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Abiotic stress effects on grapevine (*Vitis vinifera* L.): Focus on abscisic acid-mediated consequences on secondary metabolism and berry quality.

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37

38 **Abiotic stress effects on grapevine (*Vitis vinifera* L.): focus on abscisic acid-mediated**
39 **consequences on secondary metabolism and berry quality.**

40

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45

46 **Keywords:** secondary metabolites; anthocyanins, polyphenols; flavonoids; carotenoids; tannins;
47 volatiles; ABA; water stress; water deficit; drought; light; temperature.

48

49 **Abstract**

50 This review deals with grapevine abscisic-acid (ABA) mediated responses to abiotic stress by
51 addressing stress consequences mainly on berry quality. Accumulation of secondary metabolites
52 as a plant defense strategy to abiotic stress is reviewed, together with perturbations of metabolite
53 molecular pathways. The role of ABA is highlighted as a link between berry ripening process and
54 grapevine response to stress. Abiotic stress (especially water scarcity, light and temperature)
55 modifies growth and development of all plant organs. The response to abiotic stress at the berry
56 level drives the accumulation in berry pulps, seeds and skins of secondary metabolites as a line of
57 defense against cell damages. Viticultural practices can be managed to control stress plant
58 response in order to influence berry secondary metabolite concentrations and profiles, reflecting
59 on an enhancement of table grape and must quality and on their nutraceutical and health
60 benefits, as grape berry secondary metabolites contribute to berry and wine taste and aroma, to
61 the potential antioxidant capacity of fruit and wines, to wine stabilization and protection during
62 ageing. Being stress response mainly ABA mediated, feeding of exogenous ABA to grapevine
63 organs is reviewed as a tool to enhance grape quality and to control abiotic stress. Consequences
64 in viticultural practices are discussed in relation to different abiotic stresses and global warming
65 effects.

66

67 **1. Introduction**

68 According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations time-series and cross
69 sectional data FAOSTAT (<http://faostat3.fao.org>) 69,654,925.50 tonnes of grapes on 7,086,021.81
70 ha were produced in the world in 2011. About 29 millions of wine tonnes were produced in 2011,
71 two thirds of them in the Mediterranean basin; considering that the yield of the transformation of
72 grape into wine is averagely 80 %, about 36 millions of tonnes are destined to the winemaking, the
73 remaining ones are fresh or dry consumed.

74 Regions with Mediterranean climate, where viticulture flourished since 1000 BC, are characterized
75 by long growing seasons, with moderate to warm temperatures. Throughout the year there is little
76 seasonal change in temperatures, and winters are generally warmer than those of maritime and
77 continental climates. During the grapevine growing season, there is very little rain fall (most
78 precipitation occurring in the winter months), which increases the risk of drought hazard in
79 viticulture (Robinson, 2006), especially in sandy and gravelly soils that do not retain water
80 (Tramontini et al., 2013).

81 Mediterranean climate ensures to grapevine long warm periods during the crucial phenological
82 stages of flowering, fruit set and ripening. The physiological processes of grapevines begin when
83 temperatures are around 10 °C. Below this temperature, vines are usually dormant. Above 35 °C,
84 on the contrary, plant adaptation to heat stress is activated. In addition to temperature, the
85 amount of rainfall and the need for supplemental irrigation are crucial characteristics for the
86 definition of viticultural areas (Keller, 2010). On average, a grapevine needs around 6 to 7
87 hundreds mm of water for sustenance during the growing season, not all of which may be
88 provided by natural rainfall. In the Mediterranean region, climate may be quite dry during the
89 grapevine growing season and vines may require additional irrigation to limit water deficit stress
90 (Chaves et al., 2007, 2010).

91 Berry quality, particularly that of winegrape varieties, is largely dependent on secondary
92 metabolites, i.e. on the accumulation of polyphenols and volatiles.

93 Plant secondary metabolism provides a line of defense in cellular response to abiotic stress
94 (Cramer et al., 2011) and induces an enhancement of grape quality, as secondary metabolites
95 contribute to colour, taste and aroma of fresh and dried grapes and they are involved in wine
96 stabilization and ageing processes. In the last decades this concept has largely been addressed, by
97 linking technological aspects (both agricultural and enological ones) with biological and molecular
98 aspects in viticulture, resulting in an increase of the related scientific literature (Figure 1a). Abscisic

99 acid has been proposed as the main mediator of grapevine biological response to abiotic stress,
100 especially drought. If, on one hand, the number of papers published on grape secondary
101 metabolism has linearly increased during the last fifteen years, due to the progress in science
102 applied to viticulture, on the other, it has exponentially increased when linked to abiotic stress and
103 especially to the ABA-mediated response to stress (Figure 1b).

104 In this review we address grapevine responses to the main abiotic stresses, highlighting the ABA
105 role in controlling environmental stress effects on secondary metabolism especially in berries, but
106 also in vegetative organs.

107

108 **2. Grape ripening: an ABA-induced process crossing with abiotic stress and secondary metabolite** 109 **accumulation**

110 In *Vitis vinifera* berries, the onset of ripening (véraison, i.e. the onset of anthocyanin accumulation
111 in colored-skin varieties) is proved to be tied to sugar accumulation (Gambetta et al., 2010) and it
112 is accompanied by a marked increase in ABA concentration (Deluc et al., 2009; Gambetta et al.,
113 2010; Owen et al., 2009).

114 Pirie and Mullins (1976) were the first to show a synergic effect of ABA and sucrose in grape leaf
115 anthocyanin accumulation. The hypothesis that ABA may drive ripening in grape berries has been
116 reinforced by the demonstration that exogenous ABA treatments at véraison enhance several
117 processes involved in berry ripening, such as soluble solid and anthocyanin accumulation and
118 organic acid concentration decrease (Coombe and Hale, 1973; Pirie and Mullins, 1976; Palejwala et
119 al., 1985; Wheeler et al., 2009; Deis et al., 2011; Sandhu et al., 2011; Xi et al., 2013; Ruiz-Garcia et
120 al., 2013).

121 Gene-specific studies on ABA molecular effects in grapevine berries have shown an activation of
122 anthocyanin biosynthetic genes and of the anthocyanin-synthesis related *VvmybA1* transcription
123 factor (Ban et al., 2003; Jeong et al., 2004), as well as in cucumber *R2R3Mybs* (Li et al., 2012), and
124 a delayed expression of condensed tannin biosynthetic genes (*VvANR* and *VvLAR2*) (Lacampagne
125 et al., 2010).

126 In berries ABA mostly acts through the regulation of the same proteins involved in the ripening
127 process, and several of these changes share common elements with the ABA-induced responses in
128 vegetative tissues (Giribaldi et al., 2010). Whether the increase of ABA concentration at véraison is
129 due to an *in loco* biosynthesis of ABA, consequently to the demonstrated activation of NCED genes
130 (Wheeler et al., 2009) or to a translocation of ABA from vegetative organs, is still unclear

131 (Castellarin et al., 2011). These authors studied the spatio-temporal berry ripening in a colored-
132 flesh berry variety ('Alicante Bouschet') pointing out that ripening begins in the stylar end flesh,
133 afterwards it moves to the pedicel end flesh and to skins; they showed a progressive and
134 correspondent up-regulation of VvNCED genes in the different tissues hand in hand colour
135 accumulates. However, as NCED genes are up-regulated in response to ABA itself (Koyama et al.,
136 2010; Sun et al., 2010; Wheeler et al., 2009), it is still unclear what causes the initial ABA
137 accumulation. ABA signaling during grape ripening interacts with plant responses to exogenous
138 stress, by regulating the process of plant adaptation through two interacting steps. First, ABA acts
139 via differential signal transduction pathways on cells which are the least and most affected by the
140 imposed stress. Second, ABA may regulate some genes and gene products, which control the
141 expression of stress or adaptative-specific genes. Some genes are up-regulated and others are
142 down regulated, resulting in overall synthesis of genomic products which may play a role in plant
143 survival under different environmental conditions (Swamy and Smith, 1999). Abscisic acid also
144 plays a role in plant response to biotic stress (Cao et al., 2011; Hayes et al., 2010). Moreover, the
145 interactions of biotic and abiotic stress signal transduction are known and reviewed (Kim, 2012;
146 Yang et al., 2012). In *Vitis vinifera* the ABA mediated responses to abiotic stress (especially water
147 stress) have been investigated since the 70s, whereas reports about ABA mediated response to
148 biotic stress are more recent. Many key genes (*VvMybA1* and *VvUFGT*) of the flavonoid
149 biosynthetic pathway were proved to be up-regulated during ripening so one can speculate that
150 stress conditions, leading to an ABA accumulation and inducing the activation of key genes of the
151 flavonoid biosynthesis, resolve in a berry quality increase, i.e. the accumulation of secondary
152 metabolites, polyphenols in particular. Demonstrations of this aspect are generally focused on the
153 detection of total concentrations of different polyphenolic groups so whether this increase is
154 always related to the accumulation of molecules deemed positive for the technological
155 transformation of grapes into wines or as nutraceuticals in table grape varieties, is still little
156 known; as a matter of fact few papers investigate how stress conditions can modify the profile of
157 specific polyphenols.

158

159 **3. Water stress**

160 Grapevine performances and berry quality depend on the vine adaptability to drought (Lovichio et
161 al., 2010). Water deficit does not exclusively cause negative effects, but a regulated water deficit,

162 which is the base of various agronomic practices, has largely been used to balance grapevine
163 vegetative and reproductive growth with the aim of controlling berry quality (Chaves et al., 2010).
164 In grapevines a direct role of ABA in stomatal closure upon water stress was demonstrated since
165 the 70s (Liu et al., 1978; Loveys, 1984; Loveys and Kriedemann, 1974). In different grapevine
166 genotypes, during the gradual imposition of soil water deficit, negative correlations between
167 stomatal conductance and either xylem (Pou et al., 2008; Rodrigues et al., 2008; Rogiers et al.,
168 2012) or leaf tissue (Liu et al., 1978; Lovisolo et al., 2002; Perrone et al., 2012a and 2012b) ABA
169 contents were often observed. On the basis of these observations, it is often assumed that root
170 ABA synthesis in response to water stress and transport through the xylem into leaves, or stress
171 induced ABA mobilization in leaf, mediate most of the stomatal response in grapevines. As a
172 determinant factor of stomatal closure, ABA controls both transpiration and assimilation,
173 enhancing expansive cell growth by saving leaf water and reducing xylem tension, likely altering
174 structural growth by limiting CO₂ entry (Pantin et al., 2012). Aquaporins are another target for ABA
175 to regulate both water and carbon fluxes. ABA affects aquaporin regulation in response to abiotic
176 stresses (Kaldenhoff et al., 2008) by modulating their gene expression and protein abundance or
177 activity, affecting, in turn, cellular water relations and cell metabolism in response to water stress.
178 By negative control of stomatal conductance, ABA drives drought avoidance mechanisms. In
179 addition, by controlling secondary lines of plant defense, ABA is an active mediator of plant
180 tolerance to water stress.

181 Adaptation of plants to water deficit is a wide and complex biological process that implies global
182 changes in gene expression and primary and secondary metabolite composition. NCED genes were
183 shown to be up-regulated under water stress conditions in *Arabidopsis thaliana* where ABA
184 exerted a role as transcriptional regulator of the biosynthesis of the branched-chain amino acids,
185 saccharopine, proline and polyamine (Urano et al., 2009). The grapevine response to water stress,
186 lowering cell turgor, above all if applied in pre-véraison, increased berry sugar influx and ABA
187 concentration (Davies et al., 2006). The expression of genes such as F3H, F3O5'H, LDOX and DFR,
188 notably involved in the biosynthesis of anthocyanins, proanthocyanidins and flavonols, increased
189 in water-deficit conditions (Castellarin et al., 2007a; Castellarin et al., 2007b). Moreover, during
190 grape berry ripening the expression of genes such as UFGT and GST, strictly associated with the
191 anthocyanin accumulation the former and the anthocyanin transport into the vacuole, the latter
192 (Ageorges et al., 2006; Deluc et al., 2007), were strongly up-regulated under water stress
193 conditions. The effect of water stress on polyphenol accumulation in grapevine berries has widely

194 been investigated over the past years (Kennedy et al., 2002; Koundouras et al., 2006; Matthews
195 and Anderson, 1988; Ojeda et al., 2002; Poni et al., 2007). Many studies dealt with the
196 accumulation of some classes of polyphenols such as anthocyanins and tannins in grapevine
197 varieties characterized by different behavior as to water relation. *Vitis* genotypes in fact, show
198 either an isohydric or anisohydric response to water stress. In isohydric cultivars, an ABA control of
199 stomatal conductance reduces transpiration avoiding decrease in water potential and delaying the
200 onset of stress tolerance mechanisms. On the contrary, a weak ABA control of stomatal closure
201 does not avoid midday drop in water potential in anisohydric grapevines (Lovisolo et al., 2010).
202 Upon water stress, polyphenolic concentration increases in berries both in isohydric varieties such
203 as 'Grenache' (Coipel et al., 2006), 'Tempranillo' (Santesteban et al., 2011), 'Manto negro'
204 (Medrano et al., 2003), and in anisohydric varieties such as 'Cabernet Sauvignon' (Bindon et al.,
205 2008; Kennedy et al., 2002), 'Cabernet Franc' (Matthews and Anderson, 1988), 'Muscat of
206 Alexandria' (dos Santos et al., 2007), with different temporal dynamics linkable to putative ABA
207 induction. As to the anthocyanin profile, Castellarin and co-workers (2007b) showed that water
208 stress conditions favored the accumulation of more hydroxylated and more methylated
209 anthocyanins (peonidin 3-O-glucoside and malvidin 3-O-glucoside); Deluc and co-workers (2009)
210 reported for 'Cabernet Sauvignon' a 4-fold higher accumulation of peonidin 3-O-glucoside in water
211 stressed plants respect to well watered ones. As to the profile of polyphenols other than
212 anthocyanins, few information are currently available in grapevine. No effects were exerted by
213 water stress on berry skin proanthocyanidin concentration in 'Cabernet Sauvignon' (Castellarin et
214 al., 2007a) as well as in concentration and profile in 'Syrah' (Olle et al., 2011). However, in green
215 leaf tea it was assessed in vivo that water deficit could increase the concentration of
216 proanthocyanidins and their profile changed greatly due to the transformation of $-(-)$ epicatechin
217 and $-(-)$ epigallocatechin gallate into their correspondent quinones (Hernandez et al., 2006).
218 Quinones are involved in the modulation of lipoxygenase activity both as pure molecules and as
219 soybean extract (Chedea et al., 2010); this aspect could have important consequences at the berry
220 level both in terms of nutraceutical implications (in table grapes) and of technological
221 transformation in winemaking (Cheynier et al., 1997).
222 The flavonol synthase (FLS), a pivotal enzyme of flavonol biosynthesis, was up-regulated in water
223 stress conditions (Deluc et al., 2009) and flavonol concentration increased in 'Chardonnay' berries
224 but not in 'Cabernet Sauvignon' ones. At present, to the best of our knowledge, the possible

225 involvement of water stress on flavonol profile is not known as well as no studies dealt with the
226 effect of water deficit on cinnamic and benzoic acids and their ester derivatives.

227 The response of *Vitis vinifera* to water stress conditions as to carotenoid accumulation was not
228 univocal but it was shown to be dependent on the soil characteristics: in a high water retention
229 capacity soil no differences in the accumulation of carotenoids were detected among vines
230 undergoing different water regimes, whereas in a low water retention capacity soil, berry
231 carotenoid accumulation was higher in plants suffering from a severe water stress (Oliveira et al.,
232 2003). One can speculate that, being the water intakes similar, soils or portions of soils in the same
233 vineyard, able to induce water stress earlier, besides influencing the anthocyanin concentration, as
234 well documented, are able to influence the accumulation of carotenoids in berries. Water deficit
235 increased the transcript abundance of isoprenoids and carotenoids in 'Chardonnay' at maturity
236 (Deluc et al., 2009), together with the increase of flavonol synthase; in the same work however
237 authors assessed that the transcript abundance of CCDs and terpene synthases was not up-
238 regulated in 'Cabernet Sauvignon' and no increase in flavonol concentration was measured in
239 colored berries of 'Cabernet Sauvignon', as well; they speculated that the increased concentration
240 of flavonols in water-stressed 'Chardonnay' berries, together with the higher transcript abundance
241 of enzymes of terpenoid and carotenoid biosynthesis in the white grape variety, indicates a
242 greater need for photoprotection, probably tied to the constitutive lack of anthocyanins. However,
243 deficit irrigation in 'Cabernet Sauvignon' (Bindon et al., 2007) increased the accumulation of C-13
244 norisoprenoids, one of the carotenoid cleavage products. Some important differences among
245 white and red wines, such as the higher floral and fruity notes of the former respect to the latter
246 could rely on the fact that white varieties, lacking of anthocyanins, have adapted to abiotic stress
247 through the enhancement of carotenoid (norisoprenoid precursors) and terpenoid biosynthesis.
248 Further transcriptomic and metabolomic insights would be necessary to clarify the hypothesis that
249 genotypes, on one hand, and conditions (cultural practices, environment, etc...), on the other, are
250 able to favour the accumulation of polyphenols, reduce the accumulation of volatiles and vice-versa;
251 longtime ago Di Stefano and co-workers through the exclusive recourse to analytical
252 measurements pointed out that varieties with a high anthocyanin concentrations were less rich in
253 flavors, terpenols in particular, respect to low-concentration anthocyanin varieties (Cravero et al.,
254 1994).

255 Water stress significantly affected the transcript abundance of four lipoxygenases (LOxs) in berries

256 of 'Cabernet Sauvignon' and 'Chardonnay' (Deluc et al., 2009) even though two of them showed a
257 reduced transcript abundance in 'Cabernet Sauvignon' after véraison; authors argue that the
258 interpretation of data is difficult, however evidences of the influences exerted by water stress on
259 this metabolism was demonstrated in *Arabidopsis thaliana* (Melan et al., 1993) and it is likely also
260 in *Vitis vinifera*. LOXs are a wide gene family ubiquitous in plants and tissues (Liavonchanka and
261 Feussner, 2006); they catalyze the membrane fatty acid lipoxygenation determining the
262 production of C6 volatile aldehydes, the most abundant volatiles in different plant organs,
263 involved in plant defense signaling (Kishimoto et al., 2006), in storage lipid mobilization and in
264 jasmonic acid biosynthesis. These compounds, with herbaceous notes, can be transformed into
265 the correspondent alcohol by alcohol-dehydrogenases (ADHs) and they can react with organic acid
266 to produce esters, giving evident relapses on wine quality. These compounds have recently been
267 indicated as the "master-switch" in plant development and stress adaptation (Liavonchanka and
268 Feussner, 2006).

269 The known water deficit effects on grapevine physiology have allowed an improvement of
270 viticulture through the enhancement of berry quality: rescue irrigation techniques such as
271 regulated deficit irrigation or partial root-zone drying, the use of rootstocks tolerant to water
272 scarcity, the use of controlled cover crops, soil tillage and green pruning have been proposed to
273 improve grape berry development and quality, as reviewed by Dai et al. (2010; 2011) and Keller
274 (Keller, 2005). In this sense, cultural practices can be managed to control the effects of a stress-
275 impaired plant metabolism on the accumulation of sugars and secondary metabolites in berry,
276 including responses to severe osmotic stress in berry cells, and the consequences at the berry level
277 of the chemically-mediated long distance stress signaling between root and shoot.

278

279 **4. Light stress**

280 The light stress implies photosynthetic activity variations, photoinhibition, and photooxidation. In
281 leaves light deficiency and excess induce stomatal and metabolic responses such as the
282 accumulation of antioxidants, namely ascorbate, glutathione, flavonoids, carotenoids and of
283 enzymes controlling their oxido-reductive state (Fini et al., 2011); in *Arabidopsis thaliana* leaves
284 (Page et al., 2012) light intensity was shown to be able to influence the accumulation of
285 anthocyanins confirming the role of these molecules, together with ascorbate, as
286 photoprotectants. On the contrary, the accumulation of the flavonol kaempferol 3-O-glucoside
287 was unaffected and, in ascorbate deficient mutants, there was no significant accumulation of ABA,

288 suggesting that in this model plant ABA could not be involved in the mediation of the response to
289 light stress. However, in potatoes an up-regulation of anthocyanidin glucosyltransferase (GT) was
290 demonstrated in response to UV, cold, light, salt and ABA, resulting in 5.5, 6.0, 5.0, 5.0 and 8.0 fold
291 increase in enzyme activity, respectively. Moreover, a synergistic effect of ABA+cold and cold+light
292 was detected, as well (Korobczak et al., 2005). In *Vitis vinifera* leaves the effect of light on the
293 increase of photoprotective compound concentration is known and documented (Kolb et al.,
294 2001).

295 Recently, Berli and co-workers (2010, 2011) have suggested that the leaf antioxidant defense
296 system is activated by UV-B irradiation and ABA acts downstream in the signaling pathway for
297 most enzymes of the photoprotection response. Tossi et al. (2009) suggested that UV-B perception
298 triggers an increase in ABA concentration, which activates NADPH oxidase and hydrogen peroxide
299 generation; this, through a nitric oxide (NO) synthase-like-dependent mechanism, increases NO
300 production to maintain cell homeostasis and attenuate UV-B-derived cell damage. Interestingly,
301 the same authors recently proposed that the induction of common signaling components, such as
302 ABA and NO in either plant or animal cells occurs in response to high doses of UV-B, showing that
303 the evolution of a general mechanism activated by UV-B is conserved in divergent multicellular
304 organisms, and it could be interpreted as a challenge to a changing common environment (Tossi et
305 al., 2012).

306 Some responses, such as the accumulation of quercetin and kaempferol in grape tissues were
307 activated both by UV-B and ABA applications whereas some others, such as caffeic and ferulic acid
308 concentration increase, were activated by ABA alone. The possible implications of these aspects at
309 the level of berry quality is well evident, together with the fact that also leaf carotenoids were
310 enhanced by UV-B treatment: in this case, the level of endogenous ABA increased, as well, being
311 carotenoids its precursors. The pigment analysis of 'Sauvignon blanc' berries allowed the
312 identification of the xanthophyll, lutein 5,6 epoxide (Young et al., 2012); this molecule occurs in
313 the alfa-carotene branch of the carotenoid biosynthetic pathway and in *Cucumis sativus* (Esteban
314 et al., 2009) its accumulation has been shown to be a plant early response to shade conditions.
315 Grapevine synthesizes carotenoids both from the violanthin cycle and the lutein epoxide cycle
316 (Young et al., 2012): possible implications on berry quality could also rely on the formation of
317 lutein 5,6 epoxide catabolites, impacting on berry quality. Moreover, even though in *Vitis vinifera*
318 at present there are no information about a possible transcriptional regulation of carotenoid
319 biosynthetic genes, it can be speculated that environmental conditions and vineyard management

320 techniques can drive the profile of carotenoid accumulation in berries, besides influencing their
321 total final concentration. In addition, possible further implications on fruit quality are evident
322 being carotenoids the precursors of C-13 norisoprenoids, a class of volatiles whose sensorial
323 impact in many fruits, grapes and wines is known.

324 In berries of *Vitis vinifera* the influence exerted by light on the accumulation of some polyphenols
325 is quite documented but at present there are no demonstrations of a possible talk-cross with ABA
326 in this response. Downey et al., (2004) did not find, in 2 out of 3 years, significant difference
327 between shade and light exposure treatments in 'Syrah' berry anthocyanin accumulation
328 confirming previous results by Price et al., (1995) in 'Pinot noir'. Other authors, on the contrary,
329 pointed out that shading considerably (32 %) even though not significantly, reduced the
330 anthocyanin content at harvest in 'Pinot noir' berries (Cortell and Kennedy, 2006). Chorti et al.,
331 (2010), in 'Nebbiolo' grapes, a peonidin 3-O-glucoside prevalent grapevine variety, assessed that
332 shading reduced the anthocyanin total content and enhanced the level of acylation with p-
333 coumaric acid, i.e. favored the formation of p-coumaroyl derivatives which are the prevalent
334 anthocyanin derivatives in most grapevine genotypes. The effects of light on grapevine physiology
335 have been exploited to address grape berry quality: different training systems, influencing the vine
336 light use efficiency (Cavallo et al., 2001; Louarn et al., 2008; Orlandini et al., 2008; Petrie et al.,
337 2009) exert pivotal consequences on berry quality. Trellis system able to increase shading within
338 the vine canopy resulted in berries with reduced anthocyanin and phenol concentrations respect
339 to controls in 'Aglianico' (Cavallo et al., 2001); on the contrary, no influences were detected in
340 'Syrah' grapevines trained to five different trellis system on polyphenolic concentration over two
341 years (Wolf et al., 2003).

342 If the effect of light exposure on berry anthocyanin concentration is not univocal, no doubts about
343 the light effect on flavonol accumulation exist: berry skin flavonol concentration is known to be
344 very sensitive to light exposure, resulting in a higher concentration in exposed berries respect to
345 shaded ones (Cortell and Kennedy, 2006; Kolb et al., 2003; Matus et al., 2009). At present there
346 are no information about the effect of light exposure on the flavonol profile in berries; however in
347 berry skins of different varieties (Ferrandino et al., 2012b) and of different clones (Ferrandino and
348 Guidoni, 2010) over two years, some flavonol profile characteristics were not dependent on
349 vintage (i.e. different light dynamics over the season), so we can speculate that the light effect on
350 the accumulation of some specific flavonols (kaempferol 3-O-glucoside, in particular) is probably
351 negligible, in line with studies on *Arabidopsis thaliana* where increasing light intensities did not

352 influence the accumulation of this compound in leaves (Page et al., 2012). In *in vitro* cultured
353 plants of *Vitis vinifera* exposed to two different intensities of 'field-like' UV-B light it was assessed
354 that low UV-B intensities increased the levels of triterpenes sitosterol, stigmasterol and lupeol, in
355 young leaves, whereas in mature leaves the accumulation of antioxidants such as diterpenes,
356 tocopherols, phytol, E-nerolidol and of monoterpenes such as carene, alfa-pinene and terpinolene
357 was maximum under high UV-B (Gil et al., 2012). Also ABA concentration increased after high UV-B
358 irradiation; one can wonder if the ABA concentration increase was a direct response to light stress
359 or a consequence to the increase of carotenoid concentration, precursors of ABA itself. Except for
360 the documented effect of artificial shading on the reduction of monoterpenols and norisoprenoids
361 in 'Muscat of Frontignan' grapes (Bureau et al., 2000) and in 'Sauvignon blanc' (unpublished data),
362 no specific information are at present available about the effect of light on volatiles in berries even
363 though, being most of these molecules, present in tissues other than berries where their
364 concentration generally increases following stress conditions (Gil et al., 2012), studies on the
365 influence of light intensity and profile on berry volatile accumulation deserve future deepening.

366

367 **5. Temperature stress**

368 Temperature plays an important role in the ripening of many fruits, including grape berries.
369 Temperature trends are so determinant for grape phenology, that historical series of grape
370 ripening have been used to reconstruct temperatures to provide insight into regional-scale climate
371 variations (Chuine et al., 2004). In the last decade much attention has been focused on the global
372 warming effects in many fields of agriculture (Wolfe et al., 2008) and in viticulture, as well
373 (Hannah et al., 2013; Jones et al., 2005). Effects of temperature increase in viticulture have been
374 discussed in the light of political, social, ecological implications in the Mediterranean area,
375 following a predicted average temperature increase of 2 °C in the next 50 years (Hannah et al.,
376 2013; Jones et al., 2005). Accordingly, regions producing at present high quality and valuable
377 wines at the margins of *Vitis vinifera* climatic limits, in conditions of further climate change, will be
378 in consistent difficulties to maintain high quality levels of production with the traditionally
379 cultivated varieties. On the contrary, the warmer conditions of locations which are at the moment
380 out of the favored areas for quality grape production, will probably turn into areas more favorable
381 to grapevine growing and fine wine production (Goode, 2012). Although the main meteorological
382 parameter implicated in global climate change is temperature, few are information, particularly as

383 to field grown plants, on temperature effects on ABA-mediated phenolic and volatile compound
384 accumulation.

385 Cold temperatures induce ABA synthesis, reflecting on phenolic accumulation and/or biosynthesis
386 enhancement (Keller, 2010; Xin et al., 2013). However, in Mediterranean cool viticultural areas an
387 increase of temperature is often linked to an enhancement of phenolic accumulation. In such
388 situations a heat increment optimizes primary metabolism, allowing fresh carbon available to
389 flavonoid biosynthesis, when an up-regulation of genes of flavonoid biosynthesis does not occur. A
390 positive effect of ABA on non-structural carbohydrate metabolism (both starch and hexoses, Çakir
391 et al., 2003) becomes crucial in light of hexose-induced activation of flavonoid metabolism. In this
392 sense, a likely threshold effect could occur in grapevine grown in cool climate areas, as Meng et al.
393 (2008) showed that cucumber seedlings treated with 50 and 150 μM ABA under low temperature
394 accumulate substantial amounts of soluble carbohydrates whereas 250 μM ABA treated seedlings
395 show, on the contrary, decreased levels of all soluble carbohydrates, as compared to the control
396 seedlings treated with 0 μM ABA. Not only an ABA-mediated effect of temperature stress can
397 influence leaf and berry secondary metabolites, but in addition, through ABA negative control on
398 stomatal aperture and transpiration rate, an increased concentration of ABA tends to buffer the
399 day-night alternations of metabolite biosynthesis in response to heat and cold. This mechanism,
400 suggested for ABA regulation of leaf growth rate by Tardieu et al. (2010), is amplified in presence
401 of water stress, *per se* causing an ABA increase. The antagonistic effect of ABA to high night
402 temperatures was demonstrated (Mori et al., 2005a): as a matter of fact by feeding 'Pinot noir'
403 vines with ABA, the suppressive effect of high temperatures on total anthocyanin amount was
404 annulled even though no effects were exerted on the anthocyanin profile. In an *in vivo* incubation
405 of 'Cabernet Sauvignon' grape berries with salicylic acid, the increase in total polyphenols
406 detected via the Folin-Ciocalteu method was consequent to the activation of phenyl alanine
407 ammonia-lyase (PAL) induced under high temperature stress conditions (Wen et al., 2008);
408 authors argued that salicylic acid can act as an answer to oxidative stress induced by very high
409 temperatures (40 °C) via the induction of the phenylpropanoid pathway, thus favoring the
410 consequent accumulation of antioxidants as polyphenols.

411 High temperatures repressed the anthocyanin accumulation in various plants, including grapevines
412 where in an interspecific hybrid, high night temperature conditions depressed the expression level
413 of the key enzymes of the anthocyanin biosynthesis, UFGT, in particular, resulting in a significantly

414 lower anthocyanin concentration in grape berries (Mori et al., 2005b). The same authors in a work
415 on 'Cabernet Sauvignon' grapes showed that high temperatures reduced the total anthocyanin
416 amount but they did not change the concentration of malvidin glucoside and of its acylated
417 derivatives; in addition, as the anthocyanin biosynthetic genes were not strongly, but only
418 partially, down-regulated they concluded that under high temperatures, the reduction of berry
419 skin anthocyanin concentrations was also imputable to anthocyanin degradation, probably due to
420 both chemical and enzymatic reactions occurring in berries still on the vine. As a matter of fact,
421 high temperatures would probably induce an oxidative stress leading to the formation of H₂O₂
422 with the subsequent induction of peroxidases and of oxidoreduction enzymes, responsible of
423 anthocyanin degradation (Mori et al., 2007).

424 Little is known about the impact of temperature on proanthocyanidin accumulation in grape skins:
425 in an experiment hold on field-grown Merlot vines cooled during the day or heated at night by +/-
426 8 °C, from fruit set to véraison in three years, the total PA content per berry varied only in one
427 year, when PA content was the highest in heated berries and the lowest in cooled berries.
428 Differences in the profile were instead detected in two years over three as cooled berries resulted
429 in a significant increase in the proportion of (-)-epigallocatechin as extension subunit. When the
430 expression level of several genes involved in the flavonoid biosynthetic pathway was assessed, it
431 emerged that berry heating and cooling altered the initial rates of PA accumulation but, as PA
432 accumulation is concentrated prior to véraison, berries were able to compensate the initial effects
433 of temperature on PA biosynthesis resulting in similar concentration of PA at harvest (Cohen et al.,
434 2012). Cooling berries during the day induced a higher flavonol content at véraison but lowered
435 flavonol and PA concentration at harvest (Cohen et al., 2008).

436 Cool temperatures increased the concentrations of C6 volatile aldehydes in 'Traminette' berries
437 whereas the monoterpenes concentration was higher in hot conditions respect to cool conditions
438 (Ji and Dami, 2008). Some insights exist about the effect of temperatures on the expression of
439 alcohol dehydrogenases (ADHs): ADHs, involved in the volatile biosynthesis thorough the
440 reduction of aldehydes into the correspondent alcohol and providing substrates for the ester
441 formation, have a specific role in the regulation of aroma biosynthesis in melon fruit (Manriquez et
442 al., 2006) and in *Vitis vinifera*, as well (Tesniere et al., 2006): grapevines over-expressing ADH
443 displayed a lower sucrose content, a high degree of proanthocyanidin polymerization and higher
444 concentration of volatiles, namely carotenoids and shikimate derivatives. Few studies report about
445 the effect of temperature on ADHs and they all were conducted in post-harvest conditions where,

446 different temperatures can lead to the over- or down-expression of ADHs, resulting in a higher or
447 lower ester concentration: however, during grape berry dehydration, the effect of temperature on
448 aldehydes dehydrogenase (ADH) and on carotenoid cleavage dioxygenase (CCD1) was
449 demonstrated: Cirilli et al. (2012) pointed out that in dehydration conditions the expression of
450 ADH2 and CCD1 in Aleatico grapes was the highest in grapes dehydrated at 10 °C respect to the
451 one detected at higher temperatures. To the best of our knowledge there are little information
452 related to the effect of temperature in grape berries still on the vine. This opens to important
453 future perspectives as recent interest as arisen around volatile alcohols and aldehydes due to their
454 involvement in plant response to biotic stress (Matsui, 2006; Shiojiri et al., 2006) and to the fact
455 that they represent the majority of varietal and pre-fermentative volatile in fresh grapes
456 (Ferrandino et al., 2012a; Kalua and Boss, 2010; Yang et al., 2009).

457

458 **6. Stress-mediated variations of berry and must quality improve the nutraceutical value of** 459 **grapes**

460 Epidemiological data indicate a beneficial effect of Mediterranean diets on human health,
461 especially associated to the lower incidence of cardiovascular diseases. Heinrich et al. (2005)
462 tested *in vitro* Mediterranean plant extracts through different tests: four antioxidant tests (2,2-
463 diphenyl-1-picrylhydrazyl scavenging –DDPH-, prevention of oxyhaemoglobin bleaching,
464 prevention of lipid peroxidation, and protection from DNA damage), three enzyme inhibition tests
465 (inhibition of xanthine oxidase, inhibition of myeloperoxidase-catalysed guaiacol oxidation, and
466 inhibition of acetylcholine esterase), one test investigating the extract potential cytotoxicity, one
467 assay measuring their anti-proliferation potential, one test assessing the anti-diabetic activity, and
468 one investigating the extract effect on mood disorder-related biochemical parameters. They
469 concluded that grape extracts, together with those derived from *Berberis vulgaris*, *Reichardia*
470 *picroides*, *Scandix australis*, *Satureja montana*, *Thymus piperella*, and *Lythrum salicaria* show the
471 highest activity in a broad range of assays, suggesting that grapes and grape derivatives may
472 contribute to the observed better aging of rural Mediterranean populations.

473 Kelsey et al. (2010) reviewed the literature pertaining to various classes of nutraceutical
474 antioxidants and discussed their potential therapeutic value in neurodegenerative diseases, by
475 dividing natural antioxidants into several distinct groups based on their chemical structures.
476 Among them, flavonoid polyphenols like epigallocatechins and non-flavonoid polyphenols such as
477 resveratrol, deriving from grapes, were included either because they directly scavenge free

478 radicals or they indirectly increase endogenous cellular antioxidant defenses. In addition,
479 neuroprotective effects of anthocyanins on apoptosis (i.e. programmed cell death) induced by
480 mitochondrial oxidative stress have been reported (Kelsey et al., 2011).

481 Options of grapes to prevent cancer and chronic diseases (atherosclerosis, cataract, diabetes,
482 neurological diseases, immune-inflammatory disorders) to improve life quality in maturity,
483 following main antioxidant defense mechanisms have been reported (Ferrari and Torres, 2003), as
484 well as antioxidant and antiobesity activities of 'Campbell Early' grape seeds (Oh et al., 2013).

485 Recently, malvidin 3-O-glucoside effects on the cardiovascular function have been tested by using
486 red grape skin extracts, containing a malvidin 3-O-glucoside amount of about 65 mg/g of fresh
487 skin. On isolated and Langendorff perfused rat hearts, Quintieri et al. (2013) found that increasing
488 doses (1-1000 ng/ml) of the extract induced positive inotropic and negative lusitropic effects
489 associated with coronary dilation. In addition, they found that malvidin 3-O-glucoside acts as a
490 post-conditioning agent, being able to elicit cardioprotection against ischemia/reperfusion
491 damages, and proposed malvidin as a new cardioprotective principle.

492 In plants, all phenylpropanoids, particularly flavonoids, play primary antioxidant functions in the
493 responses of plants to a wide range of abiotic stresses. Stress-responsive dihydroxy B-ring-
494 substituted flavonoids have great potential to inhibit the generation of reactive oxygen species
495 (ROS) and reduce the levels of ROS once they are formed, performing antioxidant functions (Agati
496 et al., 2012). A strong antioxidant ROS-scavenging activity, determined by both DPPH and FRAP
497 assays, has recently been reported in the berry skin and wine of 'Aglanico' grapes harvested from
498 plants cultivated upon controlled drought and high light levels (De Nisco et al., 2013). Even if the
499 significance of flavonoids as scavengers of reactive oxygen species (ROS) in humans has been
500 questioned, based on the observation that the flavonoid concentration in plasma and most tissues
501 is too low to effectively reduce ROS, flavonoids play key roles as signaling molecules in mammals,
502 through their ability to interact with a wide range of protein kinases, including mitogen-activated
503 protein kinases (MAPK), that control key steps of cell growth and differentiation (Brunetti et al.,
504 2013). Flavonoid function in plants is actually restricted to flavonols, the ancient and widespread
505 class of flavonoids. Upon light stress, flavonols are not as efficient as other secondary metabolites
506 in absorbing wavelengths in the 290-320 nm spectral region, but display the greatest potential to
507 keep stress-induced changes in cellular reactive oxygen species homeostasis under control, and to
508 regulate the development of individual organs and the whole plant (Pollastri and Tattini, 2011).

509

510 **7. Feeding grapevine organs with exogenous ABA: a tool to enhance grape quality and to control** 511 **abiotic stress**

512 Exogenous ABA application are moderately used in the production of table grapes, to hasten
513 ripening, to increase berry color and to regulate other key processes such as dormancy (Zhang et
514 al., 2011). Since few years a commercial product containing ABA was authorized in Chile and in
515 California where it is essentially used for the enhancement of color development in table grapes.
516 Research on the application of exogenous ABA is not so wide at present and is focalized on table
517 grape varieties such as 'Flame seedless' (Peppi and Fidelibus, 2008; Peppi et al., 2006), 'Crimson
518 Seedless' (Cantin et al., 2007; Lurie et al., 2009; Peppi et al., 2008), 'Redglobe' (Omran, 2011) and
519 'Benitaka' (Roberto et al., 2012); evidences about exogenous ABA application in 'Chambourcin'
520 and 'Cabernet franc' grapes were reported in relation to the increase of freeze tolerance (Zhang
521 and Dami, 2012a; Zhang and Dami, 2012b), as well. Xiao et al (2006) reported that the C-repeat
522 (CRT)-binding factor/dehydration-responsive element (DRE) binding protein 1 (CBF/DREB1)
523 transcription factors (CBF1), controlling freezing and drought tolerance in plants, were
524 accumulated in young *Vitis vinifera* leaves in response to exogenous ABA application. Moreover,
525 foliar application of exogenous ABA were applied to increase the phenolic compound content of
526 xylem sap extracted from 'Pinot noir' vines, resulting in an increase in the Pierce's disease curing
527 (Meyer and Kirkpatrick, 2011).

528 Koyama et al. (2010) comprehensively examined the effect of exogenous ABA application on the
529 transcriptome and on the phenolic profiles of 'Cabernet Sauvignon' berry skins. As expected,
530 exogenous ABA induced anthocyanin and hexose accumulation in the skins. Moreover, the
531 analysis of transcripts revealed that about half of ABA-induced transcripts in the berries
532 corresponded to ripening-specific genes; these ripening-specific genes were showed to be up- and
533 down-regulated in the berry skins. ABA- and ripening-induced genes included genes associated
534 with stress response, such as beta-1,3-glucanase, chitinases, thaumatins, LEA proteins, as well as
535 genes associated with cell wall modification such as polygalacturonase PG1 and proline-rich cell
536 wall proteins, in addition to anthocyanin biosynthetic genes. Moreover, the ABA- and ripening-
537 induced genes included those associated with photosynthesis such as chlorophyll a/b binding
538 protein, photosystem components and those associated with auxin response. The relapses on the
539 berry skin transcriptional response were shown to be wide and for some of them possible
540 implications on secondary metabolite accumulation were evident; further insights will help to
541 elucidate possible consequences on grape quality (Wheeler et al., 2009).

542

543 **8. Conclusions**

544 In grapevine, abiotic stress modifies growth and development of all plant organs. The response to
545 abiotic stress at the berry level drives the accumulation in berry pulps, seeds and skins of
546 secondary metabolites as a line of defense against cell damages. Viticultural practices can be
547 managed to control stress plant response in order to increase secondary metabolite
548 concentrations, reflecting on an enhancement of table grape and must quality, as secondary
549 metabolites of grapes contribute to fruit and wine taste and aroma, to the potential antioxidant
550 capacity of fruit and wines, to wine stabilization and protection during ageing.

551

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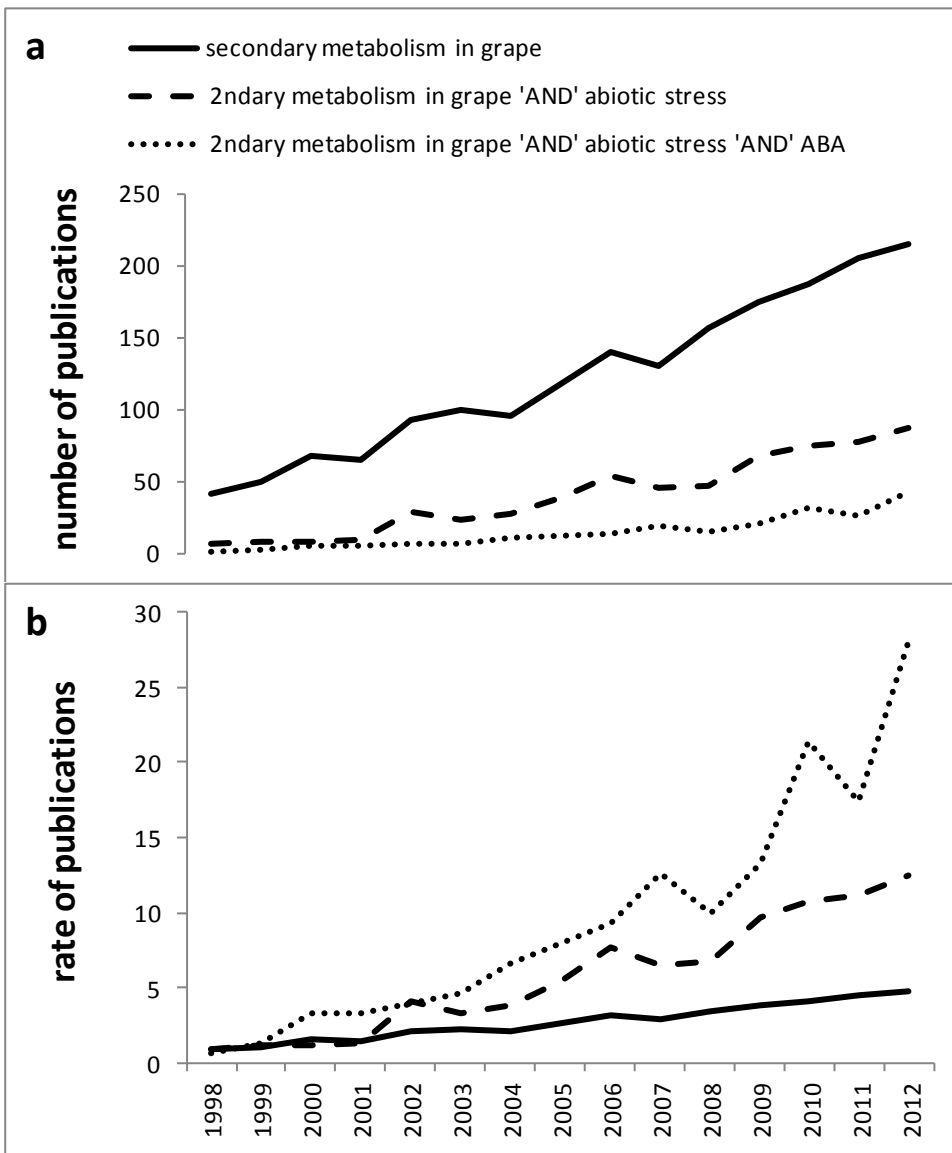
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974 Figure 1. Publications published during the last 15 years on grape secondary metabolism and links
 975 to abiotic stress and to the ABA-response to stress: (a) number and (b) rate (i.e. the numbers of
 976 papers published each year divided by the average number of papers published in the first three
 977 years of the observed period). Key words used in the search of ISI Web of KnowledgeSM included:
 978 *Vitis* OR grape*, secondary metabolism (including sub-terms; e.g. flavon* OR phenol* OR anthoc*
 979 OR metabolite*), AND abiotic stress (including stress sub-terms; e.g. drought OR water deficit OR
 980 dehydration OR temperature OR cold OR heat OR light stress), AND abscisic acid OR ABA.