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Chronic heat stress affects the photosynthetic apparatus of *Solanum lycopersicum* L. cv Micro-Tom

This is the final peer-reviewed author's accepted manuscript (postprint) of the following publication:

Published Version:

Parrotta, L., Aloisi, I., Faleri, C., Romi, M., Del Duca, S., Cai, G. (2020). Chronic heat stress affects the photosynthetic apparatus of *Solanum lycopersicum* L. cv Micro-Tom. *PLANT PHYSIOLOGY AND BIOCHEMISTRY*, 154, 463-475 [10.1016/j.plaphy.2020.06.047].

Availability:

This version is available at: <https://hdl.handle.net/11585/766507> since: 2020-07-20

Published:

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.plaphy.2020.06.047>

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1 **Chronic heat stress affects the photosynthetic apparatus of *Solanum lycopersicum***
2 **L. cv Micro-Tom**

3
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34 **Keywords:** Heat Stress, *Solanum lycopersicum*, RuBisCo, Photosynthesis, Metabolism

35 **Highlights**

- 36 • Heat stress affects the photosynthetic apparatus of tomato plant.
- 37 • Heat stress induces changes in ATP, ADP and sugar concentrations of tomato leaves.
- 38 • Rubisco enzyme's isoforms are differently accumulated in tomato leaves during heat stress.
- 39 • Heat stress causes morphological and histological variations in tomato leaves.

40 **Abstract**

41 Tomato (*Solanum lycopersicum* L.) is one of the most widely cultivated crops in the world. Tomato
42 is a plant model and the relationship between yield and biotic/abiotic stress has attracted increasing
43 scientific interest. Tomato cultivation under sub-optimal conditions usually has a negative impact on
44 growth and development; in particular, heat stress affects several cellular and metabolic processes,
45 such as respiration and photosynthesis. In this work, we studied the effects of chronic heat stress on
46 various cytological and biochemical aspects using the Micro-Tom cultivar as a model. Photosynthetic
47 efficiency decreased during heat stress while levels of post-photosynthetic sugars (sucrose, fructose,
48 glucose and glucose 6-phosphate) oscillated during stress. Similarly, photosynthetic pigments (lutein,
49 chlorophyll a, chlorophyll b and β -carotene) showed an oscillating downward trend with partial
50 recovery during the stress-free phase. The energetic capacity of leaves (*e.g.* ATP and ADP) was
51 altered, as well as the Reactive Oxygen Species (ROS) profile; the latter increased during stress.
52 Important effects were also found on the accumulation of Rubisco isoforms, which decreased in
53 number. Heat stress also resulted in a decreased accumulation of lipids (oleic and linoleic acid).
54 Photosynthetically alterations were accompanied by cytological changes in leaf structure, particularly
55 in the number of lipid bodies and starch granules. The collected data indicate that the metabolism of
56 tomato leaves is progressively compromised as the duration of heat stress increases. The present study
57 reports multi-approach information on metabolic and photosynthetic injuries and responses of tomato
58 plants to chronic heat stress, highlighting the plant's ability to adapt to stress.

59

60 **Abbreviations:**

61	DAB	Diaminobenzidine
62	HPLC	High-Performance Liquid Chromatography
63	HPLC-MS	High-Performance Liquid Chromatography Mass Spectrometry
64	HSP	Heat Shock Protein
65	LB	Lipid Bodies
66	Pi	Performance Index
67	PSI	Photosystem I
68	PSII	Photosystem II
69	ROS	Reactive Oxygen Species
70	RT	Room Temperature
71	Rubisco	Ribulose 1,5-bisphosphate carboxylase
72	SuSy	Sucrose Synthase
73	TEM	Transmission Electron Microscope

74

75 **1. Introduction**

76 Tomato (*Solanum lycopersicum* L.) is an important fruit plant widely cultivated worldwide and a
77 model plant for studies on the effects of heat stress. Many studies have demonstrated the drastic
78 impacts of heat (*i.e.* 25–30 °C during the daytime and 20 °C at night) on tomato physiology
79 (Nankishore & Farrell, 2016). For example, when the environmental temperature exceeds 35 °C,
80 tomato seed germination, seedling and vegetative growth, flowering and fruit set, and fruit ripening
81 are adversely affected (Foolad, 2005). Several studies have focused on the reproductive process,
82 mainly on meiosis in both male and female organs, pollen germination and pollen tube growth, ovule
83 viability, stigma and style positions, number of pollen grains retained by the stigma, fertilization and
84 post-fertilization processes, growth of endosperm, proembryo and fertilized embryo (Golam et al.,
85 2012). In addition, heat stress can disrupt the relationships between tomato leaves and hydraulic
86 conductivity of roots (Morales et al., 2003). Many studies have evaluated heat tolerance in tomato
87 using various parameters, such as phenotypic index, physiological and biochemical stress indexes,
88 and microscopic observation index (Ayenan et al., 2019). Different cellular and metabolic aspects of
89 tomato plants are the focus of many studies, trying to figure out physiological responses and tolerance
90 mechanisms to heat stress, an imperative goal to maintain crop production. These studies are
91 particularly important in a perspective where the effects of climate change on agricultural productivity
92 could be severe.

93 The measurement of photochemical efficiency of PSII, based on chlorophyll *a* fluorescence
94 and expressed, as reduction in Fv/Fm, is an effective and non-invasive technique to detect damage in
95 PSII and thus the genotypic differences to heat stress (Zhou et al., 2015). The reduction in Fv/Fm rate
96 does neither take into account a possible decrease of photosynthesis due to a reduced amount of
97 antenna pigments (Camejo et al., 2006), nor possible alterations in the chloroplast ultrastructure
98 (Zhang et al., 2014). Moreover, photosynthesis decrease and carbohydrate accumulation were
99 correlated to a direct damage of leaf ultrastructure (Zhou et al., 2015). As a result, not only
100 chlorophylls and carotenoids in heat-stressed plants undergo variations in content, but also
101 downstream photosynthetic products, *i.e.* carbohydrates, may undergo increased accumulation (Zhou
102 et al., 2020) and transport and/or accumulation to the sink, as recently shown for sucrose (Zhou et al.,
103 2015) and starch.

104 In particular, heat stress perturbs the sink-source relations by altering the carbon balance. The
105 decrease in leaf photosynthetic efficiency under heat stress leads to an increased carbohydrate
106 demand, which increases dark respiration and photorespiration as a final result (Sharma et al., 2015).
107 However, the effect of heat stress on leaf photosynthesis and carbohydrate metabolism differs
108 between genotypes, allowing its use as a key indicator for the detection of heat susceptibility in plants
109 (Upchurch, 2008). General responses to heat stress include the accumulation of heat shock proteins

110 (HSPs) and the remodeling of membrane fluidity thus the release of membrane lipids. Increased
111 improper folding of newly synthesized proteins and denaturation of existing proteins leads to their
112 accumulation; the resulting activation of HSPs, expressed in many plant tissues in response to heat
113 stress, can provide a molecular tool for the development of thermo-tolerance (Nover et al., 2001). An
114 increased production of HSPs occurs when plants experience either unexpected or gradual increases
115 in temperature resulting in heat stress, representing one part of complex defense mechanisms (Gupta
116 & Kaur, 2005; Piterková et al., 2013).

117 Heat stress results in the production of Reactive Oxygen Species (ROS) and invokes oxidative
118 stress responses (Xu et al. 2006). Generating activated oxygen species under heat stress is a symptom
119 of cellular damage, because peroxidation of membrane lipids and pigments compromise membrane
120 permeability and function. ROS cause damage to a wide range of cellular components such as the
121 photosynthetic apparatus and, at the whole plant level, these results in limiting metabolic flux
122 activities thus affecting plant growth and yield by (Foyer & Noctor 2009). However, new evidence
123 showed that oxidative stress and related signaling accompanied heat stress by. Increased protection
124 from heat stress, as mediated by oxidative stress, might be a component of the acquired
125 thermotolerance trait because the activities of ROS scavengers such as ascorbate peroxidase (APX)
126 increase under heat stress conditions (Frank et al., 2009).

127 The remodeling of membrane fluidity often leads to the release of α -linolenic acid (18:3)
128 from membranes. Changes in unsaturated fatty acid levels in chloroplast membranes, usually due to
129 upregulation of fatty acid desaturase enzymes, has been shown to strongly enhance high-temperature
130 tolerance in plants (Li et al., 2015). The effects of elevated temperature on fatty acid composition of
131 storage lipids have been examined extensively in developing seeds. Changes in glycerolipid
132 composition of soybean seed exposed at high temperatures consisted of an increase in oleic acid
133 (18:1) and a decrease in polyunsaturated fatty acids (18:2 + 18:3), a pattern similar to that of plant
134 leaves acclimatizing to rising temperatures (Dornbos & Mullen, 1992). Thus, increasing the saturation
135 level of fatty acids appears to be critical for maintaining membrane stability and enhancing heat
136 tolerance (Bita & Gerats, 2013).

137 Heat stress in plants was also correlated to alteration of chloroplast ultrastructure, which
138 directly affects the state of the photosynthetic apparatus and the photosynthesis rate (Zhang et al.,
139 2014). Heat stress damaged the chloroplast structure by disordering the lamellae in the chloroplast
140 and increasing the plastoglobulus number (Gao et al., 2010). Zhou et al., (2015) suggest that heat
141 stress negatively affected the photosynthesis and carbohydrate accumulation by both decreasing the
142 leaf pigment contents and damaging the leaf ultrastructure.

143 In this work, we investigated the effects of chronic heat stress on selected cytological and
144 biochemical aspects of tomato plants cv Micro-Tom in relation to the mechanism of photosynthesis.

145 Micro-Tom represents the smallest tomato variety in the world, with a maximum height about 20 cm.
146 This peculiarity is due to the presence of two recessive mutations: one in the *dwarf* gene and the other
147 one in the *miniature* gene (Marti et al., 2006). Availability of sequenced genome, the high density
148 growth capacity (1357 plants / m²) and the short life cycle (70-90 days) (Sun et al., 2006), make the
149 Micro-Tom an effective model system for the study of plant biology (Shikata & Ezura 2016). High
150 temperature chronic stress was chosen because it mirrors a typical situation where temperatures
151 persist at high levels for several days. This is reasonably expected for a plant such as tomato, which
152 is usually grown in areas with medium to high temperatures. The cv Micro-Tom has been chosen
153 because it allows to process simultaneously an adequate number of plants under controlled conditions.
154 The aim of the work was to evaluate the damage induced to photosynthesis and the responses that
155 tomato could implement. For this purpose, we initially evaluated photosynthetic efficiency as a
156 general parameter, and the concentration of four main sugars produced post photosynthesis (sucrose,
157 fructose, glucose and glucose 6-phosphate) as well as the level of photosynthetic pigments and the
158 concentrations of ATP and ADP. The induction of oxidative stress was evaluated at the entire leaf
159 level. On the protein side, we analyzed the accumulation of sucrose synthase (SuSy), a sucrose-
160 metabolizing enzyme involved in sugar metabolism during heat stress; HSP70, a chaperone stress-
161 relieving protein whose increased level indicates stress damage, and isoforms of Rubisco (large
162 subunit, hereafter indicated as Rubisco), the key enzyme in the Calvin cycle. Finally, the effects of
163 heat treatment on the content of specific fatty acids were examined and compared to possible
164 cytological and ultrastructural changes of tomato leaves. Although several effects of heat stress have
165 been investigated in tomato, an integrated view that simultaneously takes into account metabolic,
166 physiological and protein aspects of photosynthesis is missing. Here we looked for possible effects
167 and responses ranging from thylakoid membranes to the production of specific sugars. We use a
168 multi-approach information to investigate metabolic and photosynthetic injuries and responses of
169 tomato plants to chronic heat stress. A broad overview of plant responses can allow a better
170 understanding of the ability to recover from stress while highlighting how tomato plants are able to
171 adapt to stress.

172

173 **2. Materials and Methods**

174 **2.1. Reagents**

175 Unless differently mentioned, all chemicals used in this work were purchased from Merck Life
176 Science (Milan, Italy).

177

178 **2.2. Tomato plants growth and stress**

179 Seeds of tomato plants cv Micro-Tom (*Solanum lycopersicum* L.), purchased from JustSeed Ltd,
180 (Wrexham, UK), were first germinated in Petri dishes with filter paper soaked with distilled water at
181 a constant temperature of 25 °C in the dark. Afterwards, seedlings were transferred to a plant growth
182 chamber, equipped with a set of SON-T and HPI-T Plus lamp (Philips, Amsterdam, NE) in a tray
183 with wells (each well 4 x 5 x 6 cm) at a constant temperature of 25 °C with a 16 h/8 h light/darkness
184 photoperiod with a PPFD (photosynthetic photon-flux density) of 350 $\mu\text{mol m}^{-2} \text{s}^{-1}$, with relative
185 humidity of $60 \pm 10\%$ and ambient CO_2 concentration. At the stage of two-leaf seedlings, plants were
186 moved into larger pots (9 x 9 x 10 cm) at the same growth conditions previously described. The
187 substrate used for repotting operations was the Vigor Plant® Growing Medium, Professional Mix.
188 Tomato plants were grown in greenhouses at temperature of 25 °C. Heat stress, corresponding to 40
189 °C as reported in literature (Camejo et al., 2005), was applied chronically for 8 h for 6 consecutive
190 days in a thermostatic chamber (Bertagnin, Bologna, Italy) to plants grown for 3 weeks. Light
191 intensity and humidity were the same as described above. Leaves samples were taken before heat
192 stress induction (H0, hereinafter referred to as the reference sample), after 4 h of heat stress (H4) and
193 after 8 h of heat stress (H8) only for the first day of treatment. During the following days, samples at
194 H0 were analyzed, to evaluate a night-recovery, and after additional 8 h of stress (H8). After each
195 daily stress phase, plants were left at RT (room temperature, around 18-20 °C in the dark), throughout
196 the night. For each treatment, at least 12 plants were used. Heat stress treatment and specific point of
197 analysis were schematically reported in supplementary material 1.

198

199 **2.3. Analysis of Photosynthetic Efficiency (Fv/Fm and Performance Index)**

200 Photosynthetic Efficiency was estimated with induction of chlorophyll fluorescence using a Handy
201 PEA 2000 fluorometer (Hansatech Instruments, King's Lynn, Norfolk, UK). The instrument performs
202 a fluorometric analysis of the chlorophyll on leaves and measures changes in the level of fluorescence
203 emission, in order to obtain data on the effectiveness of the exploitation of light in the photosynthetic
204 process (Conti et al., 2019). Parameters used: peak at 650 nm, 3000 $\mu\text{mol m}^{-2} \text{s}^{-1}$. Recorded
205 parameters: $F_v/F_m = (F_m - F_0)/F_m$ (F_m = maximum fluorescence value, F_0 = fluorescence value at
206 origin, $F_v = F_0$ value minus F_m value), and Performance Index (Pi) a more sensitive multiparameter,
207 covering the main photochemical processes (www.hansatech-instruments.com/product/handy-pea/).

208 Measurement of the maximum photochemical efficiency requires the sample to be fully dark-adapted
209 prior to measurement. Every leaf/clip were dark adapted for 20 minutes. Photosynthetic efficiency
210 was estimated for 5 consecutive days of treatment on different plant leaves randomly selected. At
211 least sixty different measurement were performed for each sample points.

212

213 **2.4. HPLC analysis of photosynthetic pigments**

214 Photosynthetic pigments were analyzed by high-performance liquid chromatography (HPLC) (LC
215 Module I Plus, Waters) as previously described (Parrotta et al., 2016a), for the first 4 days of
216 treatment. A total of 10 mg of tomato leaves were lysed in 1 mL of ethanol using an Ultra-Turrax®
217 T-25 basic (IKA®-Werke GmbH & Co. KG, Staufen im Breisgau, Germany) homogenizer for 2 min.
218 The homogenate was centrifuged at 13,000 g for 5 min and supernatants with pigments were
219 collected. A volume of 20 µL of each sample were injected into a C18 (Supelco Sigma-Aldrich)
220 HPLC column (15 cm × 4 mm, particle size of 5 µm). Identification of different components was
221 achieved by comparing the retention times with those of standards. The CSW- 32 software (Clarity-
222 DataAPEX) was used for pigments' quantification.

223

224 **2.5. Determination of ATP and ADP content**

225 ATP and ADP analysis were performed using HPLC as previously reported (Liu et al., 2006). Briefly,
226 50 mg of leaves were collected and suspended in boiling water (1 mL). A Potter-Elvehjem
227 homogenizer with 40 strokes per sample produced complete disintegration and rupture of tissues. The
228 homogenate was centrifuged at 15,000 g for 15 min at RT. The supernatants were transferred to vials
229 and 20 µL of samples were injected into a solid stationary phase C18 column (Supelco Sigma-
230 Aldrich) (75 mm × 4.6 mm, particle size of 5 µm). The mobile phase was a binary mobile phase
231 gradient (solvent A: 10 mM phosphate buffer pH 7; solvent B: acetonitrile) working in accordance to
232 the following gradient: 0 min, 100% solvent A, 0% solvent B; 2 min, 95% A, 5% B; 4 min, 80% A,
233 20% B; 5.3 min, 75% A, 25% B; 6 min, 100% A, 0% B. The following parameters were used: flow
234 rate of 0.3 ml/min; RT; the approximate elution times were 6 min for ATP and 7 min for ADP.
235 Identification of different components was obtained by programming the spectrophotometric detector
236 DAD 235C (Perkin Elmer, Shelton, CT, USA) with excitation wavelength at 254 nm. Treatment was
237 conducted for the first 4 days.

238

239 **2.6. HPLC analysis of sugars**

240 HPLC sugar analysis was performed during the first 4 days of treatment. Leaves tissues were lysed
241 as described above and supernatants were examined by Waters Sugar-Pak I ion-exchange column
242 (6.5 × 300 mm) at a temperature of 90 °C using a Waters 2410 refractive index detector. MilliQ grade

243 water (pH 7) was used as a mobile phase with a flow rate of 0.5 mL/min; an injection loop of 20 μ L
244 was used for all samples.

245

246 **2.7. Determination of linoleic and oleic acids**

247 About 200 mg of tomato leaves were extracted with 1.5 mL of a mixture of chloroform and methanol
248 (2: 1 v / v). Samples were homogenized for 3 min using Ultra-Turrax® T-25 basic (IKA®-Werke
249 GmbH & Co. KG, Staufen im Breisgau, Germany) homogenizer, until complete disintegration. The
250 homogenate obtained was centrifuged at 5,000 g for 5 min at RT and subsequently filtered (0.45 μ m).
251 To 0.5 mL of extract were added 5 mL of NaOH and samples were put at 100 °C for 1 h in a speed-
252 vac concentrator (RC1010; Jouan, Winchester, Va.). 5 mL of petroleum ether were added to the
253 solution and mixed. After separation in two clearly visible phases, the upper phase was discarded.
254 These steps were repeated twice. The remaining solution was acidified to pH 2.9 with 1 M HCl, dried
255 using a speed-vac and finally resuspended in 400 μ L of methanol. Lipid analysis was carried out using
256 a high-performance liquid chromatography-mass spectrometry (HPLC-MS). An HP 1100
257 autosampler equipped with a 100 μ L loop and an HP 1090A LC pump, both from Hewlett-Packard
258 (Palo Alto, CA, USA) were used. A C18 reversed-phase column (5 μ m, 250 \times 4 mm i.d., LiChrospher
259 100 RP-18) was used for the chromatographic separation. The mobile phases applied were composed
260 by methanol and ammonium acetate (25 mM pH 7), using following gradient, from 0 min 70%
261 methanol + 30% ammonium acetate to 65 min 100% of methanol. Analysis of fatty acid was
262 conducted only for the first 2 days of treatment, to correlate this data with the microscopy analysis of
263 lipid bodies.

264

265 **2.8. Visualization of ROS**

266 ROS localization was performed for the first 2 days of treatment, using Diaminobenzidine (DAB)
267 according to literature (Aloisi et al., 2015). Briefly, fresh material was incubated with 0.5 mg/mL
268 DAB pH 3.8 for 30 min under vacuum and left for 24 h at RT. Samples were washed with 95%
269 ethanol for 15 min at 70 °C prior to image analysis performed with the ImageJ software
270 (<https://imagej.nih.gov/ij/index.html>). All images of leaves were photographed under exactly the
271 same exposure parameters, and then individual images were imported into ImageJ and threshold-
272 processed with the same settings to highlight the leaf surface damaged by oxidative stress. The area
273 as detected by thresholding was highlighted in red and measured.

274

275 **2.9. Protein extraction, 1-D electrophoresis, western blotting and image analysis**

276 Proteins for mono-dimensional electrophoresis were extracted according to a protocol developed for
277 protein extraction from recalcitrant tissues protocol (Wang et al., 2006). Samples from the first 4 days

278 of the time-course experiment were processed simultaneously to minimize the experimental
279 variability. Protein concentration of samples was determined using a commercial kit (2-D Quant Kit,
280 GE HealthCare) and a UV-160 spectrophotometer at 480 nm (Shimadzu Italia S.r.l. Milan Italy).
281 Separation of proteins by 1-D electrophoresis was performed as previously reported (Parrotta et al.,
282 2010). After SDS-PAGE separation, proteins were electrotransferred to nitrocellulose membranes
283 using a Trans-Blot Turbo Transfer System (Bio-Rad) according to the manufacturer's instructions.
284 Membranes were blocked overnight at 4 °C in 5% ECL Blocking Agent (GE HealthCare) in TBS (20
285 mM Tris pH 7.5, 150 mM NaCl) plus 0.1% Tween-20. After washing with TBS, membranes were
286 incubated for 1 h at RT with following primary antibodies:

- 287 - Rabbit polyclonal AS03 anti-Rubisco (Agrisera), diluted 1:3500,
- 288 - Mouse monoclonal anti-HSP70 (Enzo Life Science), diluted 1:3000,
- 289 - Rabbit polyclonal K2 anti-SuSy (Heinlein & Starlinger 1989), diluted 1:1000.

290 Subsequently, membranes were washed several times with TBS and then incubated for 1 h with
291 secondary antibodies: a goat anti-rabbit IgG conjugated with peroxidase (Bio-Rad) and a goat anti-
292 mouse IgG conjugated with peroxidase (Bio-Rad), diluted 1:3000. Images of gels and blots were
293 acquired using a Fluor-S apparatus (Bio-Rad) and analyzed with the QuantityOne software (Bio-
294 Rad). Exposure times were 30–60 s for blots and 5–7 s for Coomassie-stained gels. Analysis of
295 relative quantitation of blots was performed by the QuantityOne software (Bio-Rad).

296

297 **2.10. Rubisco purification and Two-Dimensional Electrophoresis (2DE)**

298 Purification of Rubisco was achieved following the methods previously described by (Sudhani &
299 Moreno 2015), with modifications. In detail, leaves were taken during the first 2 days of treatment,
300 then were powdered in liquid nitrogen and suspended in cold extraction buffer (100 mM Tris-HCl,
301 10 mM MgCl₂, 20 mM 2-mercaptoethanol pH 8, supplemented with protease inhibitors). Insoluble
302 polyvinylpyrrolidone (PVPP) was added (2% final concentration) and mixed with a magnetic
303 stirrer for 5 min in a cold chamber (4 °C). Subsequently samples were centrifuged at 25,000 g for 15
304 min at 4 °C and supernatants were collected. Then, while still mixing with a magnetic stirrer,
305 ammonium sulfate was added (final concentration 35%) to supernatants. Samples were stirred for 30
306 min in a cold room (4 °C), thus centrifuged at 25,000 g for 10 min at 4 °C. Ammonium sulfate was
307 added (final concentration 60%) to supernatants and samples stirred for 30 min in a cold room (4 °C).
308 Thereafter, samples were further centrifuged at 25,000 g for 10 min at 4 °C and the supernatant was
309 discarded. The obtained protein pellets were resuspended in Sucrose Gradient Buffer (SGB: 10 mM
310 Tris-HCl pH 8, 10 mM MgCl₂, 10 mM NaHCO₃, 1 mM β-mercaptoethanol) and desalted through a
311 gel filtration chromatography using HiTrap Desalting columns (GE HealthCare) previously
312 equilibrated with SGB. The column was eluted with SGB and the Rubisco positive fractions identified

313 by dot-blot with the anti-Rubisco antibody, were pooled and loaded over a linear gradient of 0.2-0.8
314 M sucrose in SGB. Subsequently samples were ultracentrifuged at 132,000 g for 4 h in a fixed angle
315 rotor (Beckmann, rotor SW41) at 4 °C, then pooled and fractionated by anion exchange
316 chromatography using a Mono-Q HR5/5 column and an AKTA Purifier System (GE HealthCare);
317 the column was equilibrated with Column Buffer A (CBA: 20 mM Tris-HCl pH 7.5). A linear
318 gradient at 1 mL/min for 20 ml from 0% to 100% of Column Buffer B (CBB: 20 mM Tris-HCl pH
319 7.5, 1 M NaCl) was used, monitoring the absorbance at 280 nm. After chromatography, positive
320 fractions were collected and confirmed by dot-blot. Rubisco-containing fractions were concentrated
321 with VivaSpin-2 (GE HealthCare), and samples were further fractionated by gel permeation
322 chromatography using a Superdex 200 column (GE Health Care), previously equilibrated with
323 Activation Buffer (AB: 100 mM Tris-HCl pH 8.2, 10 mM MgCl₂, 10 mM NaHCO₃). Elution was
324 carried out at 0.8 mL/min, monitoring the absorbance at 280 nm. Positive fractions were analyzed by
325 dot-blot with the Rubisco antibody. Finally, the pool of positive fractions was precipitated by cold
326 TCA-acetone, the pellet was washed twice with cold acetone and resuspended with Rehydration
327 Buffer (40 mM Tris, 8 M urea, 2 M thiourea, 2% CHAPS, bromophenol blue) for 2-D electrophoresis
328 as previously described (Parrotta et al., 2019).

329

330 **2.11. Transmission electron microscopy (TEM) and optical microscope analysis**

331 Leaves from 2 days treatment were prepared for optical and electron microscopy following the
332 protocol previously described (Behr et al., 2019). Samples were sectioned using the ultra-microtome
333 NOVA LKB (Leica Microsystems) to obtain sections of about 2-3 µm for light microscopy
334 observation and sections of 600 Å for TEM observations. Samples, collected on copper grids and
335 counterstained with a solution of 2% uranyl acetate and lead citrate, were observed with a Morgagni
336 262 transmission electron microscope (Philips) and an Axiophot phase contrast optical microscope
337 (Zeiss).

338

339 **2.12. Statistical analysis**

340 All the experimental analyses have been carried out in triplicate and for each single analysis; different
341 plants have been selected at random. Row data were analyzed using student-test of GraphPad Prism.
342 Differences among sample sets were determined by analysis of variance with a threshold P-value of
343 0.05 and P-value of 0.01.

344 **3. Results**

345 **3.1. Heat stress affects photosynthetic efficiency of tomato plants**

346 Photosynthetic efficiency in tomato plants stressed at 40 °C for an 8-hour period over 6 days was
347 measured with a Handy PEA fluorometer. The Fv/Fm and Pi parameters are considered ideal
348 indicators of the functioning of photosynthesis mechanism in plants. The Fv/Fm parameter showed
349 significant changes during the time of treatment (Figure 1A). Statistical analysis revealed significant
350 differences after the first 8 hours of stress between reference samples and stressed samples, clearly
351 indicating that heat stress affects photosynthesis. Similar differences were found after analyzing the
352 Pi parameter. Data showed a general decrease after heat stress, with a partial recovery within day 2.
353 After the first 4 h of treatment at 40 °C (D1H4), the Pi value decreased significantly at the onset of
354 treatment and then increased again at the end of the first day of heat stress (D1H8). The measurement
355 of Pi carried out after a night-time recovery at 25 °C (D2H0) showed that Pi was partially restored.
356 During the next days of stress, the values of Pi remained lower than reference sample and the night-
357 time recovery was not equally evident, indicating a damage of the photosynthetic apparatus (Figure
358 1B).

359

360 **3.2. Concentration of photosynthetic pigments oscillates during heat stress**

361 The concentration of the various photosynthetic pigments present in tomato leaves was analyzed
362 during the first 4 days of stress. Proper amount of pigments is required to ensure that photosynthesis
363 proceeds optimally. The data indicate that, as stress increased, the concentration of all four pigments
364 analyzed (lutein, Figure 2A; chlorophyll b, Figure 2B; chlorophyll a, Figure 2C; β -carotene, Figure
365 2D) decreased during stress. After the first night-time recovery (D2H0), pigment concentrations
366 increased significantly but, after one more round of stress, concentrations decreased again (D2H8).
367 We have observed this trend for the rest of treatment, although with a less pronounced recovery.

368

369 **3.3. Levels of ATP and ADP change during heat treatment**

370 We measured the concentration of adenosine triphosphate (ATP, Figure 3A) and adenosine
371 diphosphate (ADP, Figure 3B) in samples treated at high temperatures. The concentration of ATP in
372 leaf cells is the result of various metabolic activities of synthesis and hydrolysis and can be a good
373 candidate to indicate the general metabolic status. After the first 4 hours of stress (D1H4), the
374 concentration of ATP decreased slightly and then increased again at the end of the first day of heat
375 treatment (D1H8) achieving a value similar to that of reference plants. From the second day of
376 treatment, ATP values increased as exposure time extended, except for the D4H8 sample, which
377 showed a reduced concentration of ATP. In terms of ADP values, we found a peculiar trend; in fact,

378 the concentration of ADP was low during the first days of treatment, while in the following days of
379 treatment ADP levels remained below the detection limit of HPLC spectrophotometric detector.

380

381 **3.4. Heat stress affects the concentrations of sugars in tomato leaves**

382 We analyzed the concentration of four sugars present in tomato leaves (*i.e.* sucrose, fructose, glucose
383 and glucose 6-phosphate) by HPLC. The four sugars act in steps following the Calvin cycle; glucose
384 6-phosphate is an intermediate in the synthesis of sucrose while glucose and fructose derive from the
385 hydrolysis of sucrose. The analysis was performed for the first four days of stress. As shown in figure
386 4A, the reference sample (D1H0) had a relatively low concentration of sucrose, do not showed a
387 significant change after 4 h of stress (D1H4), however D1H8 sample reached a concentration almost
388 three times higher than the initial concentration. At the beginning of the second day of stress, sucrose
389 levels dropped dramatically (D2H0) indicating high consumption during the night; when plants were
390 stressed for the second day, the amount of sucrose increased again (D2H8) but it was lower than after
391 the first 8 hours of stress. On the third day of stress sucrose levels were similar to the previous day,
392 in both day samples (D3H0 and D3H8). During the fourth day, sucrose levels were lower than on the
393 previous days, but remained stable during the 8 hours of heat stress. Glucose concentrations increased
394 after the first 4 hours of treatment but at the end of the next four hours of stress, the value of glucose
395 decreased drastically (Figure 4B). Glucose concentrations remained low and constant for the rest of
396 treatment, except in D3H0, when concentrations increased significantly. A similar trend was found
397 for fructose (Figure 4C). Even in this case, the concentrations of fructose decreased as the heat
398 treatment advances. In particular, fructose levels decreased slightly and negligibly, except for the
399 D3H0 sample. Finally, glucose 6-phosphate concentrations, unlike the other sugars analyzed, showed
400 a slight decrease after the first 8 h of stress (D1H8) but, in any case, it exhibited a constant and
401 practically unchanged trend during all phases of treatment (Figure 4D).

402

403 **3.5. Oleic and linoleic acid decrease in concentration at the beginning of heat treatment**

404 The concentration of two main fatty acids (oleic acid and linoleic acid) present in leaves of tomato
405 plants was investigated. Fatty acids are not only a reservoir of energy but also a pool of molecules for
406 the synthesis of compounds with a protective action. The analysis was conducted for the first two
407 days of stress, and the values are reported in Figure 5. The starting concentration of oleic acid (D1H0)
408 appeared to decrease during the first day of stress (D1H8), without an evident recovery during the
409 night (D2H0). When plants were subjected to a new heat stress cycle, the values decreased
410 significantly (D2H8) (Figure 5A). Linoleic acid concentrations decreased meaningfully during the
411 first day of stress (D1H4 and D1H8). The values continuously decreased during the second day of
412 exposure (both in D2H0 and D2H8) (Figure 5B).

413

414 **3.6. High temperatures increase ROS production**

415 By analyzing the pattern of DAB staining in tomato leaves (Figure 6A), we have highlighted the
416 distribution of ROS. ROS production is one of the most evident effects following heat stress and is
417 therefore an index of the physiological state of leaves. Whereas scattered but small areas of ROS
418 production could be observed in reference samples (D1H0), the area highlighted by DAB increased
419 significantly in heat-stressed samples. In some cases, the area enriched in ROS was concentrated
420 along the central vein (as in D1H8) or along the lateral veins (in D2H0). In the final sample (D2H8)
421 the areas affected by ROS production were evident at various areas. We observed a more significant
422 increase in samples treated with 8 h of heat stress (D1H8) compared to reference samples (D1H0)
423 and those obtained after night-time recovery (D2H0). The data also showed a higher amount of ROS
424 (defined as the leaf area labelled by DAB) positively correlated to the increase in chronic exposure
425 to high temperatures (Figure 6B).

426

427 **3.7. HSP70, SuSy and Rubisco accumulate differently during heat stress**

428 Protein samples from reference and stressed plants were analyzed by one-dimensional SDS-PAGE.
429 The resulting gel (Figure 7A) highlighted the absence of significant variations in protein intensity
430 between treatments. Following one-dimensional electrophoresis, an immunoblotting analysis was
431 performed to detect any changes in specific protein levels during the first 3 days of chronic stress
432 (Figure 7B). Specifically, we have analyzed Rubisco because it is the key enzyme during the Calvin
433 cycle and because it is often targeted for environmental stress conditions. In addition, we analyzed
434 the stress-related protein HSP70 and the sucrose-metabolizing enzyme SuSy.

435 As reported in Figure 8A, accumulation levels of Rubisco decreased after the first 8 h of heat stress
436 (D1H8) and, even after a slight night-time recovery to ambient temperature (D2H0), protein
437 accumulation levels decreased again. Between the second and third day of treatment, protein levels
438 (even if low) remained constant and the night recovery was not evident. Despite partial night-time
439 recoveries, the amount of Rubisco never reached the reference levels after stress treatment.
440 Accumulation of HSP70 (Figure 8B) showed a slight increase after the first eight hours of stress, the
441 highest level of accumulation was found after the night-recovery during all stress treatment (D2H0
442 and D3H0). The immunoblotting analysis of SuSy (Figure 8C) showed a constant trend during the
443 first days of treatment but we found a significant increase in D3H0 sample.

444 Rubisco was purified and separated by two-dimensional electrophoresis in order to detect changes
445 in protein isoforms. Figure 9 shows the two-dimensional gels of reference samples (D1H0) and of
446 samples taken after the first day of stress (D1H8) and after the next day of treatment (D2H0 and
447 D2H8). Rubisco spots ranged in a pH between 5.5 and 6.5. During the first day of stress, both

448 reference (D1H0) and stressed samples (D1H8) showed eight protein spots; despite the same number
449 of spots, they had a different distribution, both in terms of molecular weight and, more clearly in
450 terms of isoelectric point (pI). In the reference sample (D1H0, Figure 9A), spots were very close to
451 each other, focusing in a relatively small pH range; not only they were separated by isoelectric point,
452 some spots also exhibited the same isoelectric point but a slight different molecular weight (~ 55 kDa)
453 (spots numbered as 5, 6 and 7). In the D1H8 sample (Figure 9B) spots showed almost the same
454 molecular weight and differentiated exclusively by the isoelectric point. In the first sample of the
455 second day (D2H0, Figure 9C), 8 total spots were identified, which were separated only by isoelectric
456 point. Compared to the D1H8 treatment, spots were more compressed towards the basic region of the
457 pH gradient, with the two most basic spots being quantitatively larger. Finally, in the last sample
458 (D2H8, Figure 9D), only 3 spots were highlighted, focusing in a very narrow pH range around 6.5.
459 These data were confirmed by the corresponding signal quantification graphs obtained with the
460 QuantityOne software, by which the relative density percentage was evaluated. The graphs show how
461 the first day of stress returns a significant prevalence of isoforms numbered as 6 and 7, both in D1H0
462 and D1H8. On the contrary, a different situation occurred on the second day, because in sample D2H0
463 isoforms 7 and 8 were prevalent while in sample D2H8 isoform 1 was more expressed. What was
464 clear, however, was the progressive shift of the accumulation region of Rubisco spots, which cluster
465 towards the basic region. In addition to this, the last stage of sampling showed a drastic reduction in
466 the spots numbers.

467

468 **3.8. Heat stress causes cytological and ultrastructural variations of tomato leaves**

469 In order to verify the possible cytological and ultrastructural variations of tomato leaf cells, we have
470 carried out analyses by light microscope (Figure 10) and transmission electron microscope (Figure
471 11). Data on the cytological structure of leaf cells are reported in figure 10, for reference samples
472 (D1H0, Figure 10A), and stressed samples (D1H8, Figure 10B; D2H0, Figure 10C; D2H8, Figure
473 10D). The cuticle (C) was relatively evident in all the samples while the epidermis (E) was composed
474 of a simple monocellular layer without intercellular spaces. Both the underlying palisade parenchyma
475 and spongy parenchyma were easily discernible. Within each cell, the vacuole (V), chloroplasts (P
476 for plastids), thylakoid grana and starch granules (S) could be identified. When comparing the various
477 cases, the most evident variation observed was a higher accumulation of rounded lipid bodies (LB)
478 in the stressed tomato leaves (D1H8 and D2H8) compared to both the reference (D1H0) and the night-
479 recovery sample (D2H0). In addition, the same samples were analyzed by TEM (Figure 11)
480 confirming data obtained by optical microscope. In particular, the D1H0 sample contained very few
481 lipid bodies, mainly observable in the plastids (Figure 11A). In D1H8 sample, lipid bodies were more
482 abundant and localized also in the cell cytoplasm of the spongy parenchyma, of the palisade

483 parenchyma and also in the epidermis (Figure 11B). In the D2H0 sample, lipid bodies (LB) could be
484 observed within chloroplasts, however, their number was not comparable to that observed in the
485 previous D1H0 and D1H8 samples (Figure 11C). The D2H8 sample was characterized by a
486 significant increase in the amount and size of lipid bodies (Figure 11D). In particular, the insert in
487 Figure 11D shows large lipid bodies (LB) distributed in the cell cytoplasm. Stage D2H8 clearly shows
488 that the synthesis of lipid bodies resumed after they had been consumed on the recovery night.
489 Nevertheless, even though they could be observed inside plastids, their size and number were small.
490 In summary, the main changes observed at both cytological and ultrastructural level concern the
491 amount of stored energy, such as lipid bodies and starch granules. Since we did not detect any clear
492 damage to the leaf structure, the data indicate that the response of leaf cells to heat stress is in the
493 metabolic system.
494

495 **4. Discussion**

496 Rising global average temperature can affect the whole plant world (Saidi et al., 2011). Biomass loss,
497 reduction in plant growth and development and ultimately death, are only few examples of the effects
498 of heat stress on plants (Timperio et al., 2008). Heat stress affects several cellular processes and it is
499 particularly severe when high temperatures occur in conjunction with the critical stages of plant
500 development, particularly during the reproductive period (Teixeira et al., 2013). Being sessile, plants
501 have evolved strategies to cope with different biotic and abiotic stresses, allowing cellular
502 homeostasis and contributing to plant survival (Kotak et al., 2007).

503 In this work, we examined how chronic heat stress (6 days, 40 °C) affects *Solanum*
504 *lycopersicum* L. cv Micro-Tom. The proposed experimental design allows the comparison of heat
505 stressed samples with a reference point in order to highlight changes in the analyzed parameters. We
506 focused on photosynthesis, as it can be completely inhibited by heat stress, probably by direct
507 inhibition of the PSII activity, which has been shown to be a thermally labile system (Camejo et al.,
508 2005). It is likely that thermal radiations can alter the conformations of PSII proteins, causing protein
509 and degradation (Nath et al., 2013). The reduction of photosynthetic activity may also be due to
510 alteration of the electron flow (Oukarroum et al., 2012) and to the inhibition of the de novo synthesis
511 of proteins involved in PSII repair. This phenomenon resulting from the production of reactive
512 oxygen species (ROS) (Nishiyama et al., 2011, Ahammed et al., 2018) as well as the loss of thylakoid
513 membrane integrity (Allakhverdiev et al., 2008). One of the questions to be clarified is whether
514 chronic stress over several days can produce a linear response or whether plants can show a
515 progressive adaptation; in our case study, while the Fv/Fm ratio remained constant over the treatment,
516 the Pi multi-parameter significantly fluctuated during stress, confirming photosynthetic alterations.
517 Fluctuations of Pi characterized both stress and recovery stages during the first days of treatment;
518 however, Pi values were constantly lower compared to reference sample after heat stress from day 1
519 to 5, suggesting that plants' homeostasis buffers only short periods of heat stress. Similar reductions
520 of these parameters have been observed in two heat-sensitive tomato varieties (Zhou et al., 2015) and
521 during tomato growth under water deficit (Nankishore & Farrell 2016). The decrease in
522 photosynthetic efficiency could be due to a reduction in the concentration of photosynthetic pigments
523 (Khan et al., 2015, Nankishore & Farrell, 2016). Indeed, our results showed that levels of
524 photosynthetic pigments, *i.e.* chlorophyll a and b, lutein and β -carotene partially mirrored the decrease
525 of photosynthetic efficiency; in particular, during night recovery both photosynthetic efficiency and
526 the amount of pigments increased, however, photosynthetic pigments never reached suboptimal
527 concentrations, especially after prolonged periods of stress. All these evidences are in according with
528 a the recent evidence that the photosynthetic pigment content and light absorption flux decrease in

529 melatonin deficient by silencing of a melatonin biosynthetic gene COMT1-silenced (*Caffeic acid O-*
530 *Methyltransferase 1*) tomato plants under heat stress (Ahammed et al., 2018).

531 Sugars, the products of photosynthesis, also underwent significant alterations. Sucrose levels
532 drastically increased during the first day of stress, probably due to an enhanced degradation of starch,
533 the reserve energy of plants when photosynthesis is compromised during stress (Rizhsky et al., 2004)
534 or to an increase in the activity of enzymes responsible for sucrose synthesis. In our case, sucrose
535 levels gradually decrease after accumulating during the first day; this could be due to the catabolism
536 of starch initially available for sucrose synthesis or to an increased activity of enzymes responsible
537 for its synthesis. When stress conditions then reoccur, plants lose the ability to recover adequate levels
538 of sucrose, possibly decrease in starch stocks, reduces the availability of sucrose. A decrease in
539 sucrose levels following an initial increase has already been reported in tomato leaves stressed by
540 moderately high temperatures (Jie et al., 2012). Like sucrose, a decrease in the levels of fructose and
541 glucose was found, probably because they are metabolized to produce energy for survival; the stress
542 conditions to which plants are subjected require high energy investments in an attempt to increase
543 protection. Characteristically, the levels of fructose and glucose showed a peak at the beginning of
544 the third day of treatment; this conditions, although peculiar, could be related to the accumulation of
545 SuSy, which peaked exactly at the same day. The increase in levels of SuSy could actually lead to a
546 higher cleavage of sucrose molecules thereby raising fructose and (indirectly) glucose levels. In other
547 cases, levels of fructose, glucose and sucrose were observed to decrease almost constantly during heat
548 stress of tomato leaves. Changes in the accumulation of Susy have been observed in different plants
549 or plant cells subjected to heat stress (Kaushal et al., 2013, Parrotta et al., 2016b, Pressman et al.,
550 2006). Arabidopsis plants subjected to a combination of drought and heat stress for 6 hours showed
551 accumulation of sucrose and other sugars such as glucose (Rizhsky et al., 2004); this suggests that
552 the metabolic alterations of sucrose-metabolizing enzymes in response to unfavorable environmental
553 conditions may be common to different plant species. However, it is not clear how plants under heat
554 stress can maintain appropriate levels of starch and soluble sugars and it is not equally clear whether
555 resistant varieties modulate starch and soluble sugar levels through either increased biosynthesis, or
556 reduced degradation, or increased uptake (Sangu et al., 2015). The concentration of glucose 6-
557 phosphate, an intermediate in the synthesis of sucrose and UDP-glucose (the precursor of cellulose)
558 were constant during heat stress. This might be achieved by a reduced production of UDP-glucose
559 and therefore cellulose, coherently with the lower growth rate of plants under heat stress.

560 In plants, ROS production is a normal consequence of aerobic metabolism. Hydrogen
561 peroxide (H_2O_2), superoxide anion (O_2^-) and the hydroxyl radical ($\bullet OH$) affect various cellular
562 components such as membrane lipids, proteins and nucleic acids. Despite the potential harmful effects
563 of ROS, these molecules are necessary for several physiological processes (Mittler, 2017). Hence,

564 the need to finely tune and regulate ROS concentration by an efficient ROS scavenging machinery
565 based on enzymes and secondary metabolites (D'Autréaux & Toledano, 2007). This appears to be in
566 line with our data as ROS were detectable also in reference samples; however, their concentration
567 increased during heat stress. Accumulation of ROS is linked to the reduction of photosynthetic
568 efficiency, which concerns the two photosystems and that could free up more electrons capable of
569 combining with oxygen to generate ROS (Asada, 2006, Kim & Portis, 2004). Finally, oxidative stress
570 can have a feedback on the photosynthetic efficiency, exacerbating the damage (Murata et al., 2007,
571 Nishiyama et al., 2005).

572 The accumulation of hydrogen peroxide in plant tissues is a critical step as it leads downstream
573 to the activation of defense genes, including genes coding for HSPs (Volkov et al., 2006). The role
574 of HSPs in maintaining the correct folding of proteins and in avoiding their aggregation during stress
575 is well known (Parrotta et al., 2013, Usman et al., 2017). This is in line with the increase of HSP70
576 during stress as observed in this paper. It should be noted, however, that the highest levels of HSP70
577 were found in samples collected in the morning, after a theoretical recovery of plants at night. In
578 addition, we observed that HSPs decrease during 8 hours of heat stress. These data suggest that the
579 higher expression of HSPs occurs during the night in response to daily stress.

580 The general decrease in sugar levels may explain the increase in ATP concentration. The
581 amount of ATP available results from the respiration process and is therefore not an index of
582 photosynthetic efficiency. However, the production of ATP is clearly linked to the availability of
583 sugars, mainly monosaccharides. A decrease in the latter can imply an increase in ATP, which is
584 necessary to sustain the response to heat stress. The increase in ATP observed at the end of treatment
585 (parallel to a drop in ADP, they appear inversely correlated) could therefore be linked both to the
586 decrease in sucrose and to the consumption of glucose and fructose. This data suggest that plants
587 address their energy resources to cope with the damage caused by high temperatures (Hemme et al.,
588 2014). Changes in ATP concentration could also be related to the reduced growth rate of plants (a
589 parameter that we have not measured), therefore to a diminished synthesis of the cell wall so that the
590 energy normally directed to the synthesis of cellulose is deviated to ATP production. Wheat plants
591 tolerant to heat stress manage to maintain adequate respiration levels (and therefore ATP production)
592 (Almeselmani et al., 2012) and the ability of heat stress-tolerant varieties to maintain adequate
593 respiratory levels seems to be a common strategy (Hu et al., 2010).

594 Various stresses, such as high temperature, salinity and ultraviolet irradiation, can have effects
595 on Rubisco (Galmes et al., 2013). Our results indicate that a few hours of stress are enough to trigger
596 a clear reduction in the Rubisco amount. The data is supported by literature, which suggests that
597 Rubisco inactivation is closely related to the inhibition and acclimatization of photosystems to heat
598 stress (Demirevska-Kepova et al., 2005). In this work, we focused on large subunit Rubisco isoforms

599 because this analysis might detect a different use of Rubisco under stress conditions. It is not known
600 whether differences in Rubisco isoforms are due to either new protein synthesis or altered/differential
601 degradation or post-translational modifications. A study conducted on chlorophytes and
602 cyanobacteria, in the Lake Bonney in Antarctica showed how climate and light variations influence
603 the accumulation of Rubisco isoforms (Kong et al., 2012). Furthermore, the research conducted on
604 cyanobacteria, brown and red algae and C3-C4 plants, confirmed how different Rubisco isoforms
605 have undergone natural variations and evolved to cope with and adapt to changes in the levels of
606 atmospheric CO₂ and O₂ over time (Parry et al., 2013). In this work we have purified and analyzed
607 Rubisco by 2-D electrophoresis enabling a quick direct visualization of the different Rubisco isoforms
608 expressed under stress conditions when plants decrease the number of Rubisco isoforms, the latter
609 being also characterized by a more basic isoelectric point. All this suggests that during heat treatment
610 tomato plants attempt to use a small number of Rubisco isoforms, probably those that are more stable
611 or work better at high temperatures. It is also likely that post-translational modifications may help to
612 stabilize the enzyme and consequently to promote photosynthetic process under harsh conditions. We
613 are inclined to assume the absence of proteolytic events that would damage specific Rubisco isoforms
614 having never observed such occurrence during enzyme purification (Supplementary Material 2).

615 Cytological analysis using both optical and electron microscopy with the aim of revealing any
616 structural changes and cell damage after heat stress showed an accumulation of lipid bodies inside
617 the cytoplasm of spongy and palisade parenchyma. The formation of lipid bodies starts from sucrose
618 and includes the synthesis of fatty acids (we specifically quantified oleic acid and linoleic acid by
619 HPLC-MS) in plastids from Acil-CoA followed by their export to the endoplasmic reticulum where
620 synthesis of lipid bodies takes place (van der Schoot et al., 2011). In heat-stressed tomato plants,
621 accumulation of lipid bodies could start after the increase in sucrose at D1H8 and could be either a
622 defense mechanism or the attempt to store energy in the form of lipids. We found that the number of
623 lipid bodies was not comparable to that of samples after night-recovery, suggesting that they were
624 dismantled overnight. We also noted the almost total absence of starch granules, suggesting that this
625 polysaccharide was completely consumed during the night recovery. Lipid bodies are involved in
626 temperature stress responses, and lipid droplets characteristically proliferate in Arabidopsis leaves
627 under stress (Gidda et al., 2016). Another hypothesis is that plants under heat stress also invest their
628 energy for the synthesis of protective lipid compounds, such as oxylipins, a group of secondary
629 metabolites produced by oxidation of polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fatty acids. The process
630 is catalyzed by lipoxygenase and includes linoleic and oleic acid respectively, as a defense system
631 against environmental changes (Mosblech et al., 2009). The study carried out in Arabidopsis
632 (Upchurch, 2008) suggested that plants release α -linolenic acid from the chloroplast membrane in the

633 attempt to adapt to abiotic stress suggesting that modulation of oleic acid and linoleic acid levels is
634 essential for stress defense.

635 Tomato exhibited a variety of responses to high temperatures, which are depicted by
636 symptomatic and quantitative changes in morphology and growth. The ability of plants to manage or
637 adapt to heat stress varies both between species and in relation to different developmental stages
638 (Ahmad et al., 2013). The data presented in this work (mainly at the photosynthetic level) indicate
639 that tomato plants suffer damage from heat treatment, but also try to respond by adapting to new
640 conditions. Adaptation covers various metabolic aspects, including sugar levels, ATP production and
641 accumulation of specific Rubisco isoforms. All these data, corroborated by previous studies, suggest
642 that high temperatures primarily induce a reduction in photosynthetic efficiency, which is a
643 consequence of reduced photosynthetic pigment concentrations and Rubisco accumulation. During
644 the night, plants might activate a recovery system to partially restore energy production in leaf cells.
645 However, recovery is not yet enough to bring the parameter values back to initial levels. Leaf cells
646 could therefore respond to heat stress with a different use of those Rubisco isoforms more resistant
647 to stress. The normal metabolism of ATP is also affected by changes to sugar metabolism and the
648 data are supported by different accumulation of SuSy, and by fatty acid and lipid bodies. In
649 conclusion, this study advances our understanding on the mechanisms of response to heat stress in
650 tomato plants and can potentially be useful for breeding and selection of heat-tolerant varieties in the
651 time of climate change.

652

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836

837

838 **Acknowledgements**

839 We are grateful to Mr Massimo Guarnieri (Department of Life Sciences, University of Siena) for
840 technical assistance during HPLC analyses.

841

842 **Declaration of interests**

843 The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships
844 that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper. The research involves neither
845 human participants nor animals.

846

847 **Fundings**

848 This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or
849 not-for-profit sectors.

850

851 **Author contributions**

852 L.P., I.A., C.F. performed the investigation and methodological analysis; L.P. and I.A. wrote the
853 original draft; M.R., G.C. S.D.D. design the research, reviewed and edited the text. All authors read
854 and approved the manuscript.

855

856 **Figure legend:**

857 **Figure 1. Photosynthetic efficiency of reference and stressed tomato plants.** Analysis of Fv/Fm
858 (A) and Performance Index (B) parameters. Data collection was performed using the HandyPea
859 Fluorimeter. Reported values are the average of at least 20 different measurements. Samples were
860 analyzed in triplicate and compared with the reference sample by a t-student test. Asterisks indicate
861 statistically significant differences (one asterisk for $P < 0.05$, two asterisks for $P < 0.01$).

862
863 **Figure 2. HPLC analysis of photosynthetic pigments of tomato leaves subjected to chronic**
864 **stress.** The main photosynthetic pigments, *e.g.* lutein (A), chlorophyll b (B), chlorophyll a (C) and β -
865 carotene (D), were quantified during heat stress. Reported values are the means of at least three
866 replicate. The Lod (detection level) of the HPLC was $0.0285 \mu\text{g} / \text{mL}$ for lutein, $0.0722 \mu\text{g} / \text{mL}$ for
867 chlorophyll b, $0.013 \mu\text{g} / \text{mL}$ for chlorophyll a and $0.217 \mu\text{g} / \text{mL}$ for β -carotene. Samples were
868 analyzed in triplicate and compared with the reference sample (D1H0) by a t-student test. Asterisks
869 indicate statistically significant differences (one asterisk for $P < 0.05$, two asterisks for $P < 0.01$).

870
871 **Figure 3. HPLC analysis of ATP and ADP concentration of tomato leaves subjected to chronic**
872 **stress.** ATP (A) and ADP (B) concentrations were quantified by HPLC. At least three replicate were
873 analyzed. Lod (detection level) were $0.015855 \mu\text{g} / \text{mL}$ for the ATP and $0.009527 \mu\text{g} / \text{mL}$ for the
874 ADP. Samples were compared with the reference sample (D1H0) by a t-student test. Asterisks
875 indicate statistically significant differences (one asterisk for $P < 0.05$, two asterisks for $P < 0.01$).

876
877 **Figure 4. HPLC analysis of sugar concentrations present in tomato leaves subjected to chronic**
878 **heat stress.** Sucrose (A), glucose (B), fructose (C) and 6-P glucose (D) concentrations were
879 quantified during heat stress. Samples were analyzed in triplicate and compared with the reference
880 sample (D1H0) by a t-student test. Asterisks indicate statistically significant differences (one asterisk
881 for $P < 0.05$, two asterisks for $P < 0.01$).

882
883 **Figure 5. HPLC-MS of fatty acid concentrations present in tomato leaves during the first two**
884 **days of chronic heat stress.** Oleic acid (A) and linoleic acid (B) concentrations are respectively
885 reported. At least three replicate were performed for each sample and samples were compared with
886 reference sample (D1H0) by a t-student test. Asterisks indicate statistically significant differences
887 (one asterisk for $P < 0.05$, two asterisks for $P < 0.01$).

888
889 **Figure 6. ROS analysis in tomato leaves during the first two days of chronic heat stress.** ROS
890 distribution in leaves of heat stressed plants stained with DAB (A). Images were converted to

891 grayscale and leaf area percentage calculated (**B**). At least three replicate were analyzed. Means of
892 treated samples were compared with reference sample (D1H0) by a t-student test. Asterisks indicate
893 statistically significant differences (one asterisk for $P < 0.05$).

894

895 **Figure 7. Electrophoretic analysis and immunoblotting of samples subjected to chronic heat**
896 **stress. (A)** Coomassie colored SDS-PAGE containing the leaf proteins. Molecular weights markers
897 in the first lane (STD - lane 1) and their values in kDa on the left. Samples analyzed are three on the
898 first day of stress (D1H0, D1H4 and D1H8), two samples on the second day (D2H0 and D2H8) and
899 the third day of stress (D3H0 and D3H8). (**B**) Immunoblotting carried out of each sample to check
900 the amount of the Rubisco, HSP70 and SuSy. The samples analyzed are the same as the one-
901 dimensional electrophoresis gel.

902

903 **Figure 8. Analysis of bands volume made with Quantity One software on the blot images.**
904 Densitometric quantification after immunoblotting against Rubisco (**A**), HSP70 (**B**) and SuSy (**C**).
905 Intensity of bands is reported in Y-axis as Integrated Density. Values are average of three independent
906 measurements.

907

908 **Figure 9. Two-dimensional electrophoresis carried out following the purification of the**
909 **Rubisco.** 2D-electrophoresis (first dimension isoelectrofocusing, second dimension SDS-PAGE).
910 The area containing the spots stained by Coomassie have been quantified as reported by graphs on
911 the left. (**A**) D1H0 sample, (**B**) D1H8 sample, (**C**) D2H0 sample and (**D**) D2H8 sample. Analysis of
912 spot volume made with Quantity One software Intensity is reported in Y-axis as Integrated Density.
913 Values are average of three independent measurements with their standard deviation.

914

915 **Figure 10. Cytological analysis of tomato leaves using a light microscope.** In D1H0 (**A**) only a
916 few lipid bodies are detectable. D1H8 sample (**B**) showed a more abundant lipid bodies localized in
917 the cytoplasm of the spongy parenchyma, of the palisade parenchyma and in the epidermis. Data
918 collected in D2H0 (**C**) indicated that the number of lipid bodies is very low and not comparable with
919 other samples. While D2H8 (**D**) sample reported a remarkable increased number of lipid bodies.
920 Leaves structure is visible. C: cuticle; E: epidermis; V: vacuole; P: plastid; S: starch; LB: lipid bodies.
921 For each images, bar scale is reported

922

923 **Figure 11. Cytological analysis of tomato leaves using a TEM.** In D1H0 (**A**) only a few lipid bodies
924 are detectable. D1H8 sample (**B**) showed a more abundant lipid bodies localized in the cytoplasm of
925 the spongy parenchyma, of the palisade parenchyma and in the epidermis. Data collected in D2H0

926 (C) indicated that the number of lipid bodies is very low and not comparable with other samples.
927 While D2H8 (D) sample reported a remarkable increased number and size of lipid bodies.
928 Magnification of lipid body was reported in the insert. Leaves structure is visible. C: cuticle; E:
929 epidermis; V: vacuole; P: plastid; S: starch; LB: lipid bodies. For each images, bar scale is reported
930

931 **Figure 12. Schematically representation of photosynthetic and metabolic pathways involved in**
932 **response to chronic heat stress in tomato leaves.** The schematic reports the hypothetically involved
933 organelles and metabolic pathways, according to the obtained data. Flash of lightning indicate main
934 cellular process studied.

935

936 **SM 1. Heat stress treatment schematically reported.** The phases of heat stress and the different
937 points of sampling are indicated with red x. Time-course analysis are reported on the top of image.

938

939 **SM2. Electrophoretic analysis of different Rubisco purification steps.** (A) SDS-PAGE gel
940 obtained of reference sample (D1H0) purification protocol and (B) gel of D1H8 sample (only two
941 gels were reported). Lane 1 = standards of known molecular weight. Lane 2 = S1, first supernatant.
942 Lane 3 = S2, supernatant after ammonium sulphate precipitation. Lane 4 = P2, precipitate after
943 ammonium sulphate precipitation. Lane 5 = PS, positive fractions after sucrose gradient separation.
944 Lane 6 = PS2, positive fractions following ion exchange chromatography. Lane 7 = PF-GF, positive
945 fractions post second gel filtration chromatography. No protein degradation is highlighted.