC for up to 6 months resulting in the final concentration of the IgG-coupled magnetic beads as 10 mg/ml. Optionally, 10 μ l of IgG-coupled magnetic beads was run in SDS PAGE and the presence of IgG subunits with silver staining was checked for quality analysis.

2.5.2 Preparation of cell lysate & TAP tag protein purification

Preparation of buffers used in TAP method were as previously described (Bayram et al., 2012). TAP-tagged fungal strains were inoculated in 800 ml liquid media and grown at 37 ºC/200 g for 24 h. Next day, mycelia were collected using miracloth and washed three times with harvest solution $(1x$ PBS, $100 \mu M$ PMSF, 1% DMSO). Remaining liquid was carefully removed by squeezing mycelia using paper towels prior to breaking mycelia down with the help of mortar/pestle in liquid nitrogen. Grounded mycelia were immediately collected and stored in precooled 15 ml falcon tubes and kept in liquid nitrogen. SS34 tubes were precooled for each strain and around 30 ml grounded mycelia product was added to each tube. Protease inhibitors, phosphatase inhibitors and DTT were added to the buffer B250. 12 ml of this buffer was added into each SS34 tube and vortexed vigorously. Tubes were kept on ice for about 10 min. At the end of mixing, tubes were centrifuged at $20,000$ g at $4 \degree$ C for 20 min. During centrifugation, 15 ml falcon tubes for each sample were pre-cooled on ice. 50 µl of IgG-coupled NHS magnetic beads was added into a microfuge tube and 1 ml B250 buffer was added to wash the beads. Beads were collected and supernatant was discarded using DynaMag™-2 Magnet (Cat; 12321D, ThermoFisher). Resuspended beads in 200 µl buffer were directly used for the next step. At the end of centrifugation, 12-15 ml supernatant from SS34 tubes was pipetted into pre-cooled falcon tubes and magnetic beads were added into the protein extract and incubated at 4 ºC for 3-4 hours on a rotator. By the end of the incubation period, wash buffers (WB250, and WB150 with protease/phosphatase inhibitors, DTT and PMSF) were prepared. TCB (TEV cleavage buffer (TEV-CB: 25 ml Tris-HCl pH 8.0, 150 mM NaCl, 0.1 % NP 40, 0.5 mM EDTA, 1 mM DTT)) buffer contained only DTT and PMSF. At the end of the 3-4 h incubation, beads were collected and supernatant was

discarded using DynaMag™-15 Magnet (Cat; 12301D, ThermoFisher) for 15 mL tube. 14 mL WB250 was added and mixed by inverting. Beads were collected and supernatant was discarded. This time beads were washed with 14 ml WB150. Next, 10 ml TCB was applied into each sample and mixed carefully. Beads were collected and supernatant was discarded. 1 ml TCB was added to resuspend the beads and solutions were transferred into new 1.5 mL microfuge tubes. 20 µl (200 U) TEV-protease was added to beads and incubated at 4 °C overnight on a rotating platform. Next day, CBB (25 mM Tris-HCl pH 8.0, 150 mM NaCl, 1 mM Mg acetate, 1 mM imidazole, 2 mM CaCl2, 10 mM β mercaptoethanol) was prepared by adding CaCl₂ and B-mercaptoethanol prior to the calmodulin binding step. 50 μ l MagnaZoom calmodulin magnetic beads (Cat; 20162002-1, bioworld) was added to 1 ml CBB in 1.5 mL microfuge. Beads were washed and supernatant was discarded. Finally, beads were resuspended in 200 µl CBB. Supernatant from the TEV-treated samples were collected and were added directly into 6 ml of CBB in a 15 ml falcon tube as well as 7 μ l of 1 M CaCl2. 200 µl CBB containing calmodulin magnetic beads were added into the same 15 ml falcon tube and incubated for 2-3 h at 4 ºC on a rotator. At the end of incubation, beads were collected and supernatant was removed using DynaMag™-15 Magnet. Beads were washed with 1 ml CBB and transferred into new 1.5 ml microfuge tubes. Next, beads were washed with 1 ml CBB, mixed well by inverting. Supernatant was discarded and this step was repeated 3 additional times. Protein bound beads were directly used for trypsin digestion in the next step.

2.6 HA and GFP purifications

For *A. nidulans*, strains were grown in GMM liquid cultures for 24 h at 37°C at 180 g. For *A. flavus*, strains were grown in complete liquid media for 24 h at 30°C at 180 g. After harvesting and grinding, mycelia were lysed with lysis buffer supplemented with DTT, protease and phosphatase inhibitors. Lysis buffer (B300) was used with the addition of DTT, protease and phosphatase inhibitors (1.5 ml/l 1 M DTT, Complete Protease Inhibitor Cocktail EDTA-free (Roche), 3 ml/l 0.5 M Benzamidine, 10 ml/l phosphatase inhibitors (100 mM NaF, 50 mM NaVanadate, 800 mM β glycerolephosphate) and 10 ml/l 100 mM PMSF). Protein extracts and magnetic beads were incubated at 4°C for approximately 2 h on a rotator prior to trypsin digestion.

2.7 Trypsin digestion and sample preparation

Trypsin digestion protocol for TAP, HA and GFP magnetic beads were performed as described in the manufacturer's ProteaseMAX protocol (Promega, V5111). Trypsin digested magnetic beads were discarded, peptides were precipitated and concentrated using speedy-vac and lastly subjected to Zip-Tip C_{18} (ZTC18S096) purification as described in manufacturer's protocol. Purified peptides were solubilized in Q-Exactive loading buffer (2% acetonitrile, 0.5% TFA in dH₂O) and sonicated for 2 min. Finally, samples were run in a Q Exactive™ Hybrid Quadrupole-Orbitrap™ Mass Spectrometer to detect multiprotein complexes. To analyse multiprotein complexes, MS/MS data processing and identification was performed with Proteome Discoverer 1.3 (Thermo Scientific) and the Discoverer Daemon 1.3 (Thermo Scientific) proteomic software and organism-specific taxon-defined protein databases. AGB551 strain was used as a control to eliminate non-specific protein contaminants in HA and TAP purifications.

2.8 Proteomics analysis and peptide identification

Protein samples were analysed using a Q-Exactive mass spectrometer coupled to a Dionex RSLCnano (Thermo Scientific, Waltham, MA, USA). Peptides were separated using a 2% to 40% gradient of acetonitrile (A: 0.1 % FA, B: 80 % acetonitrile, 0.1 % FA) over 65 min at a flow rate of 250nl/min. The Q Exactive was operated in the data dependent mode, collecting a full MS scan from $300-1650$ m/z at 70K resolution and an AGC target of 1e⁶. The 10 most abundant ions per scan were selected for MS/MS at 17.5K resolution and AGC target of $1e⁵$ and intensity threshold of 1K. Maximum fill times were 10msec and 100msec for MS and MS/MS scans respectively with a dynamic exclusion of 60sec. Samples were analysed using 25 NCE (normalized collisional energy) with 20% stepped energy.

Peptide identification using Proteome Discoverer 1.4 was performed using the Sequest HT (SEQUEST HT algorithm, licence Thermo Scientific, registered trademark University of Washington, USA) and searched against the UniProtKB-SwissProt database (taxonomy: *A. nidulans* and *A. flavus* respectively). The following search parameters were used for protein identification: (1) peptide mass tolerance set to 10 ppm, (2) MS/MS mass tolerance set to 0.02 Da, (3) up to two missed cleavages were allowed, (4) carbamidomethylation set as a fixed modification and (5) methionine oxidation (+15.99492 Da) /acetylation (+42.0106 Da)/phosphorylation (+79.96633 Da) set as a variable modification.

2.9 Protein alignment and ortholog analysis

Data was obtained using basic local alignment tool (BLAST; https://blast.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/Blast.cgi) with *A. nidulans* and *A. flavus* KERS protein sequences as reference. Listed orthologs correspond to the proteins of highest scores obtained from the most significant alignments while values represent percentages of identification of protein sequence

2.10 Southern hybridization

Southern blot hybridization experiments were carried out using the Roche DIG Nucleic Acid Detection Kit (Roche, 11175041910). Amplification of either 5'UTR or 3'UTR regions (each yielding approximately 1.2 kbp) used as probes were carried out using the nonradioactive digoxigenic (DIG) labelling kit (Roche, 11093657910).

2.11 Confocal microscopy

Strains expressing sGFP and mRFP were grown in Lab-Tek chambered Coverglass W/CVT (Thermo Scientific, 155360) in 400 µl GMM for 16 h at 29ºC. For *A. flavus* experiments, DRAQ5 (BioStatus Limited, DR50050) with 1:10,000 dilution was used for nuclear staining 30 minute prior to imaging under microscope. Microscopic images were captured using Olympus FV1000 confocal microscopy in 60x magnification.

2.12 RP-HPLC analysis of aflatoxin production

To analyse aflatoxin levels from culture media, approximately 2 cm of agar cores were removed from the centre of culture plates and were subjected to chloroform extraction to collect the organic phase. Samples were dried under speedy-vac and resuspended in methanol for HPLC analysis. To analyse aflatoxin from infected peanuts, one infected peanut seed for each strain was collected and incubated for 30 min with 6 ml chloroform:dH₂O (v/v) at 4°C. Samples were centrifuged at 4000 g for 15 min at 4°C. Organic phase was transferred into microfuge tube. Chloroform was dried out under speedyvac and samples were resuspended in methanol prior to HPLC analysis. 3 biological replicates were prepared for each experiment. The same procedure was repeated twice. WT was adjusted to 100%.

2.13 Pathogenicity tests

Pathogenicity assays were performed similar to previously described (Christensen et al., 2012). Skins of raw peanut seeds were peeled off, washed with ethanol for 5 min and rinsed with sterile water for 5 min. Rinsing step was repeated three more times and then seeds were let air dry for 30 min under sterile cabinet. Ten peanut seeds were placed into sterile 50 ml centrifuge tubes and incubated with $5x10³$ conidia spores in PBS for 30 min on shaker at room temperature. Non-infected peanut seeds were used as mock. Ten infected peanut seeds for each strain and mock were placed onto sterile cellulose paper and covered with petri dish. Samples were incubated at 30ºC under the dark condition for five days.

2.14 Purification of RpdA activity and HDAC assay

IgG pull-downs were performed as described by Bayram et al., (2012) with minor modifications. Strains were grown in shaking culture for 14 h at 37 \degree C at a density of 5 x 10 6 conidia per ml in GMM with appropriate supplementation (3 flasks - 250 ml each). Lyophilized mycelia (approx. 1.2-1.5 g each) were ground to powder in a MixerMill (Gretsch) and resuspended in 6 ml of buffer B250 per g dry weight. After centrifugation (40,000 x g for 30 min at 4 °C), fungal extracts were batched with 300 µl of IgG Sepharose (GE Healthcare) at 4 \degree C for 2-3 h on a rotator. After washing, elution was performed by TEV cleavage over night at 4 °C in TCB including 10 % glycerol. Eluates were aliquoted, snap frozen in liquid nitrogen and kept at -80 °C until further usage. Enzymatic activity of enriched RpdA complexes was measured in triplicates using [H-3]-acetate prelabelled chicken histones as substrate as described (Trojer et al., 2003). Briefly, 30 μl of the IgG eluate were mixed with 20 μ l of WB150 and 10 μ l of labelled histones and subsequently incubated for 60 min at 25 °C.

2.15 Generation of plasmid constructs and strains of *A. nidulans*

2.15.1 Generation and confirmation of deletion and complementation strains

pUC19 (Sigma, D3404) was used as a recipient plasmid to generate plasmid constructs for *A. nidulans* transformation. *Sma*I site was digested and used to integrate DNA fragments. *A. nidulans* A4 (FGSC stock centre) genomic DNA was used as template for the amplification of PCR fragments. All DNA fragments were amplified using Q5 High Fidelity DNA Polymerase kit (New England Biolabs). *Taq* polymerase was used to verify positive colonies after each bacterial transformation.

For deletion cassettes of *kdmB* and *sntB*, a ~2.0kbp *ptrA* fragment was released from pME3024 circular plasmid by *Sfi*I digestion. Approximately 1.2kbp of upstream and terminator regions (OZG610/611, 612/613 for *kdmB*, OZG752/753 and 754/755 for *sntB*) were amplified with primers containing 16 bp overhang homologous regions with pUC19 and *ptrA* sequence prior to fusing to *ptrA* cassette. Three fragments were then fused into pUC19-*Sma*I region by In-Fusion HD cloning kit (Clontech, 121416) as described in the product user manual. Resulting plasmids were digested by *Swa*I and transformed into recipient AGB551 strain to create ANOB226 (*kdmB*D*::ptrA*) and ANOB254 (*sntB*D*::ptrA*). Similarly, *kdmB* and *sntB* mutants were constructed with *pyrG* or *pyroA* markers. *pyrG* cassette was amplified using $OZG695/OZG694$ oligonucleotides yielding ~1.9kbp fragment. *pyroA* marker was amplified using OZG696/OZG694 oligonucleotides yielding ~1.6kbp fragment. These were fused to *kdmB* and *sntB* flanking regions yielding following deletion plasmids pBK53 (*kdmB* \triangle ::*AfpyrG*) and pBK128 (*sntB* \triangle ::*pyroA*), respectively. *kdmB* \triangle ::*AfpyrG* was amplified (BK337/BK338, yielding ~4.2 kbp) and transformed into AGB551 to create ANBK53. Similarly, $sntB\Delta$::pyroA was amplified (BK568/BK569, yielding ~3.9 kbp) and transformed into ANBK83.1 to create ANBK112.

To generate complementation strain for *kdmB*∆::*ptrA*, ~8.4 kbp genomic locus of *kdmB* (BK389/390) was fused into pOSB114 *Swa*I-digested linear plasmid by In-Fusion HD cloning kit yielding pBK74. Similarly, to generate complementation strain for *sntB* Δ ::*ptrA*, ~8.4 kbp genomic locus of *sntB* (BK391/396) was fused into pOSB114 SwaI-digested plasmid by In-Fusion HD cloning kit yielding pBK75. The resulting complementation plasmids (pBK74, pBK75) were transformed into *kdmB*D*::ptrA and sntB*D*::ptrA* recipients respectively. *pyroA+* transformants were selected and the mRNA expression levels of *kdmB* and *sntB* were confirmed by RT-qPCR using gene-specific oligonucleotides.

Figure 2.1. Confirmation of *kdmB* and *sntB* deletion and complementation strains in *A. nidulans*. *kdmB* and *sntB* deletion strains were confirmed by Southern blot analysis with the digestion strategy in the schematic representation. Blue color indicates the DIG-labelled DNA probe binding region. Approximately 1.2 kbp 5UTR DNA fragment was amplified and detected using DIG-High Prime DNA Labelling and Detection Starter Kit II (Cat. 11585614910). DNA marker for comparison DNA fragments were used from Roche DNA Molecular Weight Marker VII (Cat no: 11209264001). (Lower panel: graphs) RT-qPCR analysis was performed using the total RNA extracted from WT, deletion and complementation strains at the end of 24 h vegetative growth at 37ºC. *benA* was used as a housekeeping gene for relative quantification $2^{\Delta\Delta CL}$.

In order to create deletion plasmid construct of *laeA*, *Aspergillus fumigatus pyrG* marker was amplified from plasmid pME3858 using OZG694 and OZG695 primers yielding a 1.89 kbp fragment. To create pBK14 (*laeA* \triangle ::*AfpyrG*), 5' UTR (BK37/BK38) and 3' UTR (BK39/BK40) regions were amplified by using the WT genomic DNA of AGB551 strain. These fragments were fused to *Sma*I-digested pUC19 by using In-Fusion HD Cloning kit, yielding pBK14 from which *laeA*∆::*AfpyrG* cassette ~4.8 kbp was amplified (BK55/56) and transformed into recipient fungal strain.

2.15.2 Generation and confirmation of epitope tagged strains; HA, TAP, GFP

For the generation of *ctap*, *sgfp* and *3xha* tagged *kdmB*, *ecoA*, *rpdA*, *sntB* strains, a similar strategy was used to create circular plasmid DNA. These epitope tags were fused into upstream and terminator regions of corresponding genes. *ctap*-*nat*R and *sgfp*-*nat*R fragments were amplified using OZG916/OZG927 yielding ~1.9kbp and 2.1kbp fragments respectively. *3xHA-pyrG* fragment was amplified using OZG916/OZG694 oligonucleotides yielding \sim 2.7 kbp fragment.

In order to create GFP and TAP fusions of KdmB, ORF (open reading frame) of *kdmB* (OZG552/550) and 3'UTR (OZG551/553) were amplified and fused to *ctap*-*natR* and *sgfp*-*natR* using fusion PCR (nested oligos OZG548/549), these *kdmB::ctap::natR* and *kdmB::sgfp::natR* PCR products were transformed into WT recipient strain. To construct SntB::cTAP and SntB::sGFP, 1 kb promoter including ORF of *sntB* (OZG1037/1039) and 3'UTR (OZG1040/1041) were amplified and fused to *sgfp* and *ctap* in *Sma*I site of pUC19 leading to plasmids pOB487 (*sntB::sgfp::natR*) and pOB488 (*sntB::ctap::natR*). Cassettes were released by digesting the plasmids with *Pme*I. Similarly, *rpdA* (OZG1033/1034, promoter and ORF, OZG1035/1036 3'UTR) and *ecoA* (OZG1042/1043, promoter and ORF, OZG1044/1045 3'UTR) were amplified and fused to *sgfp* and *ctap* creating the plasmids, pOB485 (*rpdA::sgfp::natR*), pOB486 (*rpdA::ctap::natR*), pOB489 (*ecoA::sgfp::natR*), pOB490 (*ecoA::ctap::natR*).

To create *kdmB::3xha::AfpyrG* fusion plasmid, *kdmB* ORF was amplified using BK27/BK28 oligonucleotides which overhangs complementary to pUC19 from 5' end and GGGSGG linker from 3'end. 3'UTR region of *kdmB* was amplified using BK29/BK30 where BK29 overhangs with *pyrG* from 5' site and BK30 overhangs pUC19 from 3' site. Three fragments were fused into the *Sma*I-site of pUC19 by in-Fusion HD cloning kit. This resulted in plasmid pBK11 which comprises the *kdmB*::3x*ha*::*AfpyrG* fusion cassette when amplified by OZG549/OZG552 oligonucleotides yielding ~5.0 kbp fragment.

To create *ecoA*::*3xha*::*AfpyrG* fusion cassette, OZG1042/BK9 were used to amplify *ecoA* fragment from 5'UTR yielding ~1.77 kbp. *Pme*I site and pUC19 15 bp overhang region were introduced to 5' end of OZG1042. BK8/OZG1045 were used to amplify \sim 2.2 kbp region of *ecoA* 3'UTR. Similarly, 15 bp overhang sequence of *pyrG* 3'end was introduced into 5' end of BK8. *Pme*I and 15 bp overhang sequence of pUC19 was introduced into 5'end of OZG1045. Three fragments were fused into the *Sma*I-site of pUC19 resulting in plasmid pBK3 which comprises the *ecoA*::3x*ha*::*AfpyrG* fusion cassette when digested by *Pme*I restriction enzyme yielding ~6.6 kbp linear fragment.

To create *rpdA*::*3xha*::*AfpyrG* fusion cassette, OZG1033/BK2 were used to amplify *rpdA* fragment from 5'UTR yielding ~2.7 kbp. *Pme*I site and pUC19 15 bp overhang region were introduced to 5' end of OZG1033. BK5/OZG1036 were used to amplify 806 bp region of *rpdA* 3'UTR. Similarly, 15 bp overhang sequence of *pyrG* 3'end was introduced into 5' end of BK5. *Pme*I and 15 bp overhang sequence of pUC19 was introduced into 5'end of OZG1036. Three fragments were fused into the *Sma*I-site of pUC19 resulting in plasmid pBK1 which comprises the *rpdA*::3x*ha*::*AfpyrG* fusion cassette when digested by *Pme*I restriction enzyme yielding ~6.2 kbp linear fragment.

To create *sntB*::*3xha*::*AfpyrG* fusion cassette, OZG1037/BK7 were used to amplify *sntB* ORF yielding ~5.9 kbp. *Pme*I site and pUC19 15 bp overhang region were introduced to 5' end of OZG1037. BK6/OZG1041 were used to amplify ~1.23 kbp region of *sntB* 3'UTR. Similarly, 15 bp overhang sequence of *pyrG* 3'end was introduced into 5' end of BK6. *Pme*I and 15 bp overhang sequence of pUC19 was introduced into 5'end of OZG1041. Three fragments were fused into the *Sma*I-site of pUC19 resulting in plasmid pBK2 which comprises the *sntB*::3xha::*pyrG* fusion cassette when digested by *Pme*I restriction enzyme yielding ~9.6 kbp linear fragment.

To create *sudA*::*3xha*::*AfpyrG* and *sudA*::*sgfp*::*AfpyrG* fusion cassettes, *3xha::AfpyrG* and *sgfp::AfpyrG* fragments were amplified using OZG916/694 from plasmids pOB430 and pOB435 respectively. To create pBK87, ORF (BK444/BK445) and 3' UTR (BK435/BK436) regions were amplified by using the WT genomic DNA of A4 strain. These two fragments and *3xha::AfpyrG* were fused to *Sma*I-digested pUC19 by using

In-Fusion HD Cloning kit, yielding pBK87 from which *sudA::3xha::AfpyrG* cassette was amplified (BK446/438) and transformed into recipient fungal strain. Similar strategy was performed to create pBK88. ORF (BK444/BK445) and 3' UTR (BK435/BK436) regions and *sgfp::AfpyrG* were fused to *Sma*I-digested pUC19 by using In-Fusion HD Cloning kit, yielding pBK88 from which *sudA::sgfp::AfpyrG* cassette was amplified (BK446/438) and transformed into recipient fungal strain. *pyrG*+ transformants were selected in the absence of uridine, uracil and epitope tags of *sudA* were confirmed by Southern hybridization. The expression of SudA::sGFP was further confirmed by Western blotting using α -GFP antibody.

2.15.3 Generation and confirmation of promoter replacement strains

In order to generate pOB549, pCH008 was digested by *Pst*I and *Acc65*I to remove *ptrA* marker. OZG1077/11845 was used to amplify *pyroA* cassette $(\sim 1.7 \text{ kbp})$ by using pOB508 as a plasmid template. The resulting *pyroA* fragment was fused to *Pst*I/*Acc65*I-digested pCH008 to create pOB549. For generation of *ecoA* (pBK32), *rpdA* (pBK33) Tet-ON-*pyroA* constructs, pOB549 was digested with *Swa*I yielding two fragments for the insertion of upstream and ORF (open reading frame) fragments of *ecoA* and *rpdA*. To generate pBK32, BK127/BK129 were used to amplify ~1.21 kbp fragment of *ecoA* 5'UTR harbouring 16bp pUC19 overhang region from 5' end and 16 bp *pyroA* region from 3' end. Similarly, BK130/BK131 were used to amplify ~1.3 kbp ORF region of *ecoA* harbouring 16 bp homology with Tet-ON sequence at 5' end and 16 bp *sgfp* homology at 3' end. Four linear fragments were mixed and fused into circular plasmid by in-Fusion HD cloning kit. The resulting plasmid resembled *tetO7::Pmin::ecoA::pyroA* cassette when amplified by BK128/BK132 yielding ~6.23 kbp of linear fragment. Similarly, for pBK33 construct, BK133/BK135 were used to amplify ~1.22 kbp fragment of *rpdA* 5'UTR harbouring 16bp

pUC19 overhang region from 5' end and 16 bp *pyroA* region from 3' end. Similarly, BK136/BK137 oligonucleotides were used to amplify ~1.52 kbp ORF region of *rpdA* harbouring 16 bp homology with Tet-ON sequence at 5' end and 16 bp *sgfp* homology at 3' end. Linear fragments harbouring 16 bp homology sequences at 5' and 3' ends were fused to circular plasmid by in-Fusion HD cloning kit. The resulting plasmid resembled *tetO7::Pmin::rpdA::pyroA* cassette when amplified by BK134/BK138 oligonucleotides yielding ~6.56 kbp of linear fragment which was transferred into fungal recipient.

Figure 2.2 Confirmation of promoter replacement strains *ecoA*^{TetON} and *rpdA*^{TetON} in *A*. *nidulans* by RT-qPCR. Relative gene expression analysis was performed using the total RNA extracted from WT, deletion and complementation strains at the end of 24 h submerged medium at 37^oC. *benA* was used as a housekeeping gene for relative quantification $2^{\Delta\Delta Ct}$. + represents doxycycline treated (30µg/ml) WT and – represents untreated WT. Numbers represent the amount of doxycycline (in µg/ml) added to the initial culture.

2.15.4 Generation of BIFC plasmids for *in vivo* **protein-protein interaction**

For *in vivo* interaction analyses, *n-eyfp* (OZG73/74) and *kdmB* cDNA (OZG670/OZG671) were amplified and cloned into *Swa*I site of pSK353 generating pOB282 plasmid. Similarly, *c-eyfp* (OZG75/76) and *kdmB* cDNA (OZG673/OZG671) were

amplified and cloned into *Swa*I site of pSK353 generating pOB283 plasmid. *rpdA* cDNA was amplified (OZG857/OZG859) and fused to *c-eyfp* (OZG677/OZG388) and combined with n-*eyfp kdmB* (inserted into *PmeI*-digested pOB282) generating plasmid pOB302. *rpdA* cDNA was amplified (OZG858/OZG859) and fused to *n-eyfp* (OZG674/OZG387) and combined with c-*eyfp kdmB* (inserted into *Pme*I-digested pOB283) generating plasmid pOB303. The appropriate *n-eyfp*::*kdmB*, *c-eyfp*::*rpdA* or *n-eyfp*::*rpdA*, *c-eyfp*::*kdmB* fusion constructs were transformed into recipient WT fungal strain to detect *in vivo* KdmB and RpdA interaction.

sntB cDNA was amplified (OZG860/OZG862) and fused to *c-eyfp* (OZG677/OZG388) and combined with n-*eyfp kdmB* (inserted into *PmeI*-digested pOB282) generating plasmid pOB304. *sntB* cDNA was amplified (OZG861/OZG862) and fused to *n-eyfp* (OZG674/OZG387) and combined with c-*eyfp kdmB* (inserted into *Pme*I-digested pOB283) generating plasmid pOB305. The appropriate *n-eyfp*::*kdmB*, *c-eyfp*::*sntB* or *n-eyfp*::*sntB*, *ceyfp*::*kdmB* fusion constructs were transformed into recipient WT fungal strain to detect *in vivo* KdmB and SntB interaction.

ecoA cDNA was amplified (OZG863/OZG865) and fused to *c-eyfp* (OZG677/OZG388) and combined with n-*eyfp kdmB* (inserted into *PmeI*-digested pOB282) generating plasmid pOB306. *ecoA* cDNA was amplified (OZG864/OZG865) and fused to *n-eyfp* (OZG674/OZG387) and combined with c-*eyfp kdmB* (inserted into *Pme*I-digested pOB283) generating plasmid pOB307. The appropriate *n-eyfp*::*kdmB*, *c-eyfp*::*ecoA* or *n-eyfp*::*ecoA*, *ceyfp*::*kdmB* fusion constructs were transformed into recipient WT fungal strain to detect *in vivo* KdmB and EcoA interaction.

2.16 Generation of plasmid constructs and strains of *A. flavus*

2.16.1 Generation and confirmation of $kdmB\Delta$ and $rpdA\Delta$ strains

In order to create deletion construct of *kdmB* and *rpdA* genes, *Aspergillus fumigatus pyrG* marker was amplified from plasmid pME3858 using OZG694 and OZG695 primers yielding 1.89 kbp fragment. To create pBK22, 5' UTR (BK67/BK69) and 3' UTR (BK70/BK71) regions were amplified by using the WT genomic DNA of NRRL3357 strain. These fragments were fused to *Sma*I-digested pUC19 by using In-Fusion HD Cloning kit, yielding pBK22 from which *kdmB*∆::*AfpyrG* cassette was amplified (BK68/72) and transformed into recipient fungal strain. Similarly, to create pBK23, 5' UTR (BK73/BK75) and 3' UTR (BK76/BK77) regions were amplified by using the WT genomic DNA of NRRL3357 strain. These fragments were fused to *Sma*I-digested pUC19 by using In-Fusion HD Cloning kit, yielding pBK23 from which $rpdA\Delta$:: $AfpyrG$ cassette was amplified (BK74/78) and transformed into recipient fungal strain. Tjes19.1 (*pyrG*-) was used as recipient for DNA transformation into *A. flavus* that was cultured and transformed as previously described (Punt & Hondel, 1992). *pyrG+* transformants were selected in the absence of uridine, uracil and deletion of transcription factors were confirmed by Southern hybridization using DIG-High prime DNA labelling and detection kit (Roche; 11745832910). DIG labelled DNA probes of approximately 1.2 kbp 5' UTR or 3' UTR corresponding regions were amplified by DIG PCR kit (Roche) and used as probe for detections. In addition to Southern blot analysis, deletion of these genes were further confirmed by RT-qPCR analysis showing the absence of these genes in mRNA level.

Figure 2.3 Confirmation of *kdmB* and *rpdA* deletion and complementation strains in *A. flavus* by Southern blot analysis. *kdmB* and *rpdA* deletion strains were confirmed by Southern blot analysis. Approximately 1.2 kbp 5UTR DNA fragment was amplified and detected using DIG-High Prime DNA Labelling and Detection Starter Kit II (Cat. 11585614910).

2.16.2 Generation and confirmation of complementation strains

To create complementation strains of $kdmB\Delta$, $rpdA\Delta$ pAN8-1 harbouring phleomycin (*phleO*) resistance cassette, was digested with *Stu*I restriction enzyme. Genomic locus of *kdmB* (BK363/BK364) was amplified and fused to *Stu*I-digested pAN8-1 by using In-Fusion HD Cloning kit, yielding pBK66. Similarly for *rpdA* complementation, genomic locus of *rpdA* (BK365/BK366) was amplified and fused to *Stu*I-digested pAN8-1 by using In-Fusion

HD Cloning kit, yielding pBK67. Approximately 10 µg of plasmid DNA (pBK66, pBK67) were transformed into $kdmB\Delta$ and $rpdA\Delta$ deletion strains respectively. $phleO^+$ transformants were selected and the mRNA expression levels of *kdmB* and *rpdA* were confirmed by RTqPCR using gene-specific oligonucleotides.

Figure 2.4 Confirmation of *kdmB* and *rpdA* deletion and complementation strains in *A. flavus* by RT-qPCR. Relative gene expression analysis was performed using the total RNA extracted from WT, deletion and complementation strains at the end of 24 h vegetative growth at 30° C. *benA* was used as a housekeeping gene for relative quantification $2^{\Delta\Delta Ct}$.

2.16.3 Generation and confirmation of KdmB::3xHA, KdmB::sGFP strains

In order to create HA and GFP epitope tagging of KdmB, *3xha::AfpyrG* and *sgfp::AfpyrG* fragments were amplified using OZG916/694 from plasmids pOB430 and pOB435 respectively. To create pBK61, ORF (BK350/BK351) and 3' UTR (BK352/BK353) regions were amplified by using the WT genomic DNA of NRRL3357 strain. These two fragments with *3xha::pyrG* were fused to *Sma*I-digested pUC19 by using In-Fusion HD Cloning kit, yielding pBK61 from which *kdmB::3xha::AfpyrG* cassette was amplified (BK354/355) and transformed into recipient fungal strain. Similar strategy was performed to create pBK62. ORF (BK350/BK351) and 3' UTR (BK352/BK353) regions with *sgfp::AfpyrG* were fused to *Sma*I-digested pUC19 by using In-Fusion HD Cloning kit, yielding pBK62 from which *kdmB::sgfp::AfpyrG* cassette was amplified (BK354/355) and transformed into recipient fungal strain Tjes19.1 resulting in AFLBK1 and AFLBK2 respectively. *pyrG+* transformants were selected in the absence of uridine, uracil and epitope tags of KdmB were confirmed by Southern hybridization. The expression of KdmB-GFP was further confirmed by Western blotting using anti-GFP antibody (Santa Cruz, sc-9996).

2.17 Statistical analysis

All data was analysed using GraphPad Prism version 7 software. The level of significance was set at p < 0.05 (*), p < 0.01 (**), p < 0.001 and p < 0.0001 (****).

Table 2.1 DNA Oligonucleotides used in this study for *A. nidulans* work.

Table 2.3 *A. nidulans* strains employed in this study.

Table 2.4 DNA Oligonucleotides used in this study for *A. flavus* work.

Table 2.5 Plasmids employed in this study for *A. flavus* work.

Table 2.6 *A. flavus* strains employed in this study.

Chapter 3 Results

H3K4 demethylase KdmB bridges cohesin acetylation to the histone deacetylase-ring finger complex for *Aspergillus nidulans* light responses

3.1 KERS is a multi-domain tetrameric chromatin remodeling complex consisting of H3K4me3 demethylase KdmB, cohesin acetyltransferase EcoA, histone deacetylase RpdA and ring finger protein SntB

Lysine-specific demethylase 1 (LSD1) interaction with the SIN3A/HDAC complex was shown to be the regulator of several cellular signalling pathways such as proliferation, survival, metastasis and the P53 signalling pathway (Yang et al., 2018). KDM5, an H3K4 JARID1 demethylase, was also indicated to interact with the histone deacetylase SIN3B-HDAC complex for the control of regulation of developmental genes (Nishibuchi et al., 2014). In order to investigate possible chromatin modifier complexes in filamentous fungi, *Aspergillus nidulans* was used as a model organism to create endogenous C-terminal epitope tags of KdmB protein with TAP, sGFP and HA (Figures 3.1 and 3.2). KdmB immunoprecipitation was carried out and potential KdmB *in vivo* interacting partners were analysed by liquid chromatography-mass spectrometry (LC-MS²) method. Proteomics data revealed that KdmB recruited cohesin acetyltransferase EcoA, histone deacetylase RpdA and chromatin binding ring finger protein SntB (Table 3.1). Therefore, the resulting novel demethylase tetrameric complex was named as KERS (KdmB-EcoA-RpdA-SntB) complex. In order to prove if EcoA, RpdA, and SntB are similarly capable of recruiting the KERS complex, the same strategy was used to tag these proteins with three different epitope tags. Indeed, reciprocal tagging and LC-MS² analysis of EcoA, RpdA, and SntB purifications further confirmed the bulk presence of the KERS complex. These experiments were performed using nutrient limited culture as well as rich media and similar results were found. Growth temperature shifts from 37ºC to 30ºC did not have any effect on complex formation emphasizing the stable tetrameric complex formation during different growth conditions. The number of unique peptides for all four proteins were significantly high. KdmB, EcoA, RpdA, and SntB were top-interacting partners in every analysed purification. AGB551 and GFP expressing *A. nidulans* strains were used as negative controls.

Figure 3.1. Representation of epitope tag strategy of KERS complex proteins. The *Sma*Idigested linear pUC19 plasmid was used as a donor to insert DNA fragments of epitope tags. DNA fragments of 5UTR-ORF and 3UTR were amplified and fused together with the epitope tag and selective marker *nat*R expressing antibiotic nourseothricin or *pyr*G as the auxotrophic marker for uracil. Each tag was fused to the C-terminals of gene open reading frames (ORFs) via the In-Fusion HD cloning kit. TAP, GFP and HA proteins were expressed under each genes native promoters. Selected recombinant strains expressing TAP, GFP and HA were confirmed by Western blot using specific monoclonal mouse antibodies and checked by Mass Spectrometry.

Figure 3.2. An illustration of a plasmid map of KdmB::3xHA circular plasmid construct. 5UTR-ORF and 3UTR regions were selected as homology sequences for introducing DNA cassettes into *A. nidulans* WT strain. For TAP and GFP strains, *nat*R as a selective marker was used. For HA strains, *pyrG* as an auxotrophic marker was used. Plasmids were confirmed by standard PCR by using nested primers to amplify DNA fragments containing 5UTR-ORF-EpitopeTag-Marker-3UTR final amplicon for fungal transformation.

Table 3.1. Discovery of a novel KdmB demethylase complex (KERS complex): KdmB, EcoA, RpdA, and SntB. Interaction partners of KdmB::cTAP, EcoA::cTAP, RpdA::cTAP, SntB::cTAP, KdmB::sGFP, EcoA::sGFP, RpdA::sGFP, SntB::sGFP, KdmB::3xHA, EcoA::3xHA, RpdA::3xHA and SntB::3xHA expressing TAP, HA and GFP fused proteins which were detected by LC-MS/MS analysis. Fungal mycelia were harvested at the end of 24 h vegetative culture at 37ºC. Values are the average of the three independent biological replicates.

3.2 Physical nuclear interaction of KdmB with EcoA, RpdA, and SntB was confirmed via BIFC

Moreover, to confirm physical *in vivo* interactions of KdmB with EcoA, RpdA, and SntB, nYFP/cYFP strains with H2A-mRFP were constructed to perform Bimolecular Fluorescence Complementation (BIFC) assays. Cultures were grown in a liquid GMM media with required supplements in microscopic chambers for 16 h at 30ºC. BIFC images clearly showed that KdmB physically interacted with EcoA, RpdA, and SntB within the nucleus (Figure 1B). Red signals (H2A-mRFP) and light green signals (YFP) were overlapped confirming physical interactions of KdmB-EcoA, KdmB-RpdA and KdmB-SntB.

Figure 3.3. Bimolecular fluorescence complementation analysis, verifying subcellular KdmB-EcoA, KdmB-RpdA and KdmB-SntB interactions. The images were captured from vegetative hyphae by fluorescence microscopy at the end of 16 h incubation at 30ºC under illumination. Nuclei are detected by mRFP fused to H2A.

By performing BLAST analysis using protein sequences of the *A. nidulans* KERS complex, it was revealed that KdmB, EcoA, RpdA, and SntB ortholog proteins are conserved from simple fungi to animals and human (Table 3.2). *A. nidulans* KdmB falls into the human KDM5 Jumonji H3K4 demethylase family as previously shown (Gacek-Matthews et al., 2016). Mouse KDM5 is named as Retinoblastoma Protein 2 (RBP2), while fruit fly *Drosophila* KdmB is named as Little Imagine Disk protein (LID). KdmB was shown to have H3K4 demethylase activity capable of removing mono-,di- or trimethylated lysine residues in yeast, *C. elegans*, *D. melanogaster*, mouse and human. It is not clear whether the KdmB ortholog of *A. thaliana* has H3K4 demethylase activity. Similarly, Establishment of Cohesion factor (EcoA) is conserved from yeast to *Drosophila*, mouse and humans. Humans have two EcoA orthologs, ESCO1, and ESCO2 respectively. HDAC RpdA is one of the most conserved proteins across various organisms from yeast to filamentous fungi, plant, *Drosophila*, mouse, and humans. RpdA orthologs have been characterised in these organisms and it has been shown to have global deacetylase activity on histone acetylated lysine residues. Interestingly, the ring finger protein SntB has a similar structure in yeast, filamentous fungi, mouse and humans, all harbouring PHD and E3 protein-ubiquitin ligase domains, however, it is not known if structural protein domain is identical in *A. thaliana*, *C. elegans* or *Drosophila*. The highest KdmB sequence similarity among the orthologs was found to be in filamentous fungi *Neurospora crassa* (57%), followed by plant-pathogen *Magnaporthe oryzae* (55%) and budding yeast *S. cerevisiae* JHD2 demethylase (42%). EcoA was found to be highly conserved in *C. elegans* (63%), followed by *N. crassa* (35%) and *M. oryzae* (35%). RpdA ortholog in *S. cerevisiae* (76%), *N. crassa* (73%) and *M. oryzae*

(65%) have significantly high protein sequence similarities. SntB orthologs sequence similarity was not found to be as high as RpdA. Nevertheless, SntB orthologs were present in all organisms analysed. The highest SntB sequence similarity among the orthologs was found to be in *N. crassa* (47%), and *M. oryzae* (47%) followed by *D. melanogaster* (41%).

Table 3.2. Orthologue analysis of the KdmB complex among various organisms. KdmB, EcoA, RpdA, and SntB are conserved from budding yeast to human. The table was generated by BLAST analysis using *A. nidulans* protein sequences as a reference. Numbers indicated beside ortholog proteins correspond to the percent of protein sequence similarity with respect to *A. nidulans*.

Domain architectures of KdmB and SntB revealed that both proteins have characteristic plant homeodomains (PHD) required for histone-binding and chromatinmediated gene regulation (Figure 3.4). KdmB contains a Jumonji N domain at its N terminus (between amino acids 74-115), an Arid/Bright domain (164-252), a plant homeodomain and bromo adjacent homology (PHD/BAH) domain (457-537), a Jumonji C domain (629-745), a zinc finger domain (853-912) and a second PHD domain (1323-1367) at the C terminus with a total size of 1717 amino acids. Domain architectures of KERS members clearly present chromatin recognition, binding sites and their catalytic domains involved in demethylation, acetylation and deacetylation (Figure 3.4). EcoA was the smallest member of the tetrameric complex with 401 amino acids. It contains a zinc finger domain (156-193) and acetyl-transferase (AT) (329-390) domains. Histone deacetylase RpdA contains a deacetylase domain (26-424). SntB protein was almost as big as KdmB protein with 1596 amino acids and contains a PHD/BAH domain (235-360), two PHD domains (402-448 and 997-1197) and a SANT domain (728-769) named after common chromatin regulators Swi3- Ada2-N-CoR-TFIIIB of yeast. These results demonstrate that KERS is a novel histone demethylase protein complex which consists of multi-domain proteins bearing classical chromatin binding regions that are present in higher eukaryotes as well as human.

Figure 3.4. Domain architecture of KERS complex members in *A. nidulans*. PHD: Plant homeodomain, ZF: Zinc Finger, A/B: Arid/Bright domain, BAH: Bromo-adjacent homology domain, SANT: Swi3, Ada2, N-Cor, and TFIIIB domain. The sequence positions of each domain were obtained from The National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI) protein database. N = N-terminal, C = C-terminal.

3.3 All four KERS complex proteins colocalize within the nucleus

From protein sequence analysis**,** it is clear that KERS consists of multi-domain proteins which have characteristic chromatin recognition and histone-binding sites for their catalytic activities. In order to explore KERS sub-cellular localizations, GFP fused strains were used as hosts to insert H2A-mRFP fragments for histone visualization. The resulting strains expressing both GFP and H2A-mRFP were subjected to confocal microscopy analysis to validate whether these proteins are localized within the nucleus. Interestingly, all members of the complex (green colour) accumulated within the nucleus co-localizing with H2AmRFP (red colour) suggesting the bulk presence of the complex within the nuclei (Figure 3.5). As can be seen, GFP and mRFP signals merge in all four strains. GFP signals could not be detected in the plasma membrane. Functional KdmB::sGFP, EcoA::sGFP, RpdA::sGFP and SntB::sGFP expressed under their native promoters were only found to be present within the nucleus which is in agreement their involvement in chromatin binding functions.

Figure 3.5. Cellular localization of KERS complex proteins. Confocal microscopy analysis of GFP expressing KdmB, EcoA, RpdA, SntB in H2A-mRFP expressing strain and their cellular localization. Images were captured at 60x magnification at the end of 16 h static growth at 30°C in GMM.

3.4 Global regulator of fungal development and secondary metabolism LaeA is not required during KERS assembly

As previously mentioned in Chapter 1, LaeA has always been under investigation for whether it is capable of modifying histone residues due to the fact that LaeA is a methyltransferase domain protein, transferring a methyl group from the ubiquitous SAM to either nitrogen, oxygen or carbon atoms. Although this hypothesis is still not proven yet, it has been shown that epigenetic marks can be affected in *laeA* mutants which show reduced SM production and increased levels of H3K9 methylation (Reyes-Dominguez et al., 2010). In order to elucidate if demethylase KERS complex formation is LaeA-dependent, *laeA* was deleted in the KdmB::cTAP strain to conduct mass spectrometry analysis. KdmB::TAP purification recruited all four proteins forming the tetrameric complex, suggesting that LaeA is not required for KERS complex formation. Furthermore, there was not any significant change in the number of unique peptides or percent coverage of proteins recruited (Data not presented).

3.5 Demethylase KERS complex plays crucial roles in growth, asexual and sexual lifecycles of *A. nidulans*

To more thoroughly investigate the roles of the KERS complex in fungal growth and development, DNA fragments containing 5UTR and 3UTR regions with a *ptrA* marker replacing the ORFs were introduced into a WT strain to create *kdmB*, *ecoA*, *rpdA,* and *sntB* deletion strains. Although many attempts were made to delete *ecoA* (AN10336) and *rpdA* (AN4493), there were no viable colonies detected at the end of transformations, suggesting that *ecoA* and *rpdA* are essential genes for growth in *A. nidulans* (Graessle et al., 2000). Therefore, doxycycline-dependent promoter replacements of *ecoA* and *rpdA* were performed to down-regulate these proteins to investigate their roles in fungal development (Figure 3.6). Successfully, there were viable colonies present displaying weaker growth with respect to WT and they were selected for further analysis. Multi-well culture plates were used to detect phenotypic effects of *ecoATetON* and *rpdATetON* strains. Doxycycline with increasing concentrations was supplemented into each well to gradually induce the expressions of *ecoA* and *rpdA*. The absence of inducer and low concentrations of doxycycline (up to 120 µg/ml) resulted in reduced growth and sporulation. Sporulation in $ecoA^{TeiON}$ and $rpdA^{TeiON}$ strains was found to be partially restored in 180 μ g/ml doxycycline supplemented media. Thus, in the subsequent experiments, *ecoATetON* and *rpdATetON* strains were used without the requirement of an inducer to analyse the consequences of EcoA and RpdA depletion on fungal development. Confirmation of promoter replacement strains was performed by RT-qPCR using total mRNA derived from mycelia cultures grown under GMM supplemented with various doxycycline concentrations (See Chapter 2, Figure 2.2).

kdmB (AN8211) and *sntB* (AN9517) were successfully deleted and viable colonies were selected for subsequent experiments. *kdmB* and *sntB* mutants were verified by Southern hybridization using DIG-labelled probes and RT-qPCR experiment showing the absence of *kdmB* and *sntB* expression (Figure 2.1).

Figure 3.6. Promoter replacement using Tet-ON doxycycline-dependent tuneable promoter. (Upper panel) Schematic representation of doxycycline-dependent promoter region. *A. fumigatus pyroA* marker was used to select successful transformants. (Lower panel) Growth of the WT, ecoA^{TetON} and rpdA^{TetON} in GMM agar media with required supplements and various concentrations of inducer doxycycline. Cultures were grown for 36 h at 37ºC. *ecoATetON* and *rpdATetON* are still able to grow in the absence of inducer suggesting trace levels of *ecoA* and *rpdA* expression are sufficient for survival. Phenotypes of *ecoATetON* and *rpdATetON* strains are improved in higher doxycycline concentrations.

All mutants, with the exception of the *ecoA* knock-down strain, showed reduced radial growth. The most drastic inhibition of growth was visible in the *rpdA* down-regulation strain. RpdA depletion resulted in 80% reduced radial growth when compared to the WT strain. There was approximately 30% reduced growth in the $sntBA$ and double-deletion $kdmB\Delta\sqrt{snt}B\Delta$ strains, while the single $kdmB\Delta$ deletion strain resulted in only 10% reduced radial growth (Figure 3.7B). Interestingly, light-dependent asexual sporulation was drastically reduced in all deletions with the highest reduction being shown in the *sntB* mutant which could sporulate only 10% of WT levels in light conditions. The *kdmB* mutant strain showed 40% less sporulation while *ecoA* and *rpdA* knock-down strains showed 80% and 90% reduced sporulation respectively. A similar result was found when cultures were subjected to growth in the dark conditions. Normally, conidiation is reduced in dark conditions but it should still occur at certain levels. In addition to their single deletions, a *kdmB* and *sntB* double deletion strain was constructed to determine the epistatic role of these proteins. *kdmB/sntB* double deletion and *rpdA* knock-down strains produced conidia only at trace levels. The *kdmB/sntB* deletion phenotype showed that SntB is epistatic to KdmB. Similar sterile phenotype lacking sexual ascospore showing white hyphal mass was visible in double deletion strain under both light and dark condition (Figures 3.7A and 3.7C). Overall, asexual sporulation seemed to be negatively affected in all mutants when compared to WT. Hence, these results certainly imply that the KERS complex is a positive-regulator of light-induced conidiation in *A. nidulans*.

A

Figure 3.7. The roles of *kdmB*, *ecoA*, *rpdA,* and *sntB* on growth and asexual development of *A. nidulans*. (A) Examination of growth behaviour of WT and mutant strains grown

during light and dark conditions. Approximately $5x10^3$ spores of WT, $\frac{kdmB\Delta}{m}$, $\frac{smtB\Delta}{m}$ $kdmB\Delta\sqrt{snt}B\Delta$, $ecoA^{TetON}$ and $rpdA^{TetON}$ strains were spot inoculated onto GMM with required supplements and grown under light and dark conditions for 3 days at 37°C. (B) For the examination of the radial growth of the WT, *kdmB* \triangle , *sntB* \triangle , *kdmB* \triangle /*sntB* \triangle , *ecoA*^{TetON} and $r \rho dA^{TetON}$, strains were subject to grow under illumination. Approximately $5x10^3$ spores of WT and the mutant strains were spot inoculated onto GMM with required supplements and grown under illumination for 3 days at 37°C. WT is adjusted to 100%. (C) Percent of asexual conidiation of WT and mutant strains during light and dark conditions. For conidia quantification, 1 cm diameter agar core was removed and resuspended in 200µl PBS. Asexual spores were quantified using microscopic counting chambers. WT grown under the light condition is adjusted to 100% for relative comparison. *sntB* deletion shows blind phenotype where this mutant does not respond to light stimuli lacking normal conidiation. Similarly, *rpdA* down-regulation results in loss of conidiation during both light and dark conditions. Conidia quantifications are the average of the three independent biological replicates. The level of significance is set at $p \le 0.05$ (*), $p \le 0.01$ (**), $p \le 0.001$ and $p \le 0.0001$ $(****)$.

3.5.1 Ring finger protein SntB and RpdA are essential for sexual development

Cleistothecia are highly specialized sexual structures of *A. nidulans,* required for genetic exchange and survival during limited sources. These structures are surrounded by nursing cells known as Hulle cells which are required to protect and nourish cleistothecia during full maturation (Bayram and Braus, 2012). Each fruiting body contains one mature cleistothecium embedded within Hulle cells, containing sexual ascospores required for genetic exchange. Each ascospore can propagate and grow when optimal conditions are met. In order to analyse the possible effects of KERS mutant strains during cleistothecia

formation, spores were subjected to grow in GMM during light and dark conditions for five days and phenotypes were analysed. Strikingly, the *sntB* mutant and *rpdA* down-regulation strain caused complete loss of cleistothecia development. In addition to this, Hulle cell could also not be detected in these mutants, suggesting that SntB and RpdA are essential for sexual development in *A. nidulans*. In addition to the total loss of cleistothecia, *rpdA* knock-down radial growth rate was drastically reduced. Similarly, the *kdmB*/*sntB* double deletion strain showed a loss of fruiting body formation (Figure 3.8). The *kdmB* mutation and *ecoA* downregulation, on the contrary, showed increased levels of fruiting body formation. The *ecoA* knock-down strain resulted in a 400% increase and the $kdmB\Delta$ produced 50% more fruiting bodies when compared with the WT strain. In summary, *kdmB* and *ecoA* mutants seem to have opposing effects on the *rpdA* and *sntB* mutants during sexual development. KdmB and EcoA act as negative-regulators while RpdA and SntB act as positive-regulators during sexual development in *A. nidulans*.

A

Figure 3.8. Examination of cleistothecia formation in WT and KERS mutants under stereomicroscope (5x). (A) Approximately $5x10^3$ spores of WT, $\frac{kdmB\Delta}{s}$, $\frac{sntB\Delta}{s}$ $kdmB\Delta\/sntBA$, *ecoA*^{TetON} and *rpdA*^{TetON} strains were spot inoculated onto glucose minimal media (GMM) containing appropriate supplements and grown under light and dark conditions for 5 days at 37°C. (B) Percent of cleistothecia formation of WT, $\kappa d m B\Delta$, $\sin\beta\Delta$, *kdmB*D/*sntB*D, *ecoA*TetON and *rpdA*TetON strains during light and dark conditions. All samples calculation were optimized with respect to the number of fruiting body formation from WT grown under the dark condition which is adjusted to 100%. The number of fruiting body formation was manually calculated using sections of three independent plates. The level of significance is set at $p \le 0.05$ (*), $p \le 0.01$ (**), $p \le 0.001$ and $p \le 0.0001$ (****).

3.5.2 Complementation of *kdmB* **and** *sntB* **restored sporulation and cleistothecia formation**

kdmB and *sntB* mutant strains were used as hosts for the insertion of the genomic locus of *kdmB* and *sntB* for complementation analysis. *AfpyroA* was used as an auxotrophic marker to select positive colonies. Selected transformants were confirmed by RT-qPCR using cDNA specific oligonucleotides for the amplification of *kdmB* and *sntB* cDNA (Chapter 2, Figure 2.1). Phenotypic spot inoculation assays showed that mutant strains phenotypes were completely restored. Normally, the *sntB* mutant strain was not able to produce sexual structures as well as proper conidiation. However, *sntB* genomic locus insertion completely restored sexual development and conidia production in this mutant strain (Figure 3.9).

were performed by protoplast fusion and *AfpyroA* was used as a selective marker. Approximately $5x10^3$ spores were spot inoculated onto GMM agar media. Images of complementation strains were taken at the end of 3 days grown under light and dark conditions at 37ºC.

3.5.3 Osmotic stabilization has a positive-effect on conidiation in KERS mutants

Chromatin modifier complexes can have genome-wide effects on development likely via involvement in more than one cellular pathway as well as acting as a response to environmental stress factors. Having discovered that KERS plays a major role in conidiation and cleistothecia development, it became interesting to see if this complex has any possible roles against stress-causing agents such as high osmolarity. KCl, NaCl and sorbitol were supplemented into GMM agar plates. $kdmB\Delta$, $sntB\Delta$, $kdmB\Delta/sntB\Delta$, $ecoA^{TetoON}$ and $rpdA^{TetoON}$ strains, as well as WT, were centre spot-inoculated with various spore numbers indicated. Normally, conidiation in $\sin B\Delta$ and ηdA knock-down strains was drastically reduced when grown on GMM agar plates (Figure 3.7). Additionally, conidiation was also reduced in $kdmB\Delta$ and $ecoA^{TetON}$ strains on GMM agar media. Surprisingly, asexual sporulation was found to be improved in all mutant strains with the most significant increase found in the *sntB* deletion strain. The positive change in conidiation can be seen in all three different osmotic stress agents when applied. Although conidiation was restored in $sntB\Delta$ and *rpdATetON* strains under high osmotic stress, fruiting body formation still could not be detected in these strains emphasizing essential roles of RpdA and SntB proteins on sexual development pathways which cannot be recovered by applying osmotic stress. It is very likely that the KERS complex may be involved directly or indirectly in the osmotic regulation pathway in *A. nidulans*.

Figure 3.10. High osmolarity restores conidiation in the *sntB* mutant as well as up-regulates conidiation in *ecoA* and *rpdA* knock-down strains. Conidial spores with various numbers, indicated below the figure, were spot-inoculated onto GMM agar with KCl, NaCl and sorbitol, generating high osmolarity. Cultures were grown for 3 days at 37ºC under illumination prior to observation. Phenotypic observations were compared with respect to control medium GMM without any stress-causing agents. The effects of reagents on mutants were correlated with WT strain.

3.5.4 Cell wall stress factors negatively affect KERS mutants

To analyse possible effects of other stress-causing agents on KERS mutants, several chemical factors used in research studies were supplemented into GMM agar plates. In previous studies, sodium dodecyl sulfate (SDS) and Congo red have been used to create cellwall stress in filamentous fungi (Ram and Klis, 2006, Ram et al., 2004). In order to investigate the role of KERS complex on cell wall stress responses, SDS (0.005%) and Congo red (20µg/mL) were supplemented into GMM media with required supplements and phenotypes were observed at the end of 3 days. Although there was no significant change when SDS was used as a cell wall agent, all KERS mutants showed reduced growth in the presence of congo red. In fact, the *rpdATetON* strain could not survive in the presence of congo red. Furthermore, the *ecoATetON* strain exhibited dramatic reductions in growth in the presence of congo red (Figure 3.11). These results suggest that all KERS subunits are equally important during survival against cell-wall agents. The KERS complex is a positive regulator during congo red regulated cell-wall stress which is necessary for the survival against stress factors.

Figure 3.11. The effect of cell wall stress agents on KERS mutants. Conidial spores with 10-fold decreasing numbers were spot-inoculated onto GMM agar supplemented with SDS and Congo Red to generate cell wall stress. Cultures were grown for 3 days at 37ºC under illumination prior to observation.

3.5.5 3-Amino-1,2,4-triazole, camptothecin and benomyl negatively affect KERS mutants

In molecular biology research, 3-Amino-1,2,4-triazole (3-AT) is applied to culture conditions to generate amino acid starvation (Alcazar-Fuoli, 2016). 3-AT leads to histidine depletion and strains cannot survive in culture media in the absence of histidine. In KERS mutants, the addition of 3-AT significantly reduced the growth of the $kdmB\Delta$ and $rpdA^{TetON}$

strains. 3-AT caused a drastic effect on KERS mutants when compared with WT. There was no visible growth of the *sntB*∆, *ecoA^{TetON}* and *kdmB*∆/*sntB*∆ mutants. 3-AT appeared to have a lethal effect on $sntBA$, $ecoA^{Te\ell ON}$ and $kdmB\Delta/sntBA$ mutants. Camptothecin (CPT) is a topoisomerase inhibitor widely used as a DNA damage stress agent to study fungal responses (Son et al., 2016). Benomyl, on the other hand, is a fungicide which is toxic to most members of Ascomycota (Zhou et al., 2016). Interestingly, CPT and benomyl resulted in similar phenotypes of the KERS mutants. A significant amount of pigmentation was visible in *kdmB*, *ecoA^{TetON}* and *kdmB* Δ / *sntB* Δ mutants, emphasizing the activation of certain clusters as a response to stress factors in these mutants while the WT did not have any visible pigmentation produced. In addition to pigmentation, conidiation was highly reduced in the *kdmB* mutant in the presence of benomyl (Figure 3.12). Overall, these results show that the KERS complex plays a role in several distinct stress response pathways such as osmotic, cell-wall, DNA damage and amino acid starvation. Furthermore, these findings present important clues for KERS chromatin binding regions necessary for the regulation of certain biochemical pathways during environmental stresses.

Figure 3.12. The effect of 3-AT, CPT and Benomyl stress agents on KERS mutants. Conidial spores with 10-fold decreasing numbers were spotinoculated onto GMM agar supplemented with stress agents to observe mutant responses. Cultures were grown for 3 days at 37ºC under illumination prior to observation

3.6 H3K4 demethylase KdmB recruits cohesion factor EcoA to heterodimer RpdA-SntB deacetylase-ring finger protein

Chromatin modifier complexes often interact with other scaffold proteins to target certain genomic regions. Furthermore, such interacting proteins might serve as co-activators or corepressors for the regulation of complex catalytic activities. In order to analyse *in vivo* complex interdependency of the complex formation, *kdmB* was deleted in EcoA::TAP, RpdA::TAP and SntB::TAP strains. Therefore, the resulting strains were pulled-down and analysed by $LC-MS²$ to elucidate the role of KdmB interdependency during complex formation.

Remarkably, in the absence of *kdmB*, RpdA, and SntB could not be detected in the EcoA::TAP purification. EcoA could recruit neither RpdA nor SntB in the KdmB depletion. Interestingly, RpdA::TAP recruited SntB, however, EcoA was not present in the identified proteins. Similarly, SntB::TAP purification recruited RpdA but EcoA could not be detected in the identified protein list. The proteomics analysis revealed that RpdA and SntB form a heterodimer (RpdA-SntB) in the absence of KdmB. These results strongly suggested that H3K4 demethylase KdmB is required for the tetrameric complex formation and essentially it acts as a scaffold by recruiting EcoA to the heterodimer RpdA-SntB for the assembly of the tetrameric KERS complex (Table 3.3).

Table 3.3. LC-MS² analysis of EcoA::TAP, RpdA::TAP and SntB::TAP purifications in the $kdmB\Delta$ strain. Approximately $2x10^6$ conidial spores per ml were inoculated into 800 ml GMM liquid culture and grown for 24 h at 37ºC 220 g. Mycelia were harvested and tandem affinity purification protocol (see Chapter 2) was applied. The same procedure was applied to WT strain which serves as a control sample to filter out non-specific peptide contaminants. Obtained values are the average of the three independent biological replicates.

3.7 Ring finger protein SntB recruits class I histone deacetylase RpdA to heterodimer KdmB-EcoA complex

A similar strategy was performed to investigate the role of ring finger protein SntB in the assembly of the tetrameric KERS complex. In order to analyse the role of SntB for complex interdependency, *sntB* was deleted in KdmB::TAP, EcoA::TAP and RpdA::TAP strains. The resulting strains were TAP pulled-down and analysed by mass spectrometry to study the role of SntB for complex assembly.

In the absence of *sntB*, KdmB::TAP could only recruit EcoA, forming a heterodimer demethylase and cohesion factor KdmB-EcoA complex. RpdA could not be detected in the identified proteins in the SntB depletion. Similarly, KdmB was identified in the EcoAinteracting proteins list while RpdA could not be detected. This was further confirmed by RpdA::TAP purification where neither KdmB nor EcoA could be detected in the RpdA-

interacting proteins list suggesting that SntB recruits RpdA to the heterodimer KdmB-EcoA for the assembly of tetrameric KERS complex. Together, these results strongly suggest that ring finger protein SntB is required for tetrameric complex formation and essentially acts as a scaffold by recruiting RpdA into the KERS complex (Table 3.4).

Table 3.4. LC-MS² analysis of KdmB::TAP, EcoA::TAP, and RpdA::TAP purifications in the absence of *sntB*. Approximately $2x10^6$ conidial spores per ml were inoculated into 800 ml GMM liquid culture and grown for 24 h at 37ºC 220 g. Mycelia were harvested and tandem affinity purification protocol (see Chapter 2) was performed. The same procedure was applied to WT strain which served as a control sample to filter out non-specific peptide bindings. Obtained values are the averages of the three independent biological replicates.

3.8 KdmB prevents EcoA proteasomal-dependent degradation

It was shown earlier in this work that KdmB and SntB are required for tetrameric complex assembly as the depletion of either of these proteins abrogated the recruitment of EcoA and RpdA to the complex. However, it is not clear yet if protein levels of *kdmB*, *ecoA*, *rpdA,* and *sntB* are interdependent. Therefore, KdmB::3xHA, EcoA::3xHA, RpdA::3xHA and SntB::3xHA strains were used to introduce *kdmB* and *sntB* deletion cassettes containing *ptrA* as a selective marker expressing pyrithiamine. *kdmB* \triangle ::*ptrA* was introduced into EcoA::3xHA, RpdA::3xHA and SntB::3xHA strains. Additionally, *sntB* \triangle ::*ptrA* was inserted into KdmB:: $3xHA$, EcoA:: $3xHA$, RpdA:: $3xHA$. Immunoblotting analysis using α -HA antibody revealed that the protein expression of KdmB is not SntB-dependent (Figure 3.13A). Full-length KdmB $(\sim 196 \text{ kDa})$ was visible in both the WT and *sntB* \triangle strain. Consistently, SntB levels were also not affected in the *kdmB* mutant. SntB full-length protein $(\sim 186 \text{ kDa})$ could be seen in the WT and in the $kdmB\Delta$ strain (Figure 3.13B). Furthermore, *rpdA* expression was not affected by the absence of either KdmB or SntB (Figure 3.13C). Full-length RpdA (~78.7 kDa) was clearly detected in the WT, *kdmB* and *sntB* mutants. Surprisingly, EcoA stability was dramatically reduced in the $kdmB\Delta$ strain while $sntB\Delta$ did not have any effect over EcoA levels. Full-length EcoA::3xHA normally corresponds to around 47.8 kDa which could not be detected in the KdmB depletion. *sntB* was deleted in EcoA::3xHA, *kdmB* \triangle ::*ptrA* strain to uncover if EcoA stability could be improved. Previously, SntB was shown to have E3 ubiquitin ligase activity in yeast (Singh et al., 2012). Strikingly, double deletion of *kdmB/sntB* fully restored EcoA protein levels suggesting that the putative E3 ubiquitin ligase SntB may play a role in EcoA proteasome degradation in the absence of KdmB. In order to prove the hypothesis if SntB is involved in EcoA proteasomal degradation, epoxomicin was supplemented into culture media in the $\frac{kdm}{B\Delta}$ strain. Epoxomicin is widely used in research to inhibit proteasome activity *in vivo* which specifically inhibits proteasomal proteases only (Meng et al., 1999). Notably, EcoA fulllength protein was restored in the $kdmB\Delta$ strain in the presence of epoxomicin, preventing EcoA proteasomal degradation (Figure 3.13D). In essence, EcoA mRNA expression remained stable in $kdmB\Delta$, $sntBA$ and in $kdmB\Delta/sntBA$ strains providing critical information that *ecoA* mRNA levels did not change in $kdmB\Delta$, $sntB\Delta$ and in $kdmB\Delta$ / $sntB\Delta$ strains (Figure 3.13E). To determine whether EcoA residues are prone to post-translational modifications which lead to its proteasomal degradation, MS analysis was performed using a phosphorylation-sensitive method. In order to detect potential PTMs residues on the EcoA protein sequence, EcoA::3xHA purification was performed in WT, $kdmB\Delta$ and $kdmB\Delta\sqrt{snt}B\Delta$ strains. Remarkably, EcoA S41/45 residues are phosphorylated when KdmB is absent which normally did not appear in WT. Surprisingly, S41/45 phosphorylation disappeared in *kdmB/sntB* double mutant strain (Figure 3.13F). These findings were consistent with immunoblotting assays where EcoA stability was completely lost in KdmB depletion. The EcoA phosphorylated residues S41/45 in the KdmB depletion most likely serves as essential marks for proteasome degradation of EcoA, mediated by SntB.

Figure 3.13. (A-D) Cellular levels of KdmB, EcoA, RpdA, and SntB in the WT, and mutant strains. Fungal cultures were grown in submerged liquid GMM media with required supplements for 24 h at 37°C. Approximately 100 µg total protein was loaded into 10%

SDS-PAGE gels. Proteins were transferred onto 0.45 µm nitrocellulose Western blotting membrane (Amersham Protran, GE healthcare) overnight at $35V$. α -HA monoclonal mouse antibody (Sigma) was used to detect HA-fused proteins, and generic α -SkpA polyclonal rabbit antibody was used to visualize SkpA as a loading control. Proteasome inhibitor epoxomicin (20 μ M) was supplemented at the end of 20 h vegetative growth for a further 4 h incubation. **(E)** RT-qPCR mRNA expression analysis of *ecoA* in WT, *kdmB* Δ , *sntB* Δ and in $kdmB\Delta\sqrt{s}ntB\Delta$ strains. WT was adjusted to 1.0 which was used as a reference point. mRNA was extracted from samples grown in submerged liquid GMM culture with required supplements for 24 h at 37ºC. Relative expression fold-change analysis was performed using $2^{\Delta\Delta\text{Ct}}$ formula and *benA* was used as a reference housekeeping gene for normalization. qPCR analyses are the average of the two independent biological replicates and six technical replicates. (F) Analysis of possible PTMs on EcoA residues in WT, κ *dmB* Δ and in *kdmB* \triangle */sntB* \triangle . Red stars and bold letters represent phosphorylated residues. Underlined amino acids represent peptide coverage in mass spectrometry analysis with high confidence. Low or medium confidence peptides are filtered out from the analysis.

3.9 KdmB is required for EcoA stability

Immunoblot analysis confirmed EcoA proteasomal degradation in the $kdmB\Delta$ strain while $sntBA$ restored EcoA stability. Full-length EcoA:: $3xHA$ could not be detected in the absence of KdmB, while deletion of *kdmB/sntB* restored and improved full-length EcoA, suggesting that EcoA might be translocated out of the nucleus in the absence of functional KdmB. To investigate cellular localization interdependency of the KERS complex, H2A-mRFP fusion was inserted into *ecoA::sgfp*/*kdmB*D, *rpdA::sgfp*/*kdmB*D, *sntB::sgfp*/*kdmB*D, $kdmB::sgfp/sntB\Delta$, *ecoA::sgfp/sntB*∆, *rpdA::sgfp/sntB*∆, and *ecoA::sgfp/* $kdmB\Delta/sntB\Delta$ strains. Approximately $5x10^3$ spores were inoculated into 500μ l GMM liquid media with required supplements in Lab-Tek® Chamber Slides and incubated overnight at 30°C for 16h. Confocal microscopy analysis revealed that nuclear localizations of RpdA and SntB were not affected in the absence of KdmB. Similarly, KdmB and RpdA nuclear localizations were not affected in the $sntBA$ strain. In both cases, $sGFP$ and mRFP signals overlap clearly presenting co-localization of chromatin binding proteins within the nucleus. However, in the $kdmBA$ strain, EcoA could not be detected within the nucleus (Figure 3.14, Left panel). On the contrary, the $sntB\Delta$ did not have any effect on EcoA nuclear localization where the green EcoA::sGFP signal was clearly visible (Figure 3.14, Right panel). More interestingly, when *sntB*∆ was inserted into the *ecoA::sgfp*/*kdmB*∆ strain, EcoA::sGFP signal was restored within the nucleus, further confirming previously performed immunoblot analyses. These data suggest that KdmB positively controls EcoA nuclear stability which could be targeted by SntB for proteasomal degradation (Figure 3.14).

Figure 3.14. KdmB-SntB mediates EcoA nuclear stability. Confocal microscopy analysis of GFP-expressing KdmB, EcoA, RpdA, and SntB in H2A-mRFP strains and their cellular localizations in *kdmB* and *sntB* mutants. Images were captured at 60x magnification at the end of 16 h static growth at 30°C in GMM with required supplements.

3.10 KdmB and SntB do not influence total RpdA HDAC activity

Highly conserved SANT domain-containing protein motifs, such as Snt2, N-CoR and SMRT (silencing mediator of retinoid and thyroid receptors) were previously shown to promote Rpd3 deacetylase activity, which are subunits of histone HDAC complexes. Rpd3 activity was shown to be negatively affected in the Snt2 depletion (Yang and Seto, 2008). Proteomic analysis in this work has shown that RpdA is recruited to the demethylase KERS complex through a SntB-mediated mechanism. In the *sntB* mutant, RpdA could not be recruited by KdmB or EcoA. This phenomenon raises an important question of whether RpdA HDAC activity requires functional KdmB or SntB. In order to elucidate the functional dependency of RpdA, an HDAC *in vitro* activity assay was performed (Figure 3.15). Strains were grown in a shaking culture for 14 h at 37 °C at a density of 5 x $10⁶$ conidia per ml in GMM with required supplements. As described previously in Chapter 2, the enzymatic activity of enriched RpdA complexes was measured in triplicates using [H-3]-acetate prelabelled chicken histones as substrate. 30 μl of the IgG eluate was mixed with 20 µl of WB150 and 10 µl of labelled histones and subsequently incubated for 60 min at 25 °C. IgG pull-downs using SntB or KdmB as bait clearly display HDAC activity, which is indicated by an increase in activity compared to the KdmB pull-down in a *sntB*D background (KdmB-T-*sntB*∆) and the AS6 pull-down with inactive RpdA as bait (Bauer et al., 2016) that can be regarded as background level. As expected from the TAP results, RpdA is lost from the KdmB-T-*sntB*∆ pull-down, which was also demonstrated by proteomics LC-MS2 analysis (see Table 3.4).

This gives further evidence for the assumption that the counts measured in KdmB-T-*sntB*∆ fractions were not significantly different from the background. In contrast to *sntB* deletion, $kdmB\Delta$ did not seem to alter the HDAC activity of the remaining SntB complex. This is in line with the fact that SntB recruits RpdA to this complex, as shown before (Table 3.4). HDAC activity in pull-downs using RpdA as bait was generally much higher, which most likely was due to the presence of other RpdA complexes, i.e. RpdA-L and RpdA-S in these fractions. Remarkably, neither *sntB* nor *kdmB* deletion seems to affect overall RpdA HDAC activity *in vitro*.

Figure 3.15. RpdA complexes exhibit HDAC activity *in vitro*. Enzymatic activity of enriched RpdA complexes was measured in triplicates using [H-3]-acetate prelabeled chicken histones as substrate as described (Trojer et al., 2003). 30 μl of the IgG eluate was mixed with 20 µl of WB150 and 10 µl of labeled histones and subsequently incubated for 60 min at 25 °C. RpdA-AS6 pull-down represents a nonfunctional TAP-tagged RpdA mutant (6 aa substituted by Ala). All samples were calculated with respect to RpdA::TAP activity which is adjusted to 100%.

3.11 Acetylation of Smc3 homolog SudA 105-106 lysine residues is abolished in *ecoA* **down-regulation**

In yeast, N-acetyltransferase Eco1 is required for the establishment of sister chromatid cohesion. Eco1 acetylates cohesin complex component SMC3 (SudA homolog in *A. nidulans*) K112/113 residues. A similar mechanism is conserved in complex eukaryotes and humans, where ESCO1 and ESCO2 (human EcoA homologs) acetylate SMC3 on K106/107 residues (Alomer et al., 2017). To investigate the functional role of the KERS complex for the formation of the cohesin complex, a GFP epitope tag was fused to the c-terminal of *sudA* in its native promoter. The resulting strain expressing SudA::GFP was subjected to purification and mass spectrometry analysis. With the objective to see if an EcoA knockdown had any effect on cohesin complex formation, SudA::GFP plasmid constructs harbouring the *pyrG* selective marker were introduced into WT and *ecoA*^{TetON}::*pyroA* strains. Furthermore, a SudA::3xHA construct was inserted into an *ecoATetON::pyroA* strain to study the functional role of EcoA in cohesin acetylation. SudA::GFP pull-downs and mass spectrometry analysis revealed that cohesin subunits are conserved in *A. nidulans* (Figure 3.16A). SudA recruited yeast homologs Smc1, Mcd1, PRP43, TRL1, SSQ1 and TorA. The same complex members of SudA are recruited in the *ecoA*^{TetON} knock-down strain, suggesting that down-regulation of EcoA did not affect cohesin complex assembly. Eco1 was shown to be responsible for the acetylation of SMC3 conserved lysine 105 and 106 residues in yeast (Rolef Ben-Shahar et al., 2008). It was also shown that Eco1 acetylates cohesin complex subunit Mcd1 (Kim et al., 2002). According to the mass spectrometry analysis in SudA::3xHA purifications, down-regulation of *ecoA* resulted in the absence of acetylated residues in SudA. This is direct evidence that EcoA may directly or indirectly be responsible for acetylating SudA K106/107 residues in filamentous fungi. However, Mcd1

was found to be acetylated in conserved K367 residue in WT and EcoA depletion suggesting that EcoA has no effect on Mcd1 acetylation (Data not presented). It was shown in immunoblotting assays that EcoA stability is positively regulated by KdmB (Figure 3.13D). In order to elucidate the effect of KdmB depletion in SudA K106/107 acetylation residues, SudA::3xHA was inserted into the $kdmB\Delta$ strain. Interestingly, the $kdmB$ mutation did not have any effect on the acetylation of SudA, suggesting that trace levels of nuclear EcoA are sufficient for the acetylation of conserved K106/107 residues (Figure 3.16B). To investigate the nuclear localization of SudA in EcoA depletion, confocal microscopy was performed using SudA::GFP in WT and in the *ecoA*^{TetON} strain. The presence of nuclei was visualized by a nuclear staining method using DRAQ5 dye. As could be seen from Figure 3.16C, the *ecoA*TetON knock-down did not have an effect on SudA nuclear levels. SudA was predominantly present within the nucleus. It was also apparent that cellular SudA::GFP levels were not affected by EcoA down-regulation (Figure 3.16D).

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Figure 3.16. EcoA knock-down abolished SudA acetylation. (A) GFP was fused to Cterminal of SudA ORF in its native promoter resulting in the expression of SudA::sGFP both in WT and in the *ecoA*TetON strain. SudA::sGFP pull-downs and LC-MS2 were performed as in previous experiments. (B) Similarly, HA was fused to the C-terminal of SudA ORF in its native promoter resulting in the expression of SudA::3xHA in WT, $ecoA^{TetON}$ and $kdmB\Delta$ strains. An HA-expressing SudA strain was used for detection of acetylated residues due to resulting in higher coverage of unique peptides. Green stars above bold letters represent acetylated residues. Underlined amino acids represent peptides covered in the LC-MS2 analysis. (C) Confocal microscopy analysis of GFP expressing SudA in an H2A::mRFP strain and their cellular localization in WT and $ecoA^{TetON}$ strain. DRAQ5 (1:10,000) was used for nuclear staining. Images were captured at 60x magnification at the end of 16 h static growth at 30°C in GMM. (D) Western blot analysis of protein levels of SudA::sGFP and SudA::sGFP in an *ecoA*^{TetON} strain. Fungal cultures expressing GFP were grown in submerged liquid GMM culture for 24 h at 37ºC prior to protein extraction. Approximately 100 μ g total protein was loaded onto 10% SDS-PAGE gels. α -GFP monoclonal mouse antibody (Santa Cruz, 1:1000 in TBS) was used to detect GFP-fused proteins, while generic a-SkpA polyclonal rabbit antibody was used against SkpA as a loading control.

Chapter 4 Results

KERS complex is required for development, secondary metabolism and pathogenicity in *Aspergillus flavus*

4.1 KERS complex is conserved in the aflatoxin producer pathogenic fungus *Aspergillus flavus*

Secondary metabolism gene clusters are likely regulated by chromatin post-translational modifications as a response to various environmental stimuli such as light, pH, temperature, UV and nutrient conditions. Certain PTMs on the histone tails determine the state of chromatin activation or repression which are regulated by chromatin modifier enzymes such as methyltransferases, acetyl-transferases, demethylases and deacetylases. In the previous chapter, a novel tetrameric demethylase KERS complex is identified in the model organism *Aspergillus nidulans,* showing critical roles for fungal development which possibly can act on certain gene clusters essential for development and secondary metabolism. These findings strongly suggested the hypothesis of whether this complex is also conserved in pathogenic fungus and carcinogenic aflatoxin producer *A. flavus* and if development and SM gene clusters could be regulated by a similar chromatin modifier complex. In order to prove this hypothesis, first, we determined an *A. nidulans* KdmB ortholog (AFLA 006240) in *A. flavus* genome using a BLAST search. *A. flavus* KdmB contains a Jumonji N domain at its N-terminus (between amino acids 74-115), an ARID/Bright domain (141-229), a plant homeodomain and bromo adjacent homology (PHD/BAH) domain (438-518), a Jumonji C domain (610-726), a zinc finger domain (834-893) and a second PHD domain (1306-1352) at the C terminus with a total size of 1704 amino acids (Figure 4.1D). The respective *kdmB* gene was tagged endogenously in native locus with synthetic green fluorescent protein (sGFP) (*kdmB::sgfp*) or human influenza hemagglutinin (HA) (*kdmB::3xha*) epitope tag fusions. Confirmation of full-length (~200kDa) KdmB::GFP expression was carried out in an immunoblotting assay using monoclonal mouse antibody α -GFP (Figure 4.1A). Moreover, KdmB::GFP strain was used to investigate the intracellular localization of KdmB. GFP signals of KdmB overlapped with red-stained nuclei (DRAQ5) and presented predominantly nuclear localization under confocal microscopy in vegetative cells (Figure 4.1B). Having shown the nuclear presence of KdmB, another important aspect was to discover its possible protein interacting partners. Therefore, HA and GFP immunoprecipitations coupled with mass spectrometry were performed using KdmB::3xHA, KdmB::GFP and WT (as a negative control) strains. Interestingly, *A. flavus* KdmB recruited putative cohesin acetyltransferase EcoA, histone deacetylase RpdA and recently characterized BAH/PHD domain transcription factor ring finger protein SntB in both HA and GFP pull-downs as top KdmB interacting proteins. The number of unique peptides for all four proteins were high, suggesting the bulk presence of conserved tetrameric KERS complex formation in the pathogenic fungus (Figure 4.1C). *A. nidulans* KERS complex members have multi-domain protein structures required for chromatin recognition, histone-binding, DNA binding and catalytic activities. Domain architectures of *A. flavus* KERS members clearly emphasized chromatin recognition sites as well as their catalytic domains involved in demethylation, acetylation and deacetylation processes (Figure 4.1D). In light of these results, it is clearly evident that the KERS complex is conserved in the pathogenic fungus *A. flavus* and possesses similar domain architecture unique to chromatin modifier enzymes. EcoA was the smallest member of the tetrameric complex with 385 amino acids which contains a zinc finger domain (141-178) and acetyl-transferase (AT) (314-375) domains. Putative histone deacetylase RpdA contains a deacetylase domain (19- 392). SntB protein was large, like the KdmB protein, with 1713 amino acids and contains a PHD/BAH domain (243-368), two PHD domains (410-456 and 1005-1205) and a SANT domain (737-777).

Alignment tool using protein sequences of *A. flavus* KERS complex suggested that all four proteins are highly conserved from yeast to human (Figure 4.1E). The highest KdmB sequence similarity among the orthologs was found to be in *A. fumigatus* (83%), followed by *A. nidulans* KdmB (79%) and *M. oryzae* (54%). EcoA was found to be highly conserved in *A. nidulans* (83%) followed by *A. fumigatus* (82%) and fission yeast *S. pombe* (33%).

Surprisingly, an EcoA ortholog could not be detected in *M oryzae*. RpdA was found to be highly conserved in *A. fumigatus* (97%), *A. nidulans* (78%), *S. cerevisiae* (76%), *M. oryzae* (70%) and human (69%), which were shown to have significantly large protein sequence similarities. The most SntB sequence similarity among the orthologs was found to be in *A*. *fumigatus* (74%), *A. nidulans* (69%), followed by *M. oryzae* hypothetical protein (47%).

Figure 4.1. Demethylase KERS complex is conserved in the pathogenic fungus *Aspergillus flavus*. (A) KdmB::sGFP fusion immunoblotting prepared from a crude extract of vegetative growth at 30°C for 24 h. 100 µg of total protein from WT and KdmB::sGFP strains was loaded onto an SDS-PAGE gel (10%) . For GFP detection, α -GFP monoclonal mouse antibody (Santa Cruz Biotech., 1:500 in TBS) was used. α -SkpA polyclonal rabbit antibody (Generic, 1:1000 in TBS + 1% Tween 20) against SkpA as a loading control. (B) Subcellular localization of KdmB::sGFP expressed under native promoter. KdmB co-localized in the nucleus. Nuclei staining was performed by incubating samples with 1:10,000 DRAQ5 dye for 30' at room temperature. Confocal microscopy images were produced using 60x magnification (C) Demethylase KERS complex consisting of H3K4me3 demethylase KdmB, acetyltransferase EcoA, histone deacetylase RpdA and ring finger protein SntB is conserved in pathogenic fungus *A. flavus*. Three biological replicates of KdmB::sGFP and KdmB::3xHA strains and WT as a negative control were immunoprecipitated and run in LC-MS². The protein list obtained from the WT control was subtracted from KdmB::sGFP and KdmB::3xHA samples to eliminate non-specific peptide binding. See Table 4.1 and 4.2 for all identified proteins list. (D) Domain architecture of multidomain KERS complex proteins of *A. flavus*. Both KdmB and SntB contain a histone-binding plant homeodomain (PHD) protein sequence region that is unique for chromatin recognition and gene regulation. (E) KdmB, EcoA, RpdA, and SntB are conserved across various organisms from yeast to human comprising demethylase, deacetylase, cohesion acetyltransferase and histonebinding domains.

4.2 KERS complex is essential for light-dependent asexual conidiation, sclerotia development and stress factor responses

In *A. nidulans*, KERS complex was shown to be involved in light-regulated asexual conidiation and sexual fruiting body formation (Figures 3.7, 3.8). Furthermore, *ecoA* and *rpdA* are shown to be essential for survival. *ecoA* and *rpdA* knock-downs resulted in phenotypic growth defects. Additionally, cleistothecia formation was found to be upregulated in the *kdmB* mutant and *ecoA* knock-down, whereas, asexual conidiation and sexual development were found to be totally abolished in the *sntB* mutant strain (See chapter 3). Similar results were shown in *Neurospora crassa*, *Fusarium oxysporum f.sp. melonis* and *A. flavus* where *snt2* deletion caused reduced conidia formation (Denisov et al., 2011, Pfannenstiel et al., 2018). In order to show the possible impact of the KERS complex in *A. flavus* development, deletion DNA constructs were transformed into an *A. flavus* WT *pyrG*auxotroph strain. *kdmB* and *rpdA* (AFLA_092360) were successfully deleted in *A. flavus*, although *rpdA* was found to be essential for growth in *A. nidulans* and *A. fumigatus* previously (Bauer et al., 2016). Despite performing many attempts to knock-out *ecoA*, no viable colony was detected, suggesting that *ecoA* may be essential for growth in *A. flavus* similar to *A. nidulans*. Surprisingly, light-induced asexual conidiation was shown to be negatively affected in the *rpdA* mutant strain when compared to the WT control in the phenotypic tests performed in PDA media (Figure 4.2A). The percentage of conidiation was drastically reduced by approximately 70% in the $rpdA\Delta$ strain (Figure 4.2 B). On the contrary, asexual sporulation was slightly increased in the $kdmB\Delta$ mutant. To determine the affected conidia regulatory genes in $rpdA\Delta$ and $kdmB\Delta$ strains, mRNA relative quantification was performed. RT-qPCR mRNA expression analysis of transcription factors required for conidiation suggested that transcription activator *abaA*, *flbA* (developmental regulator) and *flbB* (basic-zipper-type transcription factor) were significantly downregulated in the *rpdA* mutant strain. *abaA* was shown to be reduced by almost 50% in the *rpdA* mutant with respect to WT. In particular, *flbA* expression was reduced by 60% in the *rpdA* mutant. *flbA* and *abaA* expressions were reduced in the *kdmB* mutant, however, *flbB* was found to be upregulated resulting in slight induction of sporulation in $\frac{kdm}{B\Delta}$ (Figure 4.2 C). These data suggest that the KERS complex is required for controlled and balanced expression of the asexual sporulation pathway in *A. flavus*.

Sclerotia are the cleistothecia-like vestigial structures of *A. flavus* which have lost their sexual cycle ability throughout evolution, though some recent studies show that they may produce sexual ascospores during exceptionally special conditions (Horn et al., 2016). Like cleistothecia, these structures are induced in the absence of illumination and limited nutrient sources. In order to see the effects of *kdmB* and *rpdA* deletions on the development of *A. flavus*, sclerotia-inducing PDA and WKM plates were inoculated with *kdmB* Δ , *rpdA* Δ and WT strains. Culture plates were incubated in dark conditions at 30ºC to promote sclerotia development. At the end of 21 days, no sclerotia formation was present in either the κ *dmB* Δ or *rpdA* Δ mutants (Figure 4.2 A,B). Phenotypical assays clearly demonstrated that, in addition to asexual growth, sclerotia formation is totally abolished in $kdmB\Delta$ and $rpdA\Delta$ strains. Sclerotia-inducing genes *nsdC* (C₂H₂ zinc finger protein) and *nsdD* (sexual development factor) were found to be significantly depleted in $kdmB\Delta$ and $rpdA\Delta$ strains, emphasizing the inductive role of the KERS complex in sclerotia development (Figure 4.2 D). This finding is in parallel to the recent study performed by using a *sntB* mutant in *A. flavus* which was shown to be unable to produce sclerotia (Pfannenstiel et al., 2018). These results clearly state that the KERS complex positively regulates sclerotia development by affecting certain sclerotia regulatory gene clusters. Unlike *kdmB*, *rpdA* is also required for normal induction of asexual conidiation.

Figure 4.2. KdmB and RpdA are essential for *A. flavus* sclerotia development. **(A)** For conidiation analysis, approximately 5x103 spores of WT, *kdmB* and *rpdA* mutants were spot inoculated onto Potato Dextrose Agar (PDA) plates including required supplements and grown for 4 days at 30°C under illumination (upper lane). For sclerotia induction, PDA (5 days) and WKM plates (21 days) including required supplements were incubated in dark conditions at 30°C for the duration indicated in parenthesis. Lower lane shows the stereomicroscopic images of sclerotia (Sc) formation in WT, whereas Sc production was totally abolished in mutant strains. **(B)** Percentages of conidiation and Sc production in WT and deletion strains. Conidia quantification was performed from the PDA plates grown under light conditions. Approximately 1 cm of agar plug was removed and resuspended in

200μl PBS for conidia counting using microscopic counting chambers. Sclerotia counting was performed manually by quantifying sclerotia produced on WKM agar plates under dark conditions. Final values were optimized with respect to WT representing as 100%. All quantifications are the result of three independent biological replicates. **(C)** RT-qPCR expression analysis of conidia regulatory genes *abaA*, *brlA*, *flbA*, *flbB* and sclerotia regulatory genes *nsdC* and *nsdD*. For the analysis of conidia regulatory genes, fungal mycelia grown in complete media with required supplements for 24 h at 30ºC 200 g was shifted onto agar plates. Total mRNA was obtained by harvesting fungal mat grown on PDA plates for 3 days at 30°C under illumination. For the analysis of the mRNA expression profiles of sclerotia regulatory genes, total mRNA was obtained by harvesting fungal mat grown on WKM agar plates for 5 days at 30°C under dark conditions. WT is adjusted to 1.0. RT-qPCR experiments were carried out using two independent biological replicates and nine technical replicates.

4.3 Camptothecin negatively affects *A. flavus* **KERS mutants while** *kdmB***∆ is more resistant against menadione-mediated oxidative stress**

Having seen that KERS is essential for the development of *A. flavus*, it became interesting to see if the demethylase complex also plays a role in the responses to various environmental stress factors. Therefore, various stress factors agents were applied including microtubule, DNA, osmotic, oxidative and cell wall stresses and growth of deletion strains was compared with the WT (Figure 4.3). It can be observed that both *kdmB* and *rpdA* mutants are more susceptible to topoisomerase inhibitor camptothecin (CPT), emphasizing their possible roles in DNA replication during the cell cycle. Interestingly, although the $rpdA\Delta$ strain did not exhibit any difference in growth on menadione-mediated oxidative stress when compared to WT, the $\frac{k}{d}$ strain was found to be more tolerant. Surprisingly, both mutants and WT were similarly sensitive to hydrogen peroxide, presenting no exclusive effect. Additionally, we could not detect any effect of benomyl, nocodazole, SDS, congo red and calcofluor on either *kdmB* or *rpdA* mutants when compared to WT (Figure 4.3). Together, these results suggest that not only is KERS essential for development but also that it is also involved in response to certain stress factors.

Figure 4.3. The effects of *kdmB* and *rpdA* mutants in response to various stress agents. GMM agar plates including required supplements and various stress-inducing agents for the concentrations indicated were incubated for 3 days under light conditions. Variable spore numbers are indicated at the bottom of images. All phenotypic tests were carried out with three independent biological replicates.

4.4 KERS is essential for aflatoxin production and crop contamination

Sexual development is often linked with SM production in filamentous fungi. In previous studies, production of the aflatoxin precursor sterigmatocystin (ST) was shown to be induced during sexual development (Bayram et al., 2008b). To this end, since it is shown in this work that KERS is essential for sclerotia development, it became essential to see if the chromatin modifier KERS complex is also required for aflatoxin production in plant pathogen *A. flavus*. Therefore, organic extracts of mutants and WT grown on YES agar plates were isolated by a chloroform extraction method. The organic extracts of *kdmB, rpdA* mutants and WT were subjected to reversed-phase HPLC. To detect aflatoxin retention time, aflatoxin B_1 standard (Sigma) was used as a reference point. Based on the HPLC analysis, aflatoxin production was completely abrogated in $kdmB\Delta$ and $rpdA\Delta$ strains, while AF production was clearly detected in the WT sample (Figure 4.4A). As can be seen from the chromatogram, aflatoxin B1 standard absorbance could be detected at approximately \sim 20 min retention time similar to aflatoxin B1 from WT overlapping at that point. *kdmB* and *rpdA* mutants did not have any absorbance signals for aflatoxin B1 emphasizing that these deletions caused total loss of carcinogenic mycotoxin production. Aflatoxin production is regulated by *afl* gene clusters. For this reason, $kdmB\Delta$, $rpdA\Delta$ mutants and WT strain were analysed to determine the expression levels of aflatoxin regulatory genes *aflC*, *aflD*, *aflM* and *aflR* by RT-qPCR. All four genes were significantly down-regulated in both mutants (Figure 4.4B). The most drastic reduction was seen in *aflM* expression. *aflM* in the *kdmB* mutant was shown to be reduced by almost 90% with respect to WT. Similarly, at least 80% *aflM* reduction was seen in the *rpdA* mutant when compared to the WT strain. Therefore, it is likely that KdmB and RpdA play essential roles in aflatoxin production by regulating *afl* cluster genes.

Fungi can cause massive invasions on oil-rich seeds by contaminating with AF and causing loss of agricultural crop products. Sclerotia and AF analyses from culture media showed promising results which posed an important question whether KdmB and RpdA are required for fungal pathogenicity. Therefore, infection tests using peanut seeds were performed to monitor the influence of *kdmB* and *rpdA* mutants for growth on seeds. We did not see any effect on surface colonization, however, there was no sign of sclerotia production observed in deletion strains while the WT produced premature sclerotia at the end of the 5th day of growth in dark conditions (Figures 3C, 3D). Peanut samples treated with $\frac{kdm}{B\Delta}$, $rpdA\Delta$ and WT were used to perform organic extraction for the analysis of aflatoxin levels. The HPLC results from peanut samples demonstrated that samples treated with either $kdmB\Delta$ or $rpdA\Delta$ mutant strains did not contain aflatoxin, while samples extracted from peanuts treated with WT gave positive results for aflatoxin B1 production (Figure 3E). All in all, these results underlined the critical role of *kdmB* and *rpdA* in sclerotia development and aflatoxin production. Since SntB was also shown to be required for AF production (Pfannenstiel et al., 2018), the KERS complex is involved in the positive induction of sclerotia and AF biosynthetic regulatory gene clusters. KERS complex is also required for seed contamination with aflatoxin.

B

Figure 4.4. KdmB and RpdA are essential for aflatoxin production and play vital roles in peanut seed contamination. (A) Aflatoxin B1 analysis of WT, *kdmB* and *rpdA* mutant strains by reversed-phase HPLC. The organic phase was extracted using chloroform from samples grown on YES agar media including required supplements for 7 days at the dark condition. WT represents 100% production. The lower panel shows the chromatogram of aflatoxin B1 peaks obtained from AFB1 standard (pink), WT (purple) and *kdmB* (brown), *rpdA* (green) mutants. (B) RT-qPCR expression analysis of the aflatoxin regulatory gene cluster *aflC*, *aflD*, *aflM* and *aflR*. For the analysis of aflatoxin regulatory genes, fungal mycelia grown in complete media with required supplements for 24 h at 30ºC 200 g was shifted onto agar plates. Total mRNA was obtained by harvesting fungal mat grown on YES agar plates for 3 days at 30°C under the dark conditions. 1 µg total DNAase-treated RNA was used for cDNA synthesis. *benA* was used as a reference gene to obtain relative expression levels of mRNA using $2^{\Delta\Delta\text{Ct}}$ method. RT-qPCR experiments were performed using two independent biological replicates and nine technical replicates (C) For the pathogenicity tests, peanut seeds were treated with spores of WT strain, *kdmB* and *rpdA* mutants for 5 days at 30ºC in a dark environment. Mock control peanut seeds without any fungal treatment were not included in the figure for simplicity. (D) Sclerotia numbers grown on each peanut were manually counted and adjusted to the WT strain. (E) Aflatoxin analysis was performed by extracting AF from infected peanuts. All values are the average of three independent biological replicates and error bars represent standard errors.

4.5 Sclerotia development and aflatoxin production are restored in *kdmB* **and** *rpdA* **complementation strains**

It has been shown that deletions of *kdmB* and *rpdA* result in a complete loss of sclerotia (Sc) development and aflatoxin production (Figures 4.2 and 4.4). In order to confirm the functional roles of KdmB and RpdA, the genomic loci of *kdmB::phleO* and *rpdA::phleO* were inserted into $kdmB\Delta$ and $rpdA\Delta$ strains respectively, creating $kdmB^{com}$ and $rpdA^{com}$. Complementation of *kdmB* and *rpdA* confirm the roles of functional KdmB and RpdA in *A. flavus* development and aflatoxin production. Sc production is restored by 20% in the *kdmB*^{com} strain, while *rpdA*^{com} restores Sc production around 45% with respect to WT (Figure 4.5A). Similarly, aflatoxin was restored by 130% in *kdmB*com, while *rpdA*com was able to produce 30% aflatoxin levels when compared to WT (Figure 4.5B). The lack of full restoration of sclerotia and aflatoxin might be due to the genomic loci of *kdmB* and *rpdA* being integrated ectopically into *A. flavus* genomic DNA.

Figure 4.5. Complementation strains *kdmB*^{com} and *rpdA*^{com} recovered sclerotia and aflatoxin production. (A) For sclerotia analysis, WKM plates with required supplements were incubated in the dark conditions at 30°C for 21 days. Lower lane shows the stereomicroscopic images of sclerotia (Sc) formation in WT and complementation strains. (B) Percentages of Sc production in WT and complementation strains. Counting was performed manually by quantifying Sc produced on WKM agar plates. Final values were optimized with respect to WT representing 100% . Aflatoxin B₁ analysis by reversed-phase

HPLC organic phase extracted from culture agar media through chloroform extraction method in WT, *kdmB* and *rpdA* complementation strains. WT represents 100% production. All quantifications are the results of three independent biological replicates and error bars represent standard errors.

4.6 KdmB and RpdA are global regulators of secondary metabolism gene clusters in *A. flavus*

Chromatin modifications play fundamental roles not only during development but also in the regulation of secondary metabolite gene clusters. In pathogenic fungus *Fusarium graminearum*, histone H3K27 methyltransferase KTM6 was shown to be responsible for the activation of SM gene clusters required for mycotoxins, pigments and other SMs (Connolly et al., 2013). In a more recent study, it has been demonstrated that the HDA1-type histone deacetylase is involved in the accumulation of 1,8-dihydroxynaphthalene melanin and ergosterol pathways of phytopathogenic fungi *Magnaporthe oryzae* and increased levels of nivalenol-type trichothecenes in *Fusarium asiaticum,* emphasizing HDACs crucial role in the regulation of production of natural chemicals in pathogenic fungi (Maeda et al., 2017). More recently, a *sntB* deletion was shown to cause total loss of aflatoxin production in *A. flavus* (Pfannenstiel et al., 2018). It is previously mentioned in this thesis that aflatoxin gene clusters are negatively affected in *kdmB* and *rpdA* mutants in *A. flavus*. However, it is important to see if the roles of KdmB and RpdA are more global rather than simply regulating aflatoxin production.

In essence, other SM gene clusters could also be affected in $kdmB\Delta$ and $rpdA\Delta$ mutants. Therefore, the Secondary Metabolite Unique Regions Finder (SMURF) tool (https://www.jcvi.org/smurf) was used to determine potential SM gene clusters in *A. flavus* genome. According to the database, there were 55 predicted backbone genes for SM clusters (Table 4.3). Hence, cDNA oligonucleotides for qPCR analysis were designed for these 55 backbone genes to analyse their gene expression levels in *kdmB*, *rpdA* and WT strains. The expression of 3 out of 55 genes could not be analysed possibly due to their complete absence in the selected growth condition, whereas 52 genes were analysed successfully. Minimum 30% of the change in expression level of backbone genes were considered as either up (Green box) or down-regulated (Red box), while lower than 30% expression differences were considered as similar or equal (Grey box) to WT strain (Figure 4.6A). Strikingly, 41 of the backbone genes required for NPRS (12 up-regulated, 12 down-regulated) and PKS (7 up-regulated, 11 down-regulated) were affected in at least $kdmB\Delta$ or $rpdA\Delta$ strains which correspond to approximately 79% of total 52 genes analysed. 11 genes (4 PKSs, 4 NPRSs, 1 dimethylallyl tryptophan synthase, putative 3-oxoacyl carrier protein synthase and 1 hypothetical protein) do not seem to be affected in *kdmB* or *rpdA* mutants. 10 backbone genes (5 NRPS, 4 PKS and 1 DMATS) in total have been drastically down-regulated, whereas only 3 genes (all NRPSp) were highly up-regulated in both mutants when compared to WT, emphasizing KERS complex generally as the positive-regulator of SM backbone genes. Additionally, 25 SM backbone gene expressions (11 NRPS, 11 PKS, 2 DMATS and 1 NRPS/PKS hybrid) were negatively affected, while only 4 genes (all NRPS) were positively affected in the *kdmB* \triangle strain, clearly demonstrating an inductive role of H3K4me3 demethylase KdmB. As opposed to $kdmB\Delta$, expression of 20 genes was affected positively (11 NRPS, 7 PKS and 2 DMATS), while expression of 12 genes was affected negatively (7 NRPS, 4 PKS and 1 DMATS) in $rpdA\Delta$, proposing RpdA more as a repressor rather than inducer on certain SM backbone genes. 20 out of 52 genes were affected only in either $kdmB\Delta$ or $rpdA\Delta$ strains exhibiting their unique role on certain SM clusters. All in all, expression profiles of 52 SM backbone genes suggests that the H3K4me3 KdmB demethylase acts mostly as an inducer, while class I histone deacetylase RpdA acts as a repressor, displaying mostly opposing roles in the regulation of SM production. Nevertheless, 11 genes were found to be regulated by both KdmB and RpdA in similar patterns (Figure 4.6B). Conidial pigmentation is regulated by PKS AFLA_006170 (Cluster 5) which was significantly down-regulated in both mutants. Interestingly, Asparasone A (AFLA 082150), PKS for sclerotia pigmentation (Cluster 27 (Chang et al., 2017)) and PKS/NRPS hybrid enzyme synthesizing leporin (*lepA*, Cluster 23, AFLA_066840 (Cary et al., 2015) are found to be down-regulated in the *kdmB* mutant while there was no significant change in the *rpdA* mutant when compared to WT. Similarly, aflatrem DMATS (AFLA_045490, Cluster 14) is down-regulated in the *kdmB* mutant, while it does not change in the *rpdA* mutant with respect to WT, emphasizing a distinct role of KdmB in the regulation of asparasone A and aflatrem. mRNA expression of NRPS for the biosynthesis of aspergillic acid (AFLA_023020, Cluster 10) and a PKS synthesizing an anti-insectan metabolite aflavarin (Cluster 37, AFLA 108550) are not changed in $kdmB\Delta$ while they are significantly increased in the $rpdA\Delta$ strain, indicating repressive roles of RpdA in the production of these metabolites.

Previously, SntB was shown to be a positive regulator of aflavarin, aflatoxin B₁, asparasone A, aflatrem, and kojic acid, and a negative regulator of ditryptophenaline and leporin B (Pfannenstiel et al., 2018). Similarly, KdmB acted as a positive-regulator of asparasone A, aflatrem, AF and leporin backbone gene mRNA levels underlining the common KERS complex functions on the regulation of SMs. RpdA, on the other hand, did not seem to have any effect on aflavarin or asparasone cluster backbone gene expression levels. RpdA seemed to be a positive regulator of aflatoxin and a negative regulator of aspergillic acid and aflavarin. Taken together, KERS complex components KdmB, RpdA, and SntB are positive-regulators of AF production while RpdA and SntB may have opposing roles in aflavarin production.

А	kdmB∆ rpdA∆			kdmB∆			kdmB∆ rpdA∆	kdmB∆ rpdA∆				
	2.5 Relative expression 2.0 1.5 1.0 0.5 0	Cluster 35 WT kdmB∆	rpdA∆	0 WT	Cluster 1 kdmB∆ rpdA∆	1.2 $\frac{6}{9}$ 1.0 $\frac{1}{9}$ 0.8 $\frac{1}{9}$ 0.6 1.0 Relative 0.4 0.2	0	Cluster 21 WТ kdmB∆	rpdA Δ	4.0 Relative expression A 3.3.5 0.5 0.5 1.5 1.5 0.5 0 WT	Cluster 47 kdmB∆	rpdA Δ
В	С	Accession		$kdmB\Delta$	r pdA Δ		C	Accession		$kdmB\Delta$	r pd $A\Delta$	
	1	AFLA_002900	PKS				28	AFLA_082480	NRPS			
	2	AFLA 004450	NRPS				29	AFLA 083250	DMATS			
	3	AFLA_005320	PKS				30	AFLA_084080	DMATS			
	4	AFLA_005440	NRPS				3 ¹	AFLA_090200	NRPS			
	5	AFLA_006170	PKS				32	AFLA_096770	PKS			
	6	AFLA_008770	NRPS				33	AFLA_101700	NRPS			
	7	AFLA_010010	NRPS				34	AFLA_104210	PKS			
	8	AFLA_010620	NRPS				35	AFLA_105190	NRPS			
	9	AFLA_017840	NRPS				36	AFLA_105450	PKS			
	10	AFLA_023020	NRPS				37	AFLA_108550	PKS			
	11	AFLA_028720	NRPS				38	AFLA_109430	NRPS			
	12	AFLA_038600	NRPS				39	AFLA_112840	PKS			
	13	AFLA_041610	NRPS				40	AFLA_114820	PKS			
	14	AFLA_045490	DMATS				41	AFLA_116220	PKS			
	15	AFLA_053870	PKS				42	AFLA_116600	DMATS			
	16	AFLA_054090	PKS				43	AFLA_116890	PKS			
	18	AFLA_060020	PKS				44	AFLA_118440	NRPS			
	19	AFLA_060680	DMATS				45	AFLA_118940	PKS			
	20	AFLA_062860	PKS				46	AFLA_119110	NRPS			
	21	AFLA_064240	NRPS				47	AFLA_121520	NRPS			
	22	AFLA_064560	NRPS				49	AFLA_128060	PKS			
	23	AFLA_066840 NRPS/PKS					50	AFLA_128170	NRPS			
	24	AFLA_069330	NRPS				51	AFLA_129930 oxoacyl cps				
	25	AFLA_070920	NRPS				52	AFLA_135490	NRPS			
	26	AFLA_079400	NRPS				54	AFLA_139410	PKS			
	27	AFLA 082150	PKS				55	AFLA 139670	HP			

Figure 4.6. KdmB and RpdA affect the majority of the SM gene clusters either positively or negatively. Complete media with required supplements was inoculated with $kdmB\Delta$, $rpdA\Delta$ and WT spores ($2x10^6$ per ml) and grown for 24 h at 30°C shaking condition. At the end of the incubation period, mycelia were shifted onto PDA agar plates to induce SM production. Total mRNA was obtained by harvesting fungal mycelia grown on PDA plates for 3 days at 30°C under the dark conditions. 1 µg total DNAase-treated RNA was used for cDNA synthesis. *benA* was used as a reference gene to obtain relative expression levels of

corresponding genes using $2^{\Delta\Delta\text{Ct}}$ method. (A) RT-qPCR expression analysis of 52 SM gene clusters which show either up-regulation, down-regulation or no change. Grey box represents no change, the red box represents down-regulation by at least 30% or more and the green box represents at least 30% up-regulation or more. cDNA was obtained from total mRNA extracted from fungal samples grown on PDA plates for 72 h at 30ºC in the dark condition. (B) Heat map expression profiles of 52 SM backbone genes with their accession numbers which belong to either NRPS, PKS, dimethylallyl tryptophan synthase, 3-oxoacyl carrier protein synthase and a hypothetical protein (HP). All values are the average of two independent biological replicates and 6 technical replicates. The error bars represent standard errors. See Appendix C for full description of all backbone gene clusters obtained from SMURF.

4.7 KERS complex regulates *in vivo* **histone modifications**

In *A. nidulans*, it was shown that KdmB is a Jumonji domain-containing demethylase which specifically targets H3K4me3 residues (Gacek-Matthews et al., 2016). Diversely, Class I histone deacetylase RpdA acts on global acetylated histone residues including H3, and H4 (Tribus et al., 2010). In order to analyse HPTMs regulated by KdmB and RpdA in *A. flavus*, a crude nuclei extraction protocol was carried out to enrich histones of *kdmB* Δ , rpdA Δ and WT strains as previously described (Soukup and Keller, 2013). PTM of histones were detected using antibodies specific for histone lysine residues described in Chapter 2. Interestingly, *A. flavus* KdmB is shown to be responsible for the demethylation of not only H3K4me3 but also H3K9me3 residues. Immunoblot band intensities of H3K4me3 and H3K9me3 were increased in the *kdmB* \triangle . However, it remains unclear if H3K9me3 demethylation is affected directly or indirectly by KdmB. On the other hand, *kdmB* \triangle H3K36me3 band intensities remained similar to WT levels suggesting that this residue is

not targeted by *A. flavus* KdmB. Notably, H3K36me3 levels were increased by 30% in the *rpdA* mutant with respect to WT. Previous studies suggested that RpdA acts on global histone residues including H3K9ac levels which control ST production. Surprisingly, H3K9ac levels did not show any increase in the *rpdA* mutant. However, a drastic increase in H3K14ac residues occurs in the RpdA depletion suggesting that *A. flavus* RpdA mainly targets H3K14ac residues which might correspond to aspergillic acid and aflavarin repression. KdmB depletion did not effect on the analysed acetylation residues of histones in *A. flavus* (Figure 4.7). Presumably, KdmB and RpdA may regulate development, SM production and pathogenicity through targeting H3K4me3, H3K9me3, H3K36me3 and H3K14ac marks.

Figure 4.7. KERS complex has *in vivo* HDMA and HDAC activities. Demethylation of histone lysine residues is controlled by KdmB and RpdA, while deacetylation of lysine residues are only RpdA-dependent. Approximately $2x10⁶$ conidia were inoculated into GMM liquid culture with required supplements and incubated at 30ºC for 48 h. 20 µg nuclear protein extract was loaded onto SDS-PAGE gels (15%). Nuclear proteins were transferred onto 0.2 µm nitrocellulose Western blotting membrane (Amersham Protran, GE healthcare) and fast transfer protocol was applied using the Thermo Scientific™ Pierce™ Power Blotter for 10 minutes. α -H3 polyclonal rabbit antibody (Abcam, 1:5000 in TBS + 1% Tween20) was used to detect H3 levels for standardization. ImageJ software was used for the

quantification of signal intensity. Immunoblot analysis was conducted in two independent biological and three technical replicates for each strain.

Chapter 5

Discussion

5.1 KERS, a novel tetrameric demethylase complex consisting multi-domain subunits, is likely conserved among other eukaryotes

Chromatin modifiers play important roles in proliferation, survival and cellular responses to environmental stimuli by regulating HPTMs at the chromatin level (Chen and Dent, 2014). Transcriptional regulation of fungal development, secondary metabolite production and pathogenicity are likely dependent on certain HPTMs (Gacek and Strauss, 2012). Although various signal transduction pathways controlling the regulation of fungal development and SM production have been discovered, epigenetic level chromatin control by chromatin modifier complexes in the model organism *A. nidulans* or pathogenic fungus *A. flavus* is not yet clarified. In this thesis, the novel chromatin modifying complex KERS, comprising Jarid1-type demethylase KdmB, putative cohesin acetyltransferase EcoA, ring finger PHD domain-containing protein SntB and Class I HDAC RpdA have been discovered and studied extensively in model organism *A. nidulans* and pathogenic fungi *A. flavus*. Discovery of the KERS complex was proved by performing tandem affinity purification (TAP) coupled with mass spectrometry using a KdmB::TAP expressing strain (Table 3.1). Co-purification and analysis of EcoA::TAP, RpdA::TAP and SntB::TAP by LC-MS² confirmed the bulk presence of the KERS complex. Similar results were found in HA and GFP reciprocal copurifications (Table 3.1). *In vivo* physical interactions of KdmB with EcoA, RpdA, and SntB were further supported by BIFC analysis (Figure 3.3). The same complex is also conserved in *A. flavus* which was confirmed by purification of KdmB::3xHA and KdmB::sGFP (Figure 4.1C). Similarly, EcoA, RpdA, and SntB were recruited by KdmB forming the tetrameric complex in the pathogenic fungus.

In *A. nidulans*, it is predicted that there are seven JmjC domain-containing demethylases, two of which have been characterised so far. KdmA, KDM4 family H3K9me2/3 and H3K36me2/3 demethylase were shown to act on between 25% and 30% of genes during early and late vegetative growth conditions. Furthermore, it was shown that KdmA normally acts as a co-repressor during primary growth and as an inducer during secondary metabolism induction which can equally positively and negatively influence gene expression. The *kdmA* mutant strain did not show any significant phenotypic change under normal conditions, however, when oxidative stress was applied, it caused lethality and sensitivity (Gacek-Matthews et al., 2015). KdmB was studied by the same research group (using *ve1* strain background) and it was found that KDM5-type demethylase KdmB acts on the removal of methyl groups from lysine residues from H3K4me2/3 by mediating transcriptional repression due to the fact that H3K4me2/3-containing nucleosomes are primarily found at promoter regions and are a hallmark of actively transcribed genes. According to ChIP-seq and RNA-seq analyses, ~1750 genes were up-regulated in the *kdmB* deletion. Interestingly, it was also demonstrated that the *kdmB* mutant resulted in the downregulation of an equal number of genes comprising secondary metabolite gene clusters, suggesting that KdmB is involved in the control of induction of secondary metabolite biosynthetic gene clusters (Gacek-Matthews et al., 2016). Domain analysis of KdmB demonstrates multi-domain protein structure (Figures 3.4 and 4.1D) and previously it was shown to be closely identical to higher eukaryotes than yeast *S. cerevisiae*. Arid/Bright domain does not exist and only one PHD domain is present in yeast, whereas two PHD domains are present together with Arid/Bright region in human and *A. nidulans* (Gacek-Matthews et al., 2016).

Figure 5.1. Protein domain architecture of KdmB in human, *S. cerevisiae* and *A. nidulans*. Red triangle represents the N-terminal Jmj domain. Yellow box represents Arid/Bright ATrich interaction α -KG binding domain. The brown pentagonal shape represents PHD classical chromatin binding domain. Blue represents catalytic JmjC domain required for the removal of methyl residues from lysine using Fe^{2+} . Green represents C5HC2 zinc finger domain for binding specificity. Yeast Jhd2 in protein size is at least twice as small as human or *A. nidulans* KdmB (Modified from (Gacek-Matthews et al., 2016)).

In budding yeast, it is estimated that there are a total of five JmjC domain-containing proteins namely Jhd1, Jhd2, Rph1, Ecm5 and Gis1 (Kwon and Ahn, 2011). Jhd1 is KDM2 demethylase which catalyses the removal of methyl groups from H3K36me3. Similarly, Rph1 (KDM4) acts on H3K36me2/3 residues. Although Ecm5 and Gis1 contain the JmjC domain, little is known about their role in mediating global histone PTMs. Ecm5 was shown to physically interact with Snt2 and deacetylase Rpd3 (Baker et al., 2013). Furthermore, in the same study, Ecm5 and Snt2 were shown to be responsible for the recruitment of Rpd3 to a number of promoter regions. Ecm5 and Snt2 were found to target a common set of genes when treated with H_2O_2 stress agent (Kwon and Ahn, 2011). Budding yeast KdmB ortholog *JHD2* encodes H3K4me3 demethylase Jhd2 (KDM5) which inhibits the Nrd1-Nab3-Sen1 (NNS) transcription termination complex and is involved in genetic inhibition of the histone chaperone complexes Spt16-Pob3 (FACT) and Spt6-Spn1 (Lee et al., 2018a). In mammals, there are four KDM5 family members, while *C. elegans* and *Drosophila* have one, RBR2 and LID respectively. All four KDM5 family demethylases play important roles in development. KDM5 was shown to interact with HDACs such as HDAC1 and HDAC4. For instance, H3K4 demethylase Lid (*Drosophila* KDM5) interacts with and inhibits Rpd3. Lid also interacts with FOXO and promotes the activation of oxidative-response genes under oxidative stresses by recruiting HDAC4 to FOXO in order to facilitate FOXO deacetylation which affects FOXO DNA binding (Liu et al., 2014). KDM5 was identified to interact with two distinct histone deacetylase complexes, the SIN3B-HDAC and the HDAC NuRD, both of which are essential in nucleosome remodelling and controlling developmentally regulated genes (Nishibuchi et al., 2014, Gajan et al., 2016). Human ortholog ESCO1 was found to be associated with Lysine-specific-demethylase 1 (LSD1), required for H3K4 -mono, -di demethylation. In Co-IP experiments, it was shown that ESCO1 also interacts with HDAC1/HDAC2 (Choi et al., 2010). It remains unknown if EcoA directly contributes to histone modification in filamentous fungi. Since we could not obtain a viable *ecoA* deletion strain in *A. flavus*, a knock-down construct may help to investigate its genome-wide effect. The *A. nidulans ecoA*^{TetON} strain could be used in future studies to study the possible influence of EcoA on histone modifications.

Class I HDACs can form multi-protein complexes to target unique locations across the genome. Apart from previously mentioned Rpd3 complexes in higher eukaryotes and Ecm5-Snt2-Rpd3 in yeast, Rpd3 forms large and small Sin3 complexes in *S. cerevisiae*, Rpd3L and Rpd3S respectively (Yeheskely-Hayon et al., 2013). Rpd3L interacts with Ume1 (DNA-binding protein), Sds3, Sap30 and Pho23 (an inhibitor of growth protein), while Rpd3S is associated with Sin3, Ume1, Eaf3 (Chromodomain protein) and Rco1 (Plant homeodomain finger protein). Both complexes have repressive features where Rpd3L targets histones at promoter regions, Rpd3S deacetylates transcribed regions to suppress intragenic transcription initiation (Yang and Seto, 2008).

RING (Really interesting new gene) finger protein Snt2 is a SANT, BAH/PHD domain-containing DNA-binding E3 ubiquitin-protein ligase in yeast *S. cerevisiae* (Baker et al., 2013). The RING domain is a characteristic structure for most E3 ligases which contain a cysteine-rich sequence motif that can bind two zinc atoms. As previously mentioned, Snt2 physically interacts with Rpd3 and demethylase Ecm5, forming the Rpd3µ complex and it is required for oxidative stress responses in yeast (Baker et al., 2013). This thesis is the first evidence presenting the KdmB-EcoA-RpdA-SntB association forming the KERS complex in *A. nidulans* (Chapter 3) and *A. flavus* (Chapter 4) which was not shown to form tetrameric complex previously.

5.2 KERS complex has a dual role in fungal development: KdmB-EcoA are negative regulators of sexual development while RpdA-SntB are positive-regulators

Interestingly, cohesin acetyltransferase-encoding *ecoA* gene could not be disrupted in *A. nidulans* and *A. flavus,* suggesting that *ecoA* is also essential for viability in filamentous fungi, similar to the yeast $ecol$ ortholog. Surprisingly, the $kdmBA$ strain displayed higher (40% increase in dark, Figure 3.7) fruiting body formation and lower conidiation (40% decrease in light, Figure 3.8) with respect to WT which was not described in previous KdmB studies. This might be as a result of the *ve1 A. nidulans* strain being used previously (Gacek-Matthews et al., 2016). A similar pattern with more drastic change was seen in the *ecoA* knock-down strain where conidiation in the presence of light was reduced by 70% and cleistothecia formation in dark was increased by 400%. These data strongly suggest that KdmB and EcoA act in a similar manner during the asexual and sexual life cycles as opposed to RpdA-SntB. *sntB* \triangle and *rpdA* knock-downs completely abolished sexual cleistothecia formation. Strikingly, asexual sporulation was drastically reduced in both strains (90% decrease). Previous research done on the *sntB* mutant showed that SntB is required for sclerotia production and *A. flavus* pathogenicity (Pfannenstiel et al., 2018). The *sntB* Δ effect seems to be similar to previous work done in *N. crassa* and *F. oxysporum,* where SntB depletion strains impaired fungal pathogenicity (Denisov et al., 2011). The role of SntB may likely be conserved across filamentous fungi. Interestingly, *kdmB* disruption did not alter the $sntB\Delta$ phenotype, suggesting that SntB is epistatic to KdmB (Figure 3.8).

 $Jhd2\Delta$ was not lethal and did not have any phenotypic effect in yeast (Huang et al., 2015). Although *kdmB* deletion in *A. nidulans* and yeast is not lethal, *Drosophila* KDM5 and mouse KDM5B are essential genes for survival (Li et al., 2010, Catchpole et al., 2011). Lid depletion leads to reduced proliferation and flies with developmental defects wing formation (Gajan et al., 2016). Mutations in Eco1 cause lethality and a human homolog ESCO2 mutation results in Roberts Syndrome and SC Phocomelia (Guacci et al., 2015, Lu et al., 2014). The lethal effect of Eco1 deletion can be suppressed by substituting Smc3 K112/113 to other residues mimicking acetylated lysine. Additionally, deleting WPL1/RAD61 was shown to suppress the lethal effect of the Eco1 mutation (Rolef Ben-Shahar et al., 2008, Sutani et al., 2009, Onn et al., 2008). In our work, SudA acetylation (K106/107) was impaired in an EcoA knock-down, however, this did not affect the viability of the strain, suggesting that a similar mechanism may not be conserved in filamentous fungi. Furthermore, acetylation of DNA polymerase V by Eso1 is essential for *S. pombe* viability (Chen et al., 2017). Class I histone deacetylase RpdA is essential for viability in *A. nidulans*, *A. fumigatus* and *Cochliobolus carbonum*, however, the RpdA homolog Rpd3 is not vital in yeast *S. cerevisiae*, making it a good candidate to study the $rpdA\Delta$ effect. It was discovered that the C-terminal part of the RpdA protein is crucial for survival which contains its catalytic activity for acetyl removal from histone tails (Bauer et al., 2016). Interestingly, *A. fumigatus* and *C. carbonum* RpdA could complement *A. nidulans rpdA*Δ, but not higher eukaryote HDACs. RpdA was shown to contribute to promoting fungal pathogenicity, thus making it an ideal target for HDAC inhibitors such as TSA. RpdA can remove acetyl modifications from all core histone residues signifying its role as a global chromatin remodeling enzyme which can also function as a histone chaperone and a chromatin stabilizing factor (Bauer et al., 2016). *rpdA* was deleted in *A. flavus* and confirmed by Southern blot analysis as well as RT-qPCR (Figures 2.3, 2.4, 4.2). Successful generation of *rpdA*∆ suggests that *A. flavus* RpdA may functionally be more closely related to yeast Rpd3.

Snt2 depletion prevents histone degradation and causes sensitivity to histone overexpression in yeast (Singh et al., 2012). KERS complex might also be involved in the regulation of histone proteins since several subunits of HIR complex required for repression of histone genes outside of S-phase were consistently detected at higher peptide numbers in *A. flavus* KdmB purifications (Appendix A, B). However, this requires further studies to show mechanistic interdependency between KERS and HIR complexes. Snt2 depletion impaired pathogenicity, asexual sporulation and hyphal growth in asexual soil-borne fungus *Fusarium oxysporum.* Similarly, an $snt-2\Delta$ strain displayed a lack of sexual development, reduction in asexual sporulation as well as hyphal growth in *Neurospora crassa* (Denisov et al., 2011). The *sntB* \triangle phenotype in this study is in parallel to previous work done in other filamentous fungi which signifies its evolutionary conserved functions.

Chromatin modifier enzymes play fundamental roles in several distinct cellular response pathways. While $ecm5\Delta$ was shown to be sensitive to oxidative stress, $rpd3\Delta$ and $snt2\Delta$ strains were resistant, emphasizing their opposing roles in yeast stress responses (Baker et al., 2013). Unlike *S. cerevisiae rpd3*D and *snt2*D, *A. nidulans kdmB*, *ecoA*, *rpdA,* and *sntB* mutant strains did not have any significant impacts in the response to oxidative stress agents (Data not presented). The high-osmolarity glycerol (HOG) MAPK pathway is a widely studied topic in *A. nidulans* and is an essential mechanism for transmitting environmental osmotic signals (Ma and Li, 2013). Asexual conidiation was found to be upregulated in *kdmB*, *ecoA*, *rpdA,* and *sntB* mutants (Figure 3.10). This suggests that genes involved in the HOG MAPK pathway such as *sln1*, *skn7*, *sho1*, *pbs2* and *hog1* may be direct targets of the KERS complex. KERS mutants resulted in sensitivity during cell-wall stress (Figure 3.12) and amino-acid starvation (Figure 3.13), suggesting that complex subunits equally contribute against certain stress response agents and are required for the regulation of various stress response pathways.

5.3 The tetrameric KERS complex is assembled via association of the heterodimers KdmB-EcoA and RpdA-SntB

Complex association interdependency analysis suggested that EcoA is recruited by KdmB to form the tetrameric KERS complex (Table 3.3). Likewise, RpdA was shown to be recruited by SntB for KERS assembly. In yeast, the KdmB homolog Jhd2 is thought to act alone during the removal of methyl groups from H3K4me3 residues and it was shown to be involved in the regulation of mitotic rDNA condensation (Ryu and Ahn, 2014). Eco1 was found to mediate the coordination of rDNA replication and transcription (Lu et al., 2014). It requires further research to answer if KdmB can act alone to shape the chromatin structure or if the KERS assembly is required for demethylase activity. Nevertheless, it is clear that KdmB is essential for the recruitment of EcoA to the RpdA-SntB heterodimer. Highly conserved SANT domain-containing protein motifs, such as Snt2, N-CoR and SMRT stimulate Rpd3 deacetylase activity, which are subunits of histone HDAC complexes (Yang and Seto, 2008). Not only SANT motifs are associated with HDACs, but also it was demonstrated that SANT domain-containing proteins are subunits of HATs such as ADA and SAGA (Spt–Ada–Gcn5-acetyltransferase) complexes (Boyer et al., 2004). Surprisingly, according to the *in vitro* HDAC activity assay, it is evident that RpdA deacetylase activity is not KdmB or SntB-dependent which is controversial to previous findings where Class I HDACs were shown to require SANT-domain subunits for H3K9ac deacetylase activity (Figure 3.14). It remains to be answered if SntB directs RpdA to certain chromatin regions for the control of transcription of gene clusters. ChIP-seq analyses could elucidate chromatin binding patterns of KERS complex in future studies.

5.4 SntB mediates EcoA-proteasomal degradation while KdmB protects its nuclear stability to promote the establishment of chromatid cohesion

In *S. cerevisiae*, the Eco1 degradation process is initiated by phosphorylation of serine 99 by Cdk1. Dbf4-Cdc7 then phosphorylates the adjacent S98 residue which further promotes phosphorylation of the T94 residue by another kinase Mck1. Such phosphorylation cascades result in ubiquitination by SCF^{Cdc4} , leading to Eco1 destruction by the proteasome (Lyons et al., 2013, Lyons and Morgan, 2011, Seoane and Morgan, 2017). These processes are essential for ceasing cohesion establishment after S phase. Protein immunoblotting and nuclear localization assays suggest that KdmB is a positive-regulator for EcoA stability while SntB directly or indirectly may be involved in targeting EcoA for proteasomal degradation (Figures 3.12, 3.13). This phenomenon can be supported by the fact that additional phosphorylated residues were detected when KdmB was absent on S41/45. These phosphorylated residues disappeared in the $kdmB\Delta/sntB\Delta$ strain (Figure 3.13F). Hence, SntB most likely targets EcoA for phosphorylation-dependent ubiquitination which leads to proteasomal degradation. Ubiquitination could not be detected in mass spectrometry analysis possibly due to the fact that dephosphorylation-ubiquitination are transient processes resulting in prompt EcoA degradation. Recently, ESCO2 protein stability was shown to be controlled by E3 ubiquitin ligase CUL4-DDB1-VPRBP and MCM complexes (Minamino et al., 2018). It was discovered that MCM-ESCO2 physical interaction prevents ESCO2 proteasomal degradation during DNA replication and cell cycle while CUL4- DDB1-VPRBP promotes ESCO2 degradation during late S phase to suppress cohesion formation. It is unknown if SntB is associated with other kinases for EcoA degradation. Although orthologs of these proteins are conserved in *A. nidulans*, EcoA purifications and mass spectrometry analyses could not identify such proteins. Therefore, SntB might have a similar role to CUL4-DDB1-VPRBP which regulates ESCO2 degradation during late S phase to suppress cohesion formation (Minamino et al., 2018), while KdmB might act as MCM complex preventing EcoA proteasomal degradation. EcoA nuclear levels are likely controlled by KdmB and SntB during specific cell-cycle mitotic phases of *A. nidulans* when cohesion establishment is necessary.

Establishment of sister chromatid cohesion occurs through Eco1 acetylating Smc3 on two conserved tandem lysine residues which contributes to the processes of chromosome segregation, DNA replication, chromosome condensation and DNA damage repair (Guacci et al., 2015). In yeast, these acetylations can be removed by deacetylase Hos1 (Xiong et al., 2010). In humans, Eco1 has two orthologs, namely ESCO1 and ESCO2 respectively, both of which can acetylate the evolutionary conserved Smc3 subunit K106/107 (Whelan et al., 2012, Nishiyama et al., 2010). Ortholog analysis revealed that *A. nidulans* EcoA is 28% identical to human ESCO1/2 (Table 3.2), suggesting that their functional roles may be conserved from filamentous fungi to human. The cohesin complex is composed of four subunits: Smc1, Smc3, Rad21 and SA1 or SA2 which are essential for cell-cycle pathways and Eco1 plays a crucial role in aiding the cohesion establishment during S phase which connects sister chromatids by encircling them as molecular rings (Onn et al., 2008, Zhang et al., 2008). The positions of *A. nidulans* SudA (yeast Smc3 ortholog) conserved lysine residues are the same as those in humans at K106/107 positions rather than yeast Smc3 K112/113 (Figure 3.16B). It is thought that Eco1 deletion is lethal due to unacetylated lysine residues of the Smc3 protein. Hence, the up-regulation of sexual development in EcoA knock-down strain might be as a result of SudA lacking acetylated K106/107 residues. In human, ESCO2 has additional functions other than acetylating Smc3. Additionally, Eco1 also was shown to acetylate Mcd1 (Rad21) which is required to establish cohesion during S phase (Choi et al., 2010, Kim et al., 2002). However, Mcd1 acetylation was not affected in EcoA down-regulation in *A. nidulans,* suggesting that a different mechanism may be involved during Mcd1 acetylation. It was emphasized that not only is ESCO2 capable of acetylating Smc3 and Mcd1 but also it is involved in HPTM by acetylating H4K16 residues both *in vivo* and *in vitro* which is essential for Spindle Assembly Checkpoint (SAC) activity and kinetochore functions during mouse oocyte meiosis (Lu et al., 2017). In this work, it was shown that SudA recruited all cohesin complex components emphasizing that the multimeric complex is conserved in *A. nidulans*. Although EcoA could not be detected in mass spectrometry analysis in a SudA purification, it is shown that K105/106 acetylation residues were abolished in an EcoA knock-down strain. Interestingly, KdmB depletion does not seem to have any effect on SudA K106/107 acetylation (Figure 3.16).

To summarize, findings presented in *A. nidulans* demonstrate the first characterised tetrameric demethylase KERS complex involved in fungal development, stress responses and cohesin acetylation. The KERS complex links cohesion establishment to fungal development and possibly regulates the transcriptional activities of gene clusters required for asexual conidiation, sexual development and stress responses (Figure 5.2). Ortholog analysis suggests that KERS subunits are highly conserved from lower to higher eukaryotes, thus similar protein complexes could be present in other eukaryotes involved in cellular pathways controlling development and disease.

Figure 5.2. Schematic representation of the roles of the tetrameric KERS complex in *A. nidulans*. KdmB recruits EcoA to the heterodimer RpdA-SntB to form the tetrameric KERS complex. SntB targets EcoA for proteasomal degradation, while KdmB represses SntB function to maintain EcoA nuclear levels which are required for cohesin acetylation and possibly transcriptional regulation of various cellular pathways involved in fungal development, stress responses and secondary metabolite production.

5.5 KERS complex is conserved in the pathogenic fungus *Aspergillus flavus* **with distinctive roles**

KdmB::GFP and KdmB::3xHA purifications revealed that the KERS complex is recruited and conserved in the plant pathogen *A. flavus* (Figure 4.1)*.* Ortholog analysis revealed that the KERS complex may be conserved in other plant and human pathogenic fungi such as *A. fumigatus* or *Magnaporthe oryzae,* making it a good candidate to study the epigenetic regulation of fungal chromatin and pathogenicity. In particular, KERS complex subunits sequence similarities were found to be quite high in human pathogen *A. fumigatus* (Figure 4.1E)*.* It would be interesting to investigate the possible roles of this complex in the regulation of aspergillosis.

It is worth noting that KdmB and RpdA are chromatin modifier catalytic enzymes which could potentially influence histone PTMs genome-wide levels affecting development, SM production and pathogenicity. This hypothesis is further supported by the fact that both *kdmB* and *rpdA* deletions resulted in the lack of sclerotia formation (Figures 4.2A, 4.4C, 4.4D). Sclerotia regulating genes *nsdC* and *nsdD* were drastically reduced in mutant strains (Figure 4.2D), suggesting that the KERS complex is involved in positive regulation of *A. flavus* sclerotia development through *nsdC* and *nsdD* regulation while KdmB-EcoA were shown to be negative regulators of sexual development in *A. nidulans* (Figure 3.8). The *sntB* mutant strain was previously shown to lack sclerotia formation (Pfannenstiel et al., 2018), suggesting that KERS complex subunits are equally important for sclerotia development.

5.6 KdmB and RpdA have opposing roles in the regulation of light-induced development

In addition to sclerotia shut-down, conidiation was significantly reduced in the *rpdA* mutant strain (Figure 4.2B), coherent with the *rpdA* knock-down strain in *A. nidulans*. Gene expression analysis suggests that RpdA is likely regulating conidiation by targeting and positively regulating *abaA* and upstream conidia regulator *flbA* expression (Figure 4.2C). As opposed to $rpdA\Delta$, conidiation is increased in the $kdmB$ mutant indicating opposite functions of KdmB and RpdA during light-induced sporulation (Figure 4.2B). Furthermore, *kdmB* and *rpdA* mutants show sensitivity against topoisomerase inhibitor CPT, while the *kdmB* mutant was more resistant to menadione mediated oxidative stress (Figure 2G), emphasizing their critical roles against stress response agents. In yeast, $ecm5\Delta$ was shown to be sensitive towards oxidative stress (Baker et al., 2013). As opposed to yeast $ecm5\Delta$, *kdmB* depletion resulted in increased resistance toward menadione mediated oxidative stress but did not have any effect against hydrogen peroxide suggesting functional differences of KdmB and Ecm5 which are not conserved. Therefore, the sensitivity of *kdmB* and *rpdA* against topoisomerase inhibitor might stem from EcoA functions on cohesins and genome integrity.

5.7 KERS complex is required for the induction of aflatoxin through the *afl* **biosynthetic cluster**

In previous studies, HPLC-MS/MS analyses suggested that sterigmatocystin, orsellinic acid and emericellamides C and D were reduced while emodin and its derivatives were increased in a $kdmB\Delta$ strain (Gacek-Matthews et al., 2016). Interestingly, aflatoxin production is completely abolished in *kdmB* and *rpdA* mutants which were confirmed by HPLC analysis performed from aflatoxin inducing agar media and *A. flavus* infected peanut samples (Figures 4.4A, 4.4E). This is consistent with the previous study with the *sntB* mutant which was shown to be unable to produce aflatoxin in *A. flavus* as well as sterigmatocystin in *A. nidulans* (Pfannenstiel et al., 2017), suggesting KERS chromatin modifiers are equally essential for aflatoxin production. Furthermore, loss of aflatoxin production was shown to be as a result of the aflatoxin cluster biosynthetic genes *aflC*, *aflD*, *aflM* and *aflR* being significantly down-regulated (Figure 4.4B) in the KERS mutants. Hence, the chromatin modifier KERS complex most likely controls aflatoxin production by targeting *afl* biosynthetic gene clusters.

5.8 KdmB and RpdA are global regulators of secondary metabolism most likely mediated by their *in vivo* **HDMA and HDAC activities**

Having observed the profound effects of KdmB and RpdA in aflatoxin production, it became vital to elucidate if KdmB and RpdA-dependent regulation of secondary metabolism extended beyond aflatoxin production in *A. flavus*. Notably, transcription levels of nearly 80% of SM backbone genes are affected in *kdmB* and/or *rpdA* deletions, indicating their roles as global secondary metabolism regulators in *A. flavus* (Figure 4.6). Nuclear enrichment immunoblotting assays using HPTM antibodies show that *kdmB* and *rpdA* mutants have increased trimethylation on histone H3K4me3 and H3K9me3 sites. Unlike the $kdmB$ mutant, $rpdA\Delta$ presented increased tri-methylation at the H3K36 residue. It remains unknown if RpdA can be associated with other chromatin readers, writers and erasers such as methyltransferases, demethylases or heterochromatin protein. The *rpdA* deletion resulted in a significant increase in H3K14 acetylation levels (Figure 4.7A). SntB was shown to be responsible for the regulation of H3 acetylation levels as well as *A. flavus* pathogenicity (Pfannenstiel et al., 2018). Similarly, in a recent study in *M. oryzae*, it was shown that SntB ortholog MoSnt2 interacts with histone deacetylase Hos2 (*A. nidulans* HosA ortholog) to mediate H3 deacetylation and plant infection (He et al., 2018). The impact of *A. flavus* SntB

in the H3 acetylation is most likely as a result of its association with RpdA. In the previous studies, histone enriched LC-MS/MS analysis revealed that global H3 N-terminal lysine acetylation (H3K9ac/K14ac) was increased by almost 20% in the *kdmB* \triangle strain in *A*. *nidulans* (Gacek-Matthews et al., 2016). Furthermore, it was recently emphasized that the yeast KdmB homolog Jhd2 is a negative regulator of the Rpd3S complex which controls the function of Rpd3S through Eaf3 and Rco1 subunits (Lee et al., 2018b). However, there seems to be no change in histone K9ac or K14ac acetylation levels in the $kdmB\Delta$ strain, suggesting the inhibition of RpdA HDAC activity in KdmB depletion may not be conserved in *A. flavus* (Figure 4.7A). Nevertheless, it is evident that the KERS complex is conserved in the aflatoxin producer pathogenic fungus, however, it is possible that the mechanistic function of this complex might differ from the model organism *A. nidulans*.

Findings in this thesis provide strong evidence on how chromatin modifier protein complexes can have a broad effect on growth, development and natural product biosynthesis by controlling epigenetic marks (Figure 5.3). Demethylase KERS complex is not only involved in the establishment of sister chromatid cohesion by regulating acetylation of cohesin subunit but also regulates asexual sporulation, fruiting body formation, sclerotia development, aflatoxin production and seed contamination. It has been revealed in this thesis that KERS is essential for aflatoxin production and fungal pathogenicity. Because the KERS complex exhibits a broad influence on the development and SM production, it could be a good target not only for novel drug discovery but also to understand the epigenetic mechanisms contributing to fungal pathogenicity. These results suggest that similar epigenetic mechanisms mediated by KERS complex is probably conserved in other eukaryotes.

Figure 5.3. The schematic model representing the roles of the tetrameric chromatin modifier KERS complex in fungal development and secondary metabolite production in *A. flavus*. The KERS complex negatively affects H3K4m3, H3K9me3, H3K36me3 methylation levels. RpdA significantly repressed H3K14 acetylation. KdmB and RpdA are positive regulators of sclerotia development and aflatoxin biosynthesis through regulation of *nsdC*, *nsdD* and *afl* pathways respectively.

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Appendix A

LC-MS2 protein lists combined from two biological replicates of KdmB::GFP purification. Non-specific peptide contaminants were filtered out by using WT as a negative control. KERS complex subunits are represented in bold letters.

Appendix B

LC-MS² protein lists combined from two biological replicates of KdmB::3xHA purification. Non-specific peptide contaminants were filtered out

by using WT as a negative control. Green color represents KdmB and yellow color represents EcoA, RpdA, and SntB interacting partners.

Appendix C

A. flavus Secondary metabolite gene clusters identified by Secondary Metabolite Unique Regions Finder (SMURF)

dehydrogenase/reductase family protein

Cluster:7

Annotated_gene_function

AFLA 017840 AFLA 017790 5 1866 494 1346287 1345971 210 0 New cDNA-based gene: (AO_CDS_042706, novel, updateIDs: 1439, [gene: novel_gene_185, model: novel_model_185]) AFLA_017840 AFLA_017780 6 1866 493 1343225 1345672 299 0 oligonucleotide transporter, putative AFLA 017840 AFLA 017770 7 1866 492 1341770 1342859 366 0 D-isomer specific 2-hydroxyacid dehydrogenase, NAD binding domain containing protein
AFLA 017840 AFLA 017760 8 1866 491 AFLA 017840 AFLA 017760 8 1866 491 1339127 1341356 414 1 FAD binding domain containing protein

Cluster:10

Cluster:11

Backbone gene id Gene id Gene positions Chromosome-Contig Gene order 5'end 3'end Gene distanceDomain score

Annotated_gene_function

Gene_positions Chromosome-Contig Gene_order 5'end 3'end Gene_distanceDomain_score Backbone_gene_id Gene_id
Annotated_gene_function

AFLA_105190 AFLA_105090 10 2689 91 256083 254102 454 1 New cDNA-based gene: (AO_CDS_042706, novel, updateIDs: 9638, [gene: novel_gene_1014, model: novel_model_1014])

AFLA_109430 AFLA_109380 5 2689 520 1388586 1389948 1021 1 oxidoreductase, zinc-binding dehydrogenase family protein

Gene_positions Chromosome-Contig Gene_order 5'end 3'end Gene_distanceDomain_score Backbone_gene_id Gene_id
Annotated_gene_function

Cluster:55

AFLA_139670 AFLA_139560 11 2911 847 2302374 2300224 822 1 Fungal specific transcription factor domain containing protein