

# Speciation of metals in indigenous plants growing in post-mining areas: Dihydroxynicotianamine identified as the most abundant Cu and Zn ligand in Hypericum laricifolium

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- <sup>1</sup> Speciation of metals in indigenous plants growing in
- <sup>2</sup> post-mining areas: dihydroxynicotianamine
- <sup>3</sup> identified as the most abundant Cu and Zn ligand in
- 4 Hypericum laricifolium

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ABSTRACT. Ag, As, Cu, Pb and Zn were found to be the principal metallic contaminants of a 14 post-mining area of Peru (Hualgayoc, Cajamarca). Study of metal distribution amongst roots, 15 16 stems, and leaves of four indigenous hypertolerant plant species, Arenaria digyna, Puya sp, Hypericum laricifolium, Nicotiana thyrsiflora indicated significant translocation of Zn 17  $(0.6 < TF \le 10.0)$  and Cu  $(0.4 < TF \le 6.5)$  into aerial plant organs and substantial water-extractable 18 fraction (20-60 %) of these metals, except for A. digvna (root and stems). A study of the metal 19 speciation by ultrahigh-performance size-exclusion (fast-SEC) and hydrophilic ion interaction 20 (HILIC) liquid chromatography with dual ICP (inductively coupled plasma) and electrospray 21 22 (ESI) Orbitrap MS detection revealed the presence of nicotianamine and deoxymugineic acid 23 copper and zinc complexes in roots, stem and leaves of N. thyrsiflora and Puya sp., and nicotianamine alone in A. digyna. A previously unreported compound, dihydroxy-nicotianamine 24 25 was identified as the most abundant Cu and Zn ligand in H. laricifolium. The presence of arsenobetaine and an arsenosugar was confirmed by ESI MS. Ag and Pb were hardly 26 27 translocated to leaves and were found as high molecular species; one of the Pb-containing species co-eluted in fast-SEC- ICP MS with rhamnogalacturonan-II-Pb complex commonly 28 found in in the walls of plants. 29

KEYWORDS: post-mining areas, Andean flora, hyphenated techniques, metal speciation, low
 molecular complexes, dihydroxynicotianamine.

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### 34 INTRODUCTION

35 Peru is the second largest producer of copper (Cu), silver (Ag), and zinc (Zn) worldwide (1). The contamination by mining environmental liabilities - including mine adits, prospecting pits, 36 waste dumps, shafts, open pits, trenches, old mine camps, old drill pads and non-mineralized pre-37 strip material (2) - raises interest in native plants able to grow in such harsh conditions, with the 38 aim to use them for soil recultivation and phytoremediation. The molecular understanding of the 39 mechanisms allowing plants to adapt and grow in heavily contaminated post-mining areas is 40 41 critically dependent on the knowledge of the chemical species (metal-complexes) involved in the uptake and transport of metals to the above-ground organs (stems and leaves) (3-5). 42

While there have been numerous studies of metal speciation in model plants grown in 43 hydroponics (6-13), studies of plants sampled in post-mining areas have been mostly limited to 44 the demonstration of the high total concentrations of accumulated metals. Information on metal 45 speciation has been scarce. These speciation studies have been carried out by synchrotron X-ray 46 absorption spectroscopy (XAS) and are thus restricted to the information about the coordination 47 environments of metal ions without revealing the molecular structure of the metal complexes 48 49 (14-18). In addition, these techniques are based on the comparison of the obtained spectra with 50 standards, and thus are incapable of untargeted (exploratory) analysis.

Molecular information on the metal species identity can be obtained by the combination of 51 52 their chromatographic fractionation with on-line mass spectrometric detection using: i) elemental techniques (Inductively Coupled Plasma Mass Spectrometry, ICP-MS) in order to detect and 53 quantify metals, and ii) molecular techniques (Electrospray Ionization Mass Spectrometry, ESI-54 55 MS), in order to identify the species (19). After a careful optimization, the approach was demonstrated to be suitable to plant fluids (phloem (6) and xylem (19)) and water-soluble species 56 involved in transport and translocation. Although the majority of studies used hydroponically 57 grown plants, some studies led to a successful identification and quantification of metal-58 speciation in wild-type plants. For example, a number of species of Ni (in hyperaccumulating 59 plants Sebertia acuminata (20) and Thlaspi caerulescens (21)), Al (22), and Fe (23) have been 60 reported. In comparison with XAS, hyphenated techniques require extraction and thus are 61 potentially vulnerable to species exchange between cells of different types and species-62 transformations. However, for the few studies having used both approaches, data obtained from 63 XAS and hyphenated techniques were found in good agreement, which suggests that these 64 concerns may be exaggerated (24, 25). Indeed, the presence of As-S bond detected by EXAFS in 65

plant tissues was confirmed by the LC-ES-MS/ICP-MS identification of As-phytochelatin 66 complexes extracted from the fresh plant material without degradation or formation of artefacts 67 during the sample preparation step (24); a similar comparison was presented for selenium species 68 in yeast (25). While simple identification of metal species in wild-type plants has already been 69 challenging, data on the quantitative distribution of the metals amongst the identified complexes 70 have been even scarcer. The difficulties of quantification result from (i) the difference in the 71 72 behavior of the synthetic standards and species naturally present in the sample, and (ii) the risk 73 of modification of the equilibrium in the case an amount of standard is added to the sample. Indeed, the stability and stoichiometry of metal complexes are dependent on the chemical 74 75 environment and are difficult to control, especially when using natural samples (26).

The goal of this study was to investigate, by means of the state-of-the-art hyphenated techniques, the metal speciation in four native Andean plants growing in a post-mining metal contaminated area, in order to identify the ligands responsible for the uptake and metal transport to the aboveground organs.

#### 80 EXPERIMENTAL

Samples. Four native plants growing in a post-mining metal contaminated area in the Andes of northern Peru were studied. They included: *Arenaria digyna, Puya sp., Hypericum laricifolium* and *Nicotiana thyrsiflora*. The taxonomic identification was carried out by Dr. M. Timaná (Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, Lima, Peru) and M.Sc. P. Gonzales Arce (Laboratory of Floristics of the Herbarium of the Natural History Museum of the Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos, Peru). The plants were sampled in the Hualgayoc mining district, that since Spanish colonial times has been known for Ag-rich polymetallic mineralization, along with Zn, Pb, and Cu. Due to the long history of mining and, until recently, the lack of appropriate legal regulations regarding mine closure, has nearly 1,000 catalogued MEL sites. The sampling area is in the west of the province of Hualgayoc, department of Cajamarca in the vicinity of a leach pad (a latitude 6°44'49" S, longitude 78°35'36" W and altitude of 3412 m above sea level) is situated on top of a mine waste deposit which has no drainage. The soil parameters are given in **Table SI-1** (*27*).

**Reagents.** The reagents used for digestions, dilutions, and the preparation of HPLC mobile 94 phases were obtained from Sigma-Aldrich (www.sigmaaldrich.com) unless specified otherwise. 95 96 The following were used: ammonium acetate ( $\geq 98\%$  for molecular biology), nitric acid (70%, 97 www.fishersci.com), acetonitrile ( $\geq 99.9\%$ ) and hydrogen peroxide (30%). Standard solutions (1000 ppm, www.scpscience.com) of Pb, Ag, Cu, Zn, As, were used for the preparation of 98 calibration curves and Sc and Rh as internal standards. Deionized water (18.2 MΩ.cm) obtained 99 from a Milli-Q® Type 1 Ultrapure Water Systems (www.merckmillipore.com) was used 100 101 throughout unless stated otherwise.

**Instrumentation.** The ICP MS spectrometers were ICP-MS 7500 (www.agilent.com) equipped with an integrated autosampler (I-AS) used for the total analysis and Agilent 7700x (www.agilent.com) used for the coupling with HPLC. The electrospray ionization mass spectrometer was Orbitrap Fusion<sup>TM</sup> Lumos<sup>TM</sup> (www.thermofisher.com). The chromatographic systems used for the separation of the analytes were: Agilent 1200 Series (www.agilent.com) and Dionex Ultimate 3000 RS (www.thermofisher.com). Samples were centrifuged using a MiniSpin and 5415 R centrifuges (www.eppendorf.com).

Sample preparation. *Initial sample preparation*. The plants were washed with tap water (for removing soil remains) and then with distilled water. Then, plants were separated into leaves, stems, and roots, and dried at 30-40 °C before grinding to obtain a fine powder.

112 *Total analysis.* The samples were digested in DigiPrep heated-block digester 113 (www.scpscience.com) using the following two-step program: (1) 1 ml of 70 % nitric acid at 85 114 °C for 4 h 30 min, after leaving the sample with acid overnight, (2) 0.5 ml of 30 % hydrogen 115 peroxide at 85°C for 4.5 h. The digest was diluted to 5 ml with water prior to analysis by ICP-116 MS.

Extraction and mass balance. 0.05 g of dried leaf, stem or root sample was shaken on a horizontal shaker with 2.5 mL of 25 mM ammonium acetate pH 7 for 1 h at 400 rpm and centrifuged for 5 min at 13 200 rpm. The supernatant was recovered and analyzed by HPLC. The supernatants (250  $\mu$ L) and the corresponding residues (after having been dried) were digested as described above prior to the analysis by ICP-MS.

Determination of the Total Metal Content. Samples were analyzed by ICP mass spectrometry (ICP-MS) using a reaction cell pressurized with He and H<sub>2</sub> gas. The isotopes monitored were <sup>107</sup>Ag, <sup>109</sup>Ag; <sup>75</sup>As, <sup>63</sup>Cu, <sup>65</sup>Cu; <sup>206</sup>Pb, <sup>207</sup>Pb, <sup>208</sup>Pb; <sup>64</sup>Zn, <sup>66</sup>Zn and <sup>68</sup>Zn. Analytical blanks were analyzed in parallel. The Standard Reference Material 1573a Tomato Leaves (NIST, Gaithersburg, MD 20899, USA) was used for quality control.

Quantification was performed in the calibration range of 0.2-100 ppb for Zn and 0.1-20 ppb for the other elements; an 8-point calibration curve was used. Measurements were carried out in triplicate; the results with relative standard deviation higher than 10% were discarded and the measurements repeated. Values are reported as mean  $\pm$  standard deviation (SD) of three analytical replicates. **Speciation of Metal Complexes.** *Chromatography.* The chromatographic conditions used are detailed in **Table 1**. For fast SEC separations, prior to injection, the supernatant from the extraction was mixed (1:1) with the eluent or ACN and centrifuged. Effluents from chromatographic column were analyzed directly or after post-column ACN addition (0.3 mL/min); ACN was delivered with an Agilent 1200 Series system. For HILIC separations, the supernatant was mixed, prior to injection, with ACN (1:4). As the addition of ACN may create a small amount of precipitate, the sample was centrifuged for 5 min at 13 200 rpm.

separation mechanism	fast size–exclusion chromatography (fast-SEC)	hydrophilic interactions liquid chromatography (HILIC)						
column	ACQUITY UPLC BEH 125 SEC	TSKgel Amide-80						
	(1.7 µm 4.6 x 150 mm); 1–80 kDa	; 1–80 kDa (2.0 μm, 2.0 x 150 mm)						
mobile phase	ammonium acetate 25 mM, pH=7	A: ammonium acetate 10 mM pH=7; B: ACN						
injection volume, $\mu L$	5	10						
flow rate, mL/min	0.3	0.1	0.2					
elution	isocratic	0 min –80 % B	0 min -80 % B					
		2.5 min - 80 % B	2.0 min - 80 % B					
		22.5 min -50 % B	3.0 min – 65% B					
		25 min –50 % B	4.5 min – 65% B					
		26 min -80 % B	9.0 min – 60% B					
		35 min -80 % B	12 min – 60% B					
			13.8 min -50 % B					
			16.8 min –50 % B					
			17.8 min –80 % B					
			25 min –80 % B					

**Table 1.** Chromatographic conditions used.

140 *ICP MS detection.* The exit of the column was directly connected to an ICP mass spectrometer

equipped with a collision cell.  $O_2$  was used as an optional gas (5%). Platinum cones were used.

*Electrospray MS.* The analyses were performed in positive ionization mode with ion source conditions set as default, according to the current LC flow – 0.3 mL/min and 0.1-0.2 mL/min for Fast-SEC and HILIC, respectively, with post-column ACN addition at a flow rate of 0.3 mL/min

to enhance ionization for Fast-SEC. Data were acquired at resolution 240 000 in a scan range of 145 150-1000 m/z with a maximum injection time of 502 ms, 5e<sup>5</sup> AGC target and 30% RF lens. 146 MS/MS was performed in a targeted analysis mode, based on the results from the FullScan mode 147 (Full MS/dd-MS<sup>2</sup>). The inclusion mass list was prepared on the basis of the already known 148 metal-containing compounds as well as compounds with metal characteristic isotopic patterns. 149 To confirm the presence those compounds, Thermo Scientific<sup>TM</sup> Compound Discoverer<sup>TM</sup> with 150 Pattern Scoring Node were used. Full MS/dd-MS<sup>2</sup> was performed as follows: 1) FullScan MS: 151 orbitrap resolution 240 K; scan range m/z 150-1000; maximum injection time 300 ms; AGC 152 target 80000; RF lens 30%; 2) MS<sup>2</sup> of targeted ions was performed in the HCD cell with a 153 154 collision energy of 30%; orbitrap resolution 60 K; maximum injection time 118ms; AGC target 75000 with the first mass of 100 m/z. 155

#### 156 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Choice of Elements of Interest. Target elements were chosen on the basis of the soil 157 contamination assessed by using the Index of Geoaccumulation (Igeo) (28). The concentrations of 158 14 elements found in the soil where the plants were collected (Table SI-2) (27) were compared 159 with their abundances in the Earth's crust (29) and with the geochemical baseline values near the 160 sampling sites (Table SI-3) (30). The degree of contamination (31) depended on the element 161 (Figure 1). The soils were found to be extremely contaminated with Ag and Pb ( $I_{geo} \ge 4$ ), 162 strongly contaminated with As, Cu, Zn ( $2 \le I_{geo} \le 4$ ), moderately contaminated with Cr, Mo, Tl 163  $(1 \le I_{geo} \le 2)$  and uncontaminated with other elements (Cd, Co, Mn, Ni, V, W,  $I_{geo} \le 1$ ). The five 164 elements for which the contamination was the highest, (Ag, As, Cu, Pb and Zn), were selected 165 166 for the study of their uptake and translocation in plants. As demonstrated in the previous study 167 concerning this area, these elements were mainly present in soil fractions with limited metal168 mobility (mineral or bound to hydrated iron and manganese oxides) (*32*).



169

Figure 1. Index of Geoaccumulation  $(I_{geo})$  for selected elements present in the soil in the contaminated post-mining site.

172 **Choice of the Studied Plants.** All the plants growing in post-mining environmental 173 liabilities areas are indigenous to the Andes. *Nicotiana thyrsiflora* belongs to *Nicotiana genus* 174 which is important in traditional medicine in South America as a source of alkaloid nornicotine 175 (*33*). It is one of the most comprehensively studied flowering plant genus (*34*),(*35*) and raises 176 interest for environmental restoration activities (*36*).

Hypericum laricifolium (Hypericaceae) is distributed from western Venezuela along the
cordilleras of Colombia and Ecuador to central Peru (*37*). Its aerial parts are rich in phenolic
acids, flavonoids, triterpenoids (*38*), xanthones (*39*), and dimeric acylphloroglucinol derivatives
(40) and their infusion is used in traditional medicine (*41*). It is a source of essential oils
(acylphloroglucinol derivatives) (*42*) (*43*).

*Puya sp.* forms clumps of small 8-10 inch wide rosettes of very narrow powdery blue-gray
leaves and has no stem. The heart of the inflorescence of *Puya sp.*, known as "aguarongo", is
cooked and eaten in Ecuador (44) and is an important nutritious resource for hummingbirds, (45)
(46). *Puya sp.* tea infusions are known for antioxidant and aldose reductase inhibitory activity
(47).

*Arenaria digyna* belongs to family of *Caryophyllaceae* and is one of indicator species for high
altitude bofedales – type of wetlands found in Peruvian and Chilean Andes (48). Several species
of this family are used as traditional medicine (49).

Bioaccumulation and Translocation Factors. The total concentration of Ag, As, Cu, Pband Zn in individual plant organs are given in Table 2.

For As, Pb and Zn, the leaves of all the studied plants showed metal concentrations higher than the maximum reference values generalized for mature leaf tissues from various plant species (*50*). Moreover, Zn concentrations in leaves of *N. thyrsiflora* significantly exceeds the level of excessive/toxic concentration (100-400 ppm). In the case of copper and silver, these values (*50*) were exceeded in *N. thyrsiflora* and *A. digyna*.

197 The data on the total element concentration in plant organs allowed for the calculation of the 198 bioaccumulation (*BCF*) and translocation factors (*TF*) in order to assess the ability of plants to 199 mobilize elements from the soil (*BCF*) and translocate (*TF*) them from roots to aerial parts (*51*). 200 The bioaccumulation factors were lower than 1. The translocation factors were exceptionally 201 high for Zn (*N. thyrsiflora*, *H. laricifolium*, and *Puya sp.*) and Cu (*N. thyrsiflora*).

**Table 2.** Total metal concentrations (mg kg<sup>-1</sup>) (mean ± SD) of As, As, Cu, Pb and Zn in different organs of the native plants the

Native species	Organs		Ag			As			Cu			Pb			Zn	
Puya sp	L	0.52	±	0.01	8.33	±	0.14	13.3	±	0.82	28.5	±	5.31	145	±	2.57
	R	2.20	±	0.01	45.3	±	0.93	22.6	±	0.41	105	±	11.8	23.4	±	2.06
Bioaccumulation factor			0.04			0.03			0.05			0.02			0.50	
Translocation factor			0.23			0.18			0.59			0.27			6.20	
	L	3.24	±	0.13	8.29	±	0.14	77.6	±	0.55	286	±	46.0	390	±	8.6
Arenaria digyna	S	10.49	±	0.10	110.3	±	1.3	123	±	1.18	2114	±	46.5	447	±	8.8
	R	15.55	±	3.90	140.6	±	48.4	132	±	12.4	2205	±	103	590	±	12.4
Bioaccumulation factor			0.14			0.02			0.15			0.10			1.97	
Transle	ocation factor		0.20			0.06			0.59			0.13			0.66	
	L	1.30	±	0.10	3.77	±	0.10	9.71	±	0.74	126	±	3.06	305	±	4.73
Hypericum laricifolium	S	0.81	±	0.02	1.07	±	0.05	9.12	±	0.95	147	±	5.39	164	±	3.46
	R	7.30	±	0.80	7.66	±	0.45	21.53	±	3.37	434	±	54.9	153	±	14.6
Bioaccumulation factor			0.06			0.01			0.03			0.04			0.57	
Translocation factor			0.18			0.49			0.45			0.29			1.99	
	L	2.97	±	0.22	2.41	±	0.07	48.5	±	0.57	41.8	±	2.05	1051	±	20.6
Nicotiana thyrsiflora	S	0.51	±	0.03	0.50	±	0.01	6.30	±	0.34	45.0	±	5.29	546	±	30.2
	R	3.46	±	0.15	3.37	±	0.16	7.47	±	0.09	66.1	±	9.11	105	±	3.78
Bioaccumulation factor			0.16			0.01			0.24			0.02			0.73	
Translocation factor			0.86			0.71			6.49			0.63			10.0	
leaf tissue generalized for various species*			0.5			1-1.7			5-30			5-10			27-150	

204 Hualgayoc district, Cajamarca region, Peru.

205 L: leaf, S: stem, R: root

Bioaccumulation factor BF=  $C_p/C_{so}$  (where  $C_p$  is the metal concentration in the plant leaves and  $C_{so}$  - in the soil)

207 Translocation factor  $TF = C_s/C_r$  (where  $C_s$  is the metal concentration the leaves and  $C_r$  - in roots)

\*according to: Kabata-Pendias, A., 2011. Trace Elements in Soils and Plants, 4th Ed. ed. CRC Press Taylor & Francis Group, Boca
 Raton London New York.

Metal Water Soluble Fraction. In order to get an insight into the ligands involved in metal 211 translocation, the fraction of metals soluble in water was assessed. The data allowing for a 212 213 comparison between the soluble and insoluble fraction are shown in Figure 2. These watersoluble fractions were highest for Cu and Zn, virtually regardless of the plant and similar for all 214 the organs (root, stem and leaves) indicating the presence of a mobile pool of metal in the plant. 215 For the other elements and plants, the mobile metal fraction was by far lower, and rarely 216 exceeded 5%. In general, the water-soluble fraction percentage was negligible for Ag and Pb 217 even if the total metal contents were relatively high. 218



Figure 2. Ag, As, Cu, Pb and Zn fractionation into water soluble and insoluble fractions, inindividual organs of the studied plants.

222 Metal Speciation: the Approach. Metal speciation was investigated coupling HILIC with a parallel (not simultaneous) detection by ICP-MS and electrospray Orbitrap MS as described 223 elsewhere (19). In order to provide an independent set of chromatographic data, size-exclusion 224 chromatography was revisited. In particular, the regular size (10 x 300 mm, 13 µm) column used 225 so far (19, 21, 52) was replaced by a ultrahigh performance  $(4.6 \times 150 \text{ mm}, 1.7 \mu\text{m})$  column. 226 This reduced considerably the analysis time (from 60 to 15 min), facilitated the online addition 227 of acetonitrile required to improve the species ionization, and increased sensitivity, as the peaks 228 were narrower than when using in the regular size SEC column. 229

230 Fast-SEC was inferior in terms of resolution to HILIC, but gave an estimation of the molecular 231 size distribution, including the high-molecular species which were precipitated (and thus could not be analyzed) in the HILIC conditions. The metal recoveries were generally higher than 80%, 232 which is a satisfactory proof of good control of possible on-column dissociation effects and 233 carry-over. The results were considered as meaningful if similar data were obtained with both 234 235 fast-SEC and HILIC. Note that HILIC elutions are usually carried out with gradients, which 236 results in changing ionization conditions in ICP-MS and ESI-MS, and may affect the datasets 237 obtained (species more or less readily ionized).

In terms of MS, both targeted and exploratory approaches (based on the characteristic metal isotopic patterns) were used for the search of metal species in the high-resolution high-accuracy mass spectra of plant extracts. Elucidation of the structure of particular complexes was completed by fragmentation studies of the complex (and free ligand, if present) using MS<sup>n</sup>.

In terms of quantification, our strategy was based on the optimization of the HPLC conditions to allow for individual metal species separation, good (close to quantitative) metal recovery, and correction of the effect of the change in the mobile phase composition on the sensitivity. Indeed, the intensity of signals obtained for Zn and Cu was the highest at ACN content of 80% and was decreasing with the gradient changing to lower ACN percentage. Finally, to avoid this problem, the FastSEC was applied to quantification, as the ACN concentration is constant throughout the chromatographic run. The method employed here was based on the estimation of the ratio between the signal intensity obtained for a specific compound (exact m/z) in different samples based on LC ESI-MS results, and therefore can be considered as a semi-quantitative.

Speciation of Zinc. Figure 3 shows a set of HILIC – ICP MS/ESI MS chromatograms for 251 the speciation of Zn. The corresponding set of fast-SEC chromatograms is shown in Figure SI-1. 252 253 The compound with m/z 366.06 present in Arenaria digyna, Nicotiana thyrsiflora, and Puya sp, 254 and being only a trace in Hypericum laricifolium, corresponds to the Zn complex with nicotianamine as demonstrated by MS/MS data (Figure SI-2a). Note that nicotianamine (NA) is 255 the most often reported LMW ligand complexing zinc in plants. Its stability constant (logK) is 256 between 14.7 (53) and 15.4 (54). Zn-NA complex identification has been carried out both in 257 plant fluids (6),(19),(55),(52) and in extracts obtained upon plant tissue homogenization 258 259 (56),(13) (57). The Zn-NA complex was identified (as the only Zn species) in the phloem sap of rice (6) and castor bean plants (Ricinus communis) (7), in the xylem of Arabidopsis thaliana 260 (55), in the xylem and embryo sac liquid of Pisum sativum (19), in coconut water (52), and in 261 hydroponically cultured lettuce leaves (13). Nicotianamine, glutathione and desGluPC<sub>2</sub> ligands 262 were identified in the Zn-containing SEC fractions of Tris-NaCl extracts of root and shoot tissues 263 of laboratory grown wild type Arabidopsis halleri, but no data for intact complexes were shown 264 265 in that study (56).

EXAFS spectra for *Thlaspi caerulescens* (Zn hyperaccumulator) indicate that nicotianamine may be involved in Zn transport to aerial plant organs, but it is not a principal storage ligand 268 (58). In turn, XANES analysis of apple leaves exposed to Zn deficiency revealed the presence of 4 types of components: Zn-citrate, Zn-cell wall, Zn<sup>2+</sup> and Zn-nicotianamine, wherein the largest 269 amount was associated with the cell wall (59). While studying Zn speciation in edible plants 270 grown in smelter contaminated soils by Zn K-edge XANES, the results were based on the use of 271 only three Zn complexes with histidine, malate, and cysteine so the results cannot be considered 272 as conclusive (60). In an XAS study of sweetcorn and maize, it was predicted that the large part 273 of Zn in the embryos was present as Zn-phytate, while in the endosperm the Zn was primarily 274 275 complexed with an N-containing ligand such as histidine and to a lesser extent with phytate (61).









In N. thyrsiflora and Puya sp., Zn-nicotianamine was accompanied by the Zn-DMA complex 280 (m/z 367.05, confirmed by MS/MS data, Figure SI-2a). The contributions of Zn-DMA, which 281 has a lower complex formation constant (12.7) (62) than Zn-NA (ca. 15 (53, 54)), were much 282 lower, although free DMA was observed in the samples. The presence of DMA in N. thyrsiflora 283 is interesting because for a long time it has been thought that only graminaceous plants 284 biosynthesize MAs. However, at least two recent LC-TOF-MS studies reported the presence of 285 286 DMA in non-graminaceous plant species such as peanut (Arachis hypogaea L.) (63) and olive 287 trees (Olea europaea L.) (57). In the first one, the authors concluded that peanut's roots absorbed Fe-DMA complex generated by DMA secreted from neighboring maize plants (63). Similarly, 288 289 the detected presence of Zn-DMA in lettuce was considered to be a contamination (13). However, in the olive tree study of Suzuki et al., possibility of intercropping was excluded and 290 DMA complexes were detected in both the xylem sap and leaves (57). The analysis of these two 291 292 samples - one analyzed directly (xylem sap) and the other one which required tissue homogenization and extraction (leaves) - provided a mutual validation of these two approaches 293 (57). Marastoni *et al.* pointed out that more and more studies indicate difficulty in assigning only 294 one type of Fe acquisition strategy by different plant species. In their work, they showed that two 295 studied grapevine rootstock varieties exhibit different Fe acquisition strategies. Although they do 296 297 not belong to the graminaceous species, in their root's exudates they found mugineic acid derivatives (64). Similar findings have been shown by Astolfi et al. (65). Their studies on tomato 298 plants support the hypothesis of double strategy of Fe acquisition by plants, previously discussed 299 300 for rice. In summary, more and more results indicate that clear distinction between Strategy I and 301 Strategy II plants (as graminaceous only), used so far, cannot be recognized as final, as the overall picture is not so explicit. 302

In our case, although in field sampling intercropping could not be excluded, the presence of 303 free (apo) DMA in *N. thyrsiflora* organs supports the detection of Zn-DMA (and also Cu-DMA) 304 complexes. The possibility of contamination during the analytical procedure (and, in particular, 305 chromatographic carryover) was carefully examined and discarded. The genes for DMA 306 biosynthesis were detected by transcriptome analysis of Olea europaea L. and it has been 307 suggested that NAAT and DMAS might have evolutionally loose substrate specificities in olive 308 309 plants in comparison with those in graminaceous plants (57). Indeed, recent studies stressed the 310 existence of several shared components of the metal complexing strategies among plants, questioning the validity of the earlier concept of their mutual exclusivity (66). 311

Although nicotianamine and deoxymugineic acid are usually discussed in relation with metal deficiency (*67*), studies have shown that NA may play a role in the rice tolerance to the Zn excess (*68*). Indeed, in the case of the Zn excess, endogenous NA secretion in roots increased, suggesting that NA is responsible for Zn tolerance, in addition to being the precursor of the synthesis of DMA. Although the function of DMA in conditions of Zn excess is not known, the synthesis of DMA in roots in such circumstances may also be involved in maintaining Zn availability in rice plants (*68*).

*Hypericum laricifolium* presented a distinctively different Zn speciation than the other three plants studied. It showed the presence of two species of which the molecular mass suggested that they were hydroxyl (mono- and di-) derivatives of nicotianamine. The hypothesis of hydroxylation is corroborated by an observation that the introduction of hydroxyl groups into a phytosiderophore skeleton increased metal-chelate stability in acid environments (48). An indication of the hydroxylation positions may come from the observation that enzymes were found to hydroxylate the C-2' positions of DMA and *epi*HDMA and the C-3 positions of MA and DMA (*69*).

Monohydroxy-nicotianamine complexes of Cu and Zn were putatively identified in grassland 327 soil on the basis of their empirical formulas, the MS/MS fragmentation spectra, and the similarity 328 of metal binding to nicotianamine (70). However, the position of the hydroxyl group in the 329 molecule structure was not given (70). Free (apo) monohydroxy-nicotianamine was also isolated 330 331 from buckwheat powder, and shown to exist in some polygonaceous plants (71). A study of its 332 distribution within buckwheat plants revealed that it was predominantly localized in seeds (72). Further studies have shown that the hydroxyl group is in the C-2" position (73). The same 333 334 compound was later identified and quantified in Asparagus officinalis, demonstrated for the first time in non-polygonaceous plants (74). However, no information about possible metal 335 336 complexes was provided (71, 72).

337 The majority of Zn in *H. laricifolium* was present in the form of an unknown species with m/z397.046361, which corresponds to the formula  $C_{12}H_{19}N_3O_8Zn$ . The structure of this species, 338 presenting a characteristic Zn isotopic pattern, was investigated by ESI-MS<sup>n</sup>. The hypothesis of 339 the structure of a double hydroxylated nicotianamine derivative was confirmed by the 340 comparison with in silico fragmentation of three possible isomers: 2',2''-dihydroxy-341 nicotianamine, 3-epi-2'-dihydroxy-nicotianamine and 3-epi-2''-dihydroxy-nicotianamine (Table 342 SI-4). However, the fragmentation of siderophores is characterized by multiple unspecific losses 343 of small fragments (hydroxyl, carboxyl, or amino groups) making the analysis of the 344 fragmentation spectra and the unambiguous confirmation of the species structures difficult. For 345 the detected Zn species, very similar coverages were obtained when comparing the experimental 346 data with three putative isomers of the dihydroxy-nicotianamine complex. The most probable 347

structure seems to be 3-*epi*-OH-2"-OH-NA having the hydroxyl groups in positions observed for other siderophores (69) and the highest agreement with the *in silico* fragmentation. In addition to the complex, in *Hypericum laricifolium* and *Nicotiana thyrsiflora* free (non-complexed) dihydroxy-nicotianamine was detected. The set of the MS<sup>n</sup> data supporting the proposed structures is shown in **Figure 4**.



Figure 4. Fragmentation pathways of Zn-complex with di-hydroxy nicotianamine candidatespecies.

353

Fig. 5 summarizes the estimated distribution of the species found in the different plant organs and accounts for the free ligands involved in the complexation of Zn and Cu, based on SEC-MS results (XIC signal intensity). It shows that in *A. digyna, N. thyrsiflora* and *Puya sp.*, Znnicotianamine is the most abundant Zn species (and in *A. digyna* the only one). Also, 21 uncomplexed (free) NA was observed in these three plants. The contributions of Zn-DMA,
which has a lower complex formation (12.7 for Zn(II)-DMA) (62) constants than Zn-NA (ca. 15
(53, 54)) were much lower, although free DMA was also present in the samples.





In *Puya sp.*, signals of Zn-DMA in roots were around twice lower than in leaves, while Zn-NA was present only in leaves (with signal intensity around twice higher than for the DMA complex). In *N. thyrsiflora*, the signals intensity for Zn-NA complex doubled when passing from roots to stems and then from stems to leaves. Relatively high signals for DMA-Zn were observed in all plant organs. In *A. digyna*, similar Zn-NA signals were present in roots and stems and

significantly higher (ca. 5 times) in leaves. No Zn-DMA complex could be detected. As it was
previously stated, the main compound in *H. laricifolium* was dihydroxy-nicotianamine-Zn,
which accumulated mainly in leaves (around 2.5x and 4x higher signals than in stems and roots
respectively). Moreover, a small part of Zn was associated with NA and monohydroxy-NA, and
localized mostly in leaves.

Speciation of copper. Figure 3 (bottom part) shows a set of HILIC – ICP MS/ESI MS
chromatograms for the speciation of Cu. The corresponding set of fast-SEC chromatograms is
shown in Figure SI-3. The overall speciation pattern is very similar to that of Zn.

The presence of NA and DMA as the major ligands in *Puya sp.*, and *N. thyrsiflora* was 379 380 observed. Note that, in contrast to Zn, the binding constants (logK) of the Cu(II)-NA and Cu(II)-DMA complexes are similar: 18.6 for Cu(II)-NA (53) 18.7 for Cu(II)- DMA (62). Indeed, NA 381 and DMA were reported in xylem and phloem of rice (Oryza sativa) (75) and castor bean plants 382 383 (Ricinus communis) (7). However, several other ligands such as histidine (18), proline (50), citrate (76) and glutathione (17) were reported in the literature. Although our untargeted search 384 385 did not indicate any of such complexes, a targeted search for these complexes and free ligands was attempted. No complex with Cu was detected with either of these ligands, despite the 386 presence of the free ligands, in particular histidine. XAS data obtained in a model hydroponic 387 experiment showed that the majority of Cu in the roots and leaves of tomato (Solanum 388 lycopersicum) and oat (Avena sativa) existed as sulfur-coordinated Cu(I) species resembling 389 glutathione/cysteine-rich proteins (77). Elemental distribution and chemical speciation of copper 390 391 in three metallophytes from the copper-cobalt belt in Northern Zambia was studied revealing a complex picture of Cu handling across the studied plants; it was further complicated by the fact 392 that several of the XANES fits were poor, with significant fit residuals noted (78). The proposed 393

species included Cu(I) bound by S donor atom ligands (modelled as glutathione or cysteine) and oxygen bound forms of Cu(I) and Cu(II); a significant contribution of Cu(II)–acetate complex (78). Cu-N and Cu-O bonds were detected in wheat and tomato root apoplasts. Nitrogen/oxygen ligands were identified in slightly higher proportions (40-70%) than single oxygen ligands. The high-affinity N functional groups embedded in root apoplasts participated in copper binding in the same magnitude than the low-affinity carboxylic groups (79). No siderophore metal complexes have been included so far in the XAS standardization.

401 In leaves of Puya sp., the intensity of the XIC signal corresponding to Cu-NA was almost twice higher than the one corresponding to Cu-DMA, whereas in roots Cu-DMA dominated 402 403 (Figure 5). In N. thyrsiflora: Cu-NA was the main species in all the organs and was accompanied by much smaller signals of Cu-DMA. The signals intensity of Cu-NA was the 404 highest in leaves and the lowest in stems. In A. digyna the intensity of the signals of Cu-NA was 405 406 similar in stems and roots and twice higher in leaves. As in the case of Zn, the speciation of Cu in H. laricifolium was different from that in other plants. The only detected species was the Cu-407 dihydroxy-NA complex which, was twice higher in leaves than in other parts. 408

The minor Cu species detected at m/z 335.0341 in all the plants except *H. laricifolium*, could be attributed the empiric formula C<sub>11</sub>H<sub>16</sub>N<sub>2</sub>O<sub>6</sub>Cu. It corresponds to the ligand C<sub>11</sub>H<sub>18</sub>N<sub>2</sub>O<sub>6</sub> previously reported (but not identified) in xylem sap of *Solanum habrochaites*, a native Andean wild tomato (*80*). The abundance of this species was too low to provide meaningful fragmentation data.

Relatively high signals corresponding to the free ligands NA and DMA were found in *N*. *thyrsiflora, A. digyna* and *Puya* organs (only DMA in roots of *Puya*). Small signals of hydroxylated nicotianamine forms were also observed in several organs of all plants, excluding *Puya.* In addition to the already discussed phytosiderophores, ligands such as aminoadipic acid,
phenylalanine, tyrosine, and tryptophan, which could potentially bind metals, were observed.
However, no metal complexes with those ligands were detected.

Speciation of arsenic. Speciation of As in plants has been mainly studied in the context of 420 food safety, with the majority of works focused on rice (81-83). Indeed, rice is often harvested in 421 areas with high soil As content and the possible presence of toxic inorganic As(III) is of concern 422 in view of its popularity as staple food in many regions. The works on As speciation in plants 423 growing in post-mining sites have been scarce (84-88). All the studies were based on retention 424 425 time matching with standards in HPLC-ICP-MS. Our goal was to expand this approach to search 426 for As species by targeted and exploratory ESI-MS<sup>n</sup>. For all the studied plants, the FastSEC fractionation of As in water extracts of organs revealed the same profile consisting of just one 427 peak, eluting in the low (below 1 kDa) molecular weight range (Figure 6a). In contrast to the 428 metals discussed above, As forms covalent organic compounds, which allows using harsher 429 430 extraction conditions than those used for coordination metal complexes. In consequence, it was 431 attempted to increase the extraction recovery of As species in comparison with those obtained for water extraction (Figure SI-4). However, the addition of methanol (or ethanol) (85-88) did not 432 significantly improve the extraction yield. A ten-fold pre-concentration by evaporation was used 433 to improve signal intensities in LC-MS/MS analysis. 434

A targeted analysis based on a Top3 MS<sup>2</sup> acquisition in positive mode permitted to confirm the detection of two arsenocompounds on the basis of their fragmentation. Different fragmentation collision energies and fragmentation modes - collision-induced dissociation (CID) and higherenergy C-trap dissociation (HCD) - were applied to find the best conditions to fragment As species and thus confirm their identification. The targeted fragmentation of arsenobetaine (m/z

179.0048) and arsenosugar (m/z 329.0573) previously detected in a full MS scan permitted the 440 determination of five characteristic fragments of arsenobetaine and three fragments of 441 arsenosugar-glycerol (89). Both compounds were found in all organs of A. dygina. Furthermore, 442 arsenobetaine itself was found in leaves/roots of Puva and roots of N. thyrsiflora, for which the 443 signal intensities from LC ICP-MS were the highest (Figure 6a). The fragmentation data 444 obtained at HCD50 were compared with and matched those found elsewhere for algal extracts 445 (90) (89). The extracted ion chromatograms and the summary of the MS<sup>2</sup> fragments are 446 447 summarized in Figure 6b. Since As is known to occur in covalent complexes with glutathione and phytochelatins (24), the presence of these putative species (Table SI-5) was screened for in 448 449 the target mode but without a positive result.

Speciation of silver and lead. SEC-ICP MS fractionation of (a) Ag and (b) Pb in individual 450 organs of the studied plants indicates the presence of compounds in the high-molecular weight 451 452 range (Figure SI-5). Neither Ag nor Pb species could be successfully separated on the HILIC column which is suitable for the analysis of LMW species only. As it has been written earlier, 453 after diluting samples with HILIC mobile phase, containing a high percentage of acetonitrile, 454 precipitation of HMW complexes takes place. Hence, in the case of these two elements, the study 455 could only be based on the data obtained after the SEC separation. A SEC signal of Ag was very 456 weak and no hypothesis about its identity could be put forward. Regarding lead, two intense 457 peaks were usually present, one of the Pb-containing species co-eluting in fast-SEC-ICP-MS 458 (Figure SI-6) with the rhamnogalacturonan-II-Pb complex (MW of ca. 10 kDa) commonly 459 found in in the walls of plants (91). 460

461 Unlike Zn or Cu, lead and silver are not the nutrient elements, and their bioavailability for
462 plants is reduced. Silver ions are preferentially bound by thiol groups and natural organic matter,

463 humic and fulvic acids play a significant role here. Consequently, the availability of Ag is estimated at less than 5%, as it is strongly retained by the soil components (92). Whereas Pb 464 tends to form insoluble compounds, like sulfates and phosphates. Most of Pb is limited by the 465 roots, which usually accumulate the highest metal contents (93). The results of the study of lead 466 tolerance mechanisms of the plant species Biscutella auriculata L. from a mining area indicated 467 its high capacity to tolerate Pb and due mainly due to a very efficient mechanism to sequester the 468 469 metal in roots (94). Similar conclusions were drawn for the Salix integra, used for the 470 phytostabilization of Pb-Zn mine tailings. It was shown that the Pb taken up by the plant is localized mainly in the cell walls, linked to the -OH or pectin groups. Furthermore, the 471 detoxification in the root cells may be related to metal precipitation in the phosphate or oxalate 472 forms (95). 473



Figure 6. Speciation of arsenic soluble species in organs of the studied plants; (a) SEC-ICP MS
fractionation, (b) XIC HILIC - ESI MS chromatograms (upper panels) and fragmentation spectra
(bottom panels) of water-soluble arsenic species found in organs of the studied plants.

#### 479 CONCLUSIONS

The speciation of Cu and Zn in plants growing in post-mining areas in the Peruvian Andes 480 481 corroborate the hypothesis that, in contrast to hyperaccumulators which transport the metals using weakly binding ligands, strong ligands such as NA and DMA are chosen in non-482 accumulator plants (15, 96). The speciation does not differ much from that found in other plant 483 species reported in the literature, except for H. laricifolium. This species contained mono- and 484 dihydroxy-nicotianamine as the only water-soluble species complexing Zn and Cu, and the latter 485 is reported here for the first time. The observation of hydroxylation and double hydroxylation is 486 unique and interesting, since the process is likely to be genetically encoded and mediated 487 enzymatically (97). The study also showed the synthesis of organoarsenic compounds in 488 terrestrial plants. Ag and Pb are not transported to the aerial parts, except for Pb in A. digyna, 489 where the species involved in translocation is likely to be a complex with diRG -II. 490

#### 491 ASSOCIATED CONTENT

#### 492 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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#### 502 ABBREVIATIONS

NA, nicotianamine; DMA, 2'-deoxymugineic acid; epiHDMA, 3-epihydroxy-2'deoxymugineic acid NAAT, nicotianamine aminotransferase; DMAS, deoxymugineic acid
synthase.

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