How likely is it for oxygenic photosynthesis to evolve?

Robert E. Blankenship
Washington University in St. Louis
Departments of Biology and Chemistry

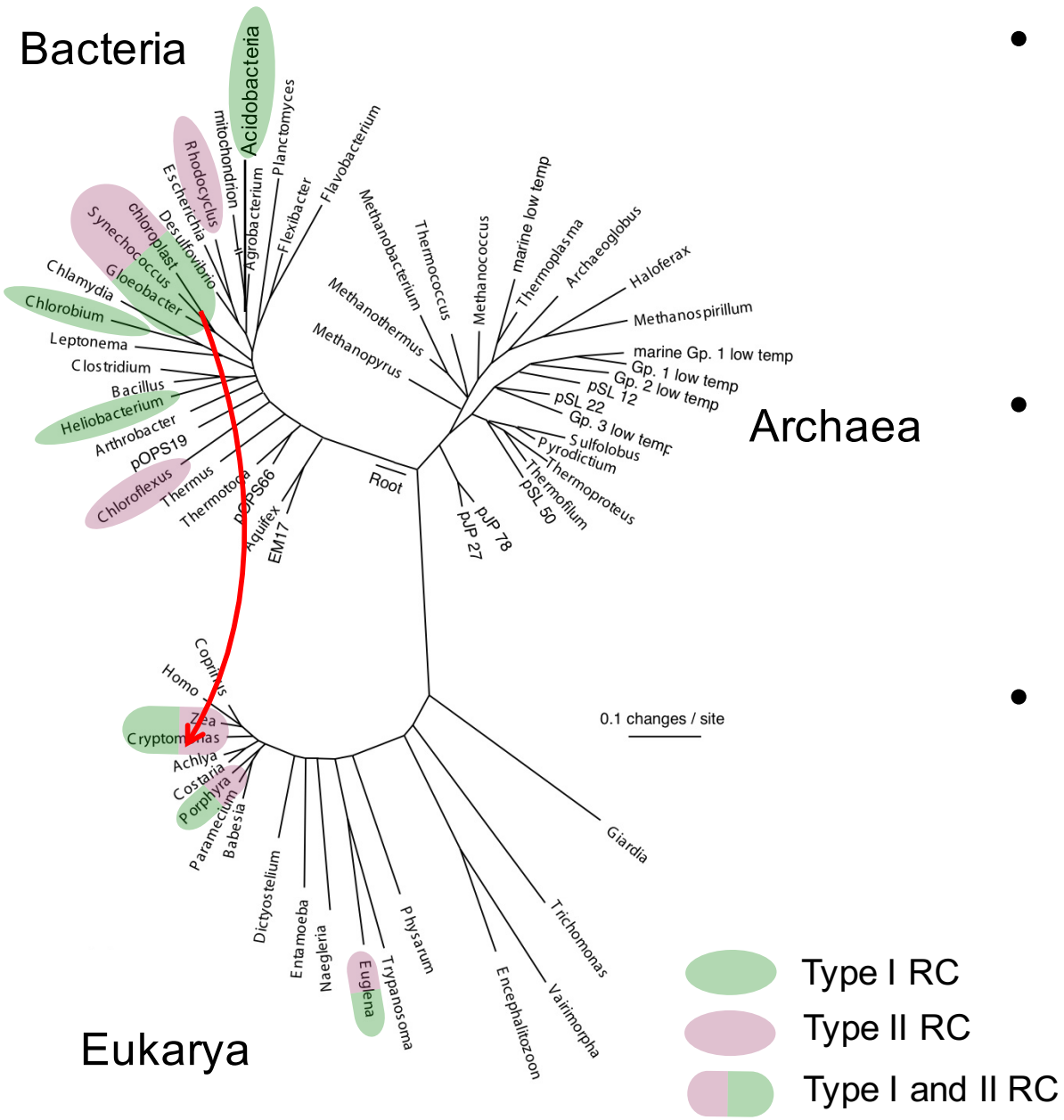
Washington University in St. Louis

NASA NExSS Biosignature Workshop
July 27, 2016

Photosynthesis- The Conversion of Light Energy into Chemical Energy

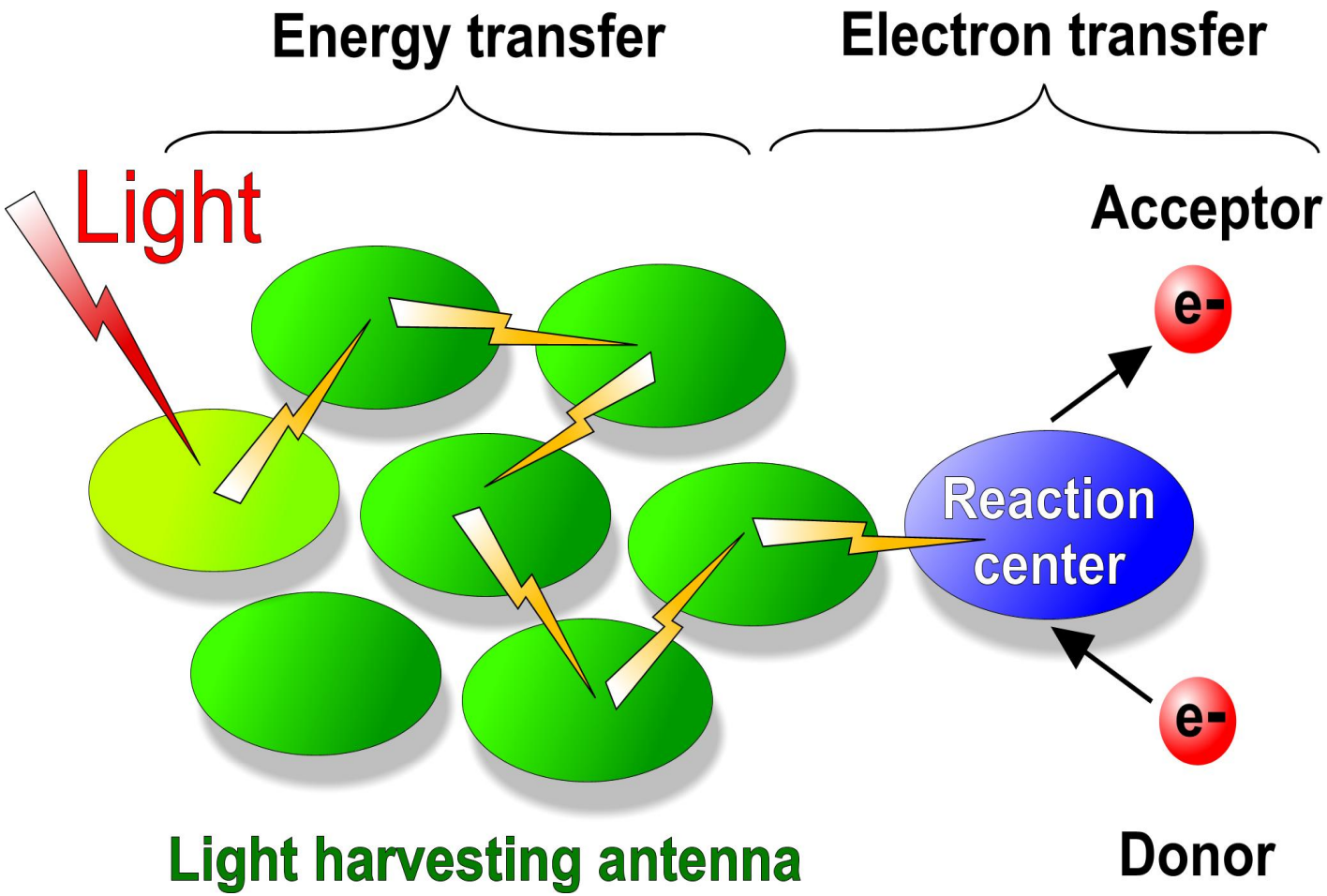
PS is the source of all our food and most of our energy resources on Earth

Types of Phototrophic Organisms



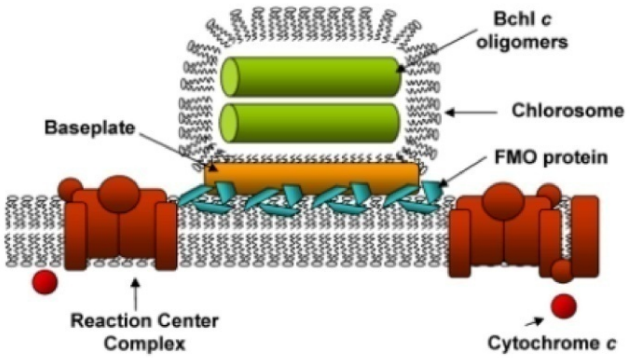
- Chlorophyll-based phototrophic organisms are found only in the Bacterial and Eukaryal domains.
- Phototrophs are either **oxygenic** (oxygen evolving) or **anoxygenic** (non-oxygen evolving)
- All phototrophic Eukaryotic chloroplasts were derived via **endosymbiosis** of cyanobacteria.

Photosynthetic Energy Storage

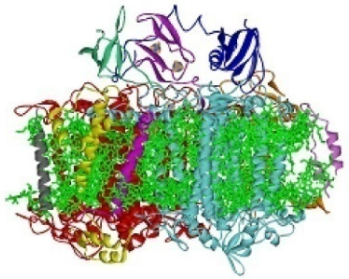


All PS organisms contain a light-gathering antenna system and an electron-transferring reaction center.

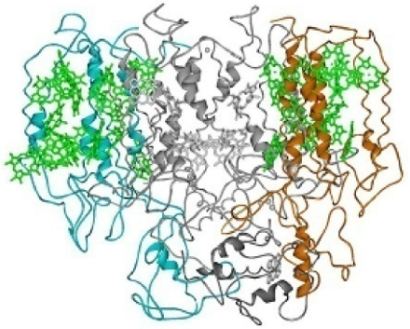
Photosynthetic Antenna Complexes



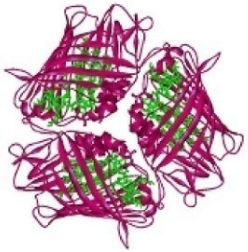
Chlorosomes



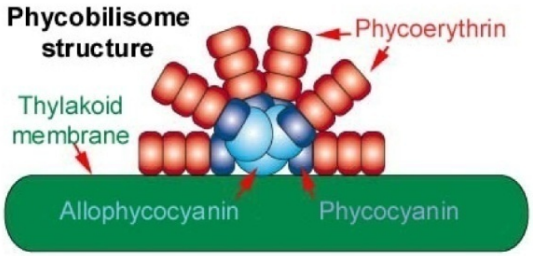
Photosystem I Core

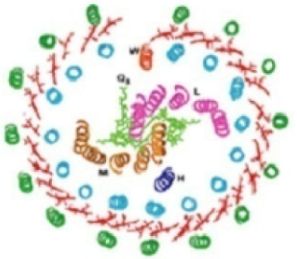


CP43 and CP47 from PSII

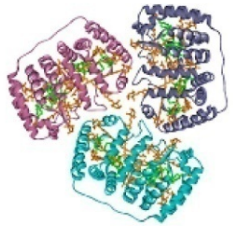


Fenna-Matthew-Olson Protein

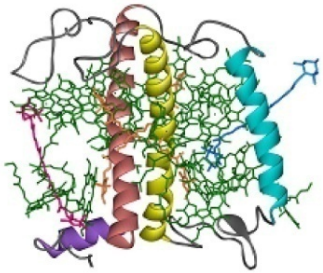




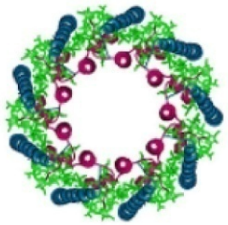
LH1 Core



Peridinin-Chl Complex



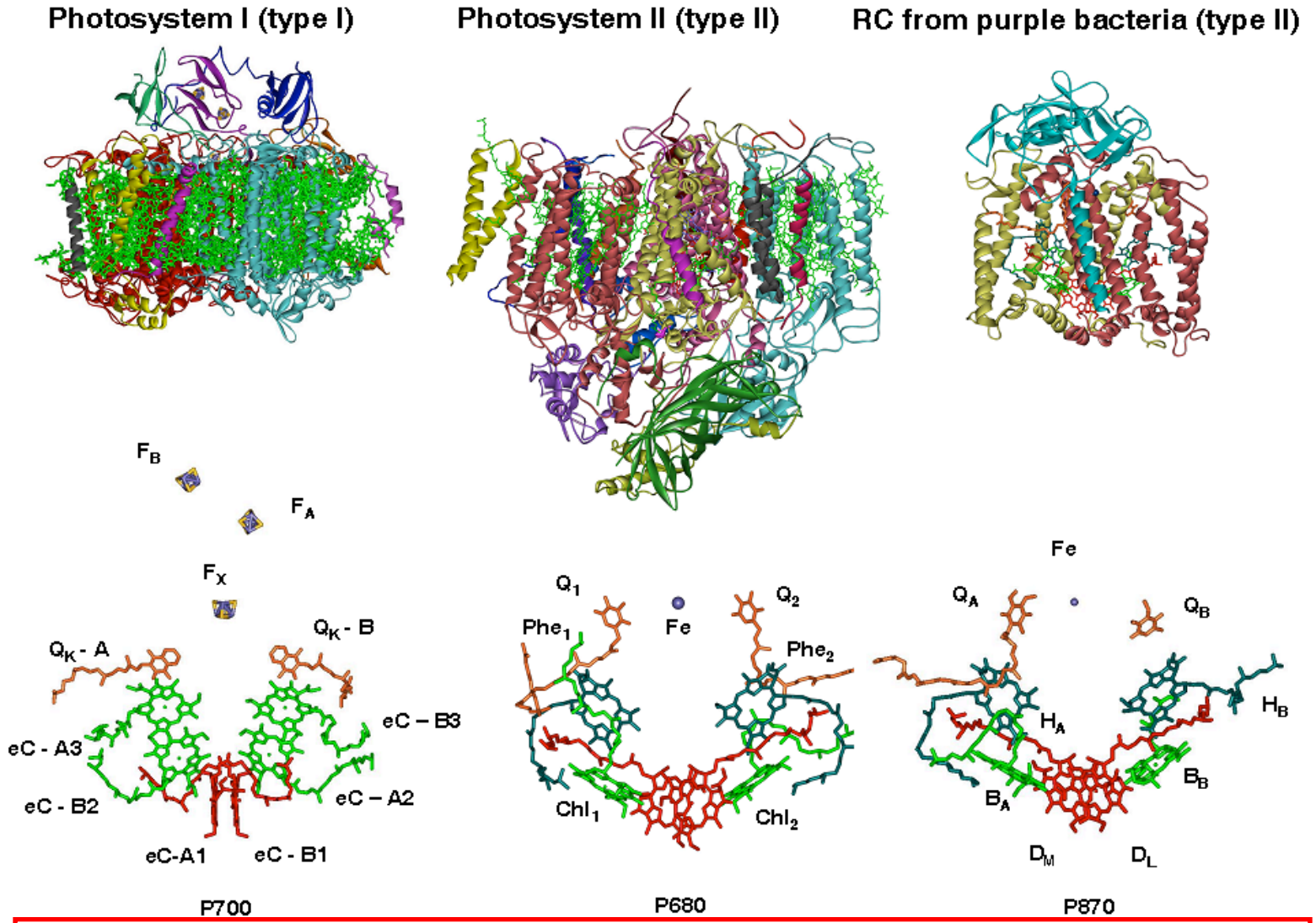
LHCII and LHCI



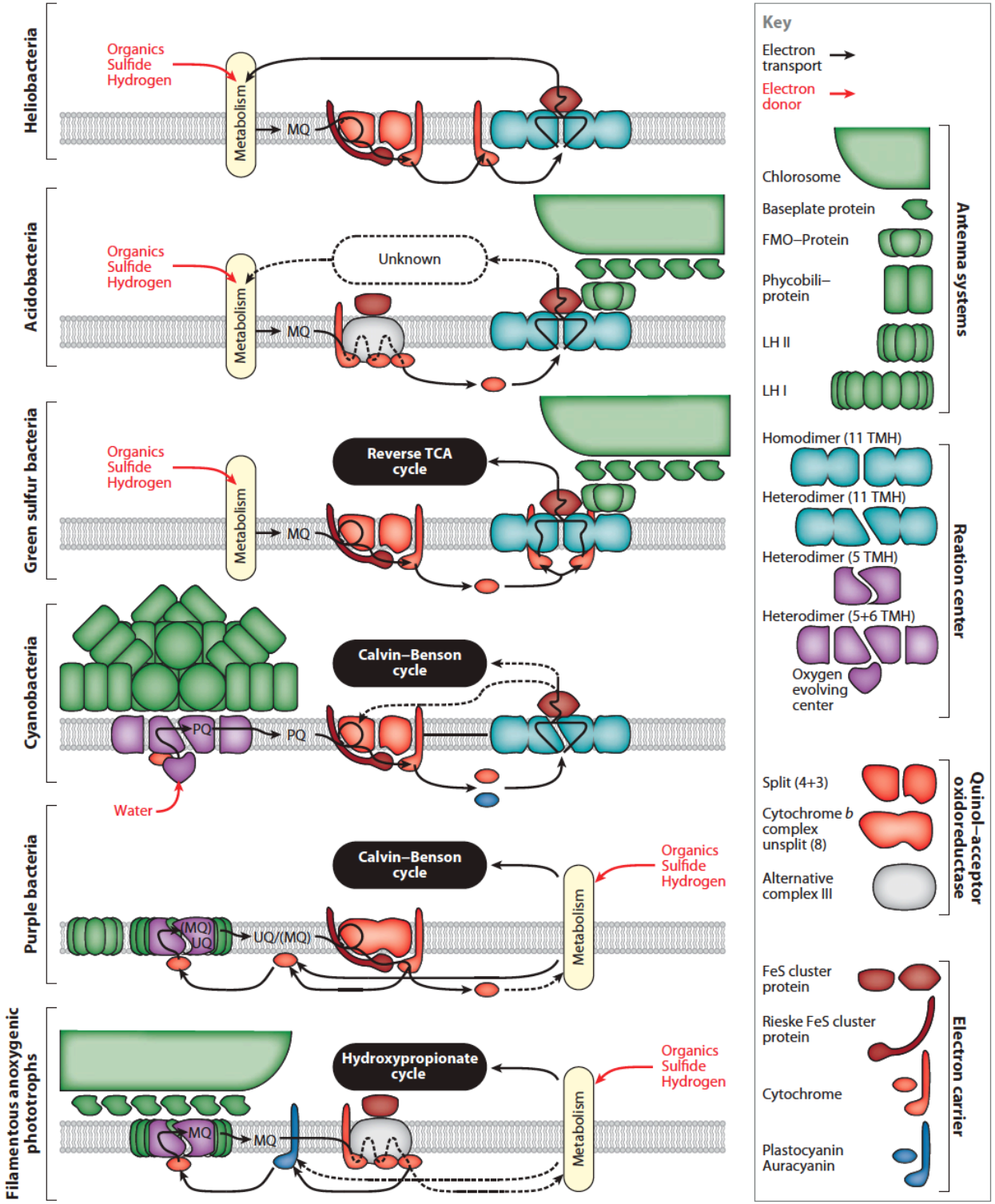
LH2

Extreme diversity of antenna systems strongly suggests multiple independent evolutionary origins - Adaptation to different photic environments.

Photosynthetic Reaction Centers



Structural conservation of RCs suggests a single evolutionary origin.

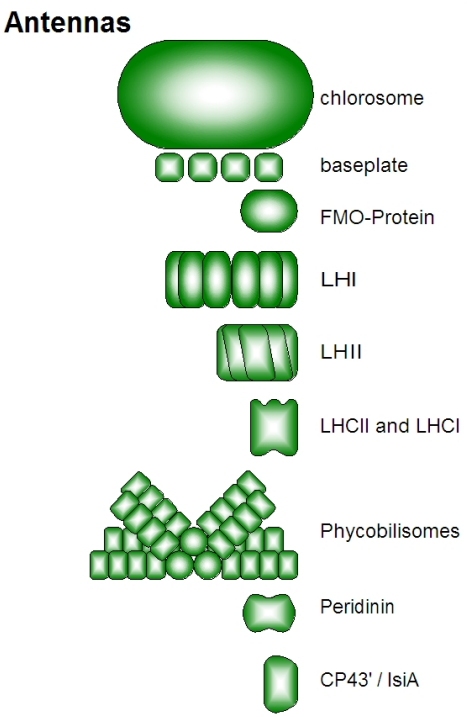


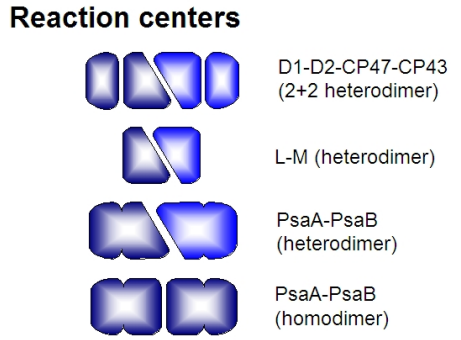
Photosynthetic Prokaryotes

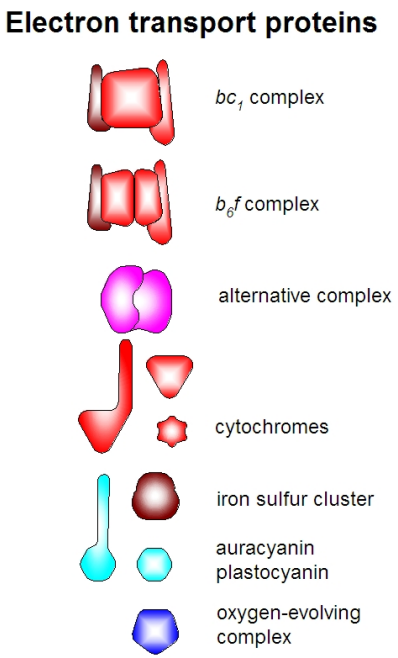
- There are ~~six~~ seven known bacterial phyla with chlorophyll-based photosynthetic members.
- They have varied modules of antennas, reaction centers, cofactor biosynthesis, and carbon fixation pathways.
- Each module has a unique evolutionary history.

Homann-Marriott and Blankenship, *ARPB* (2011)

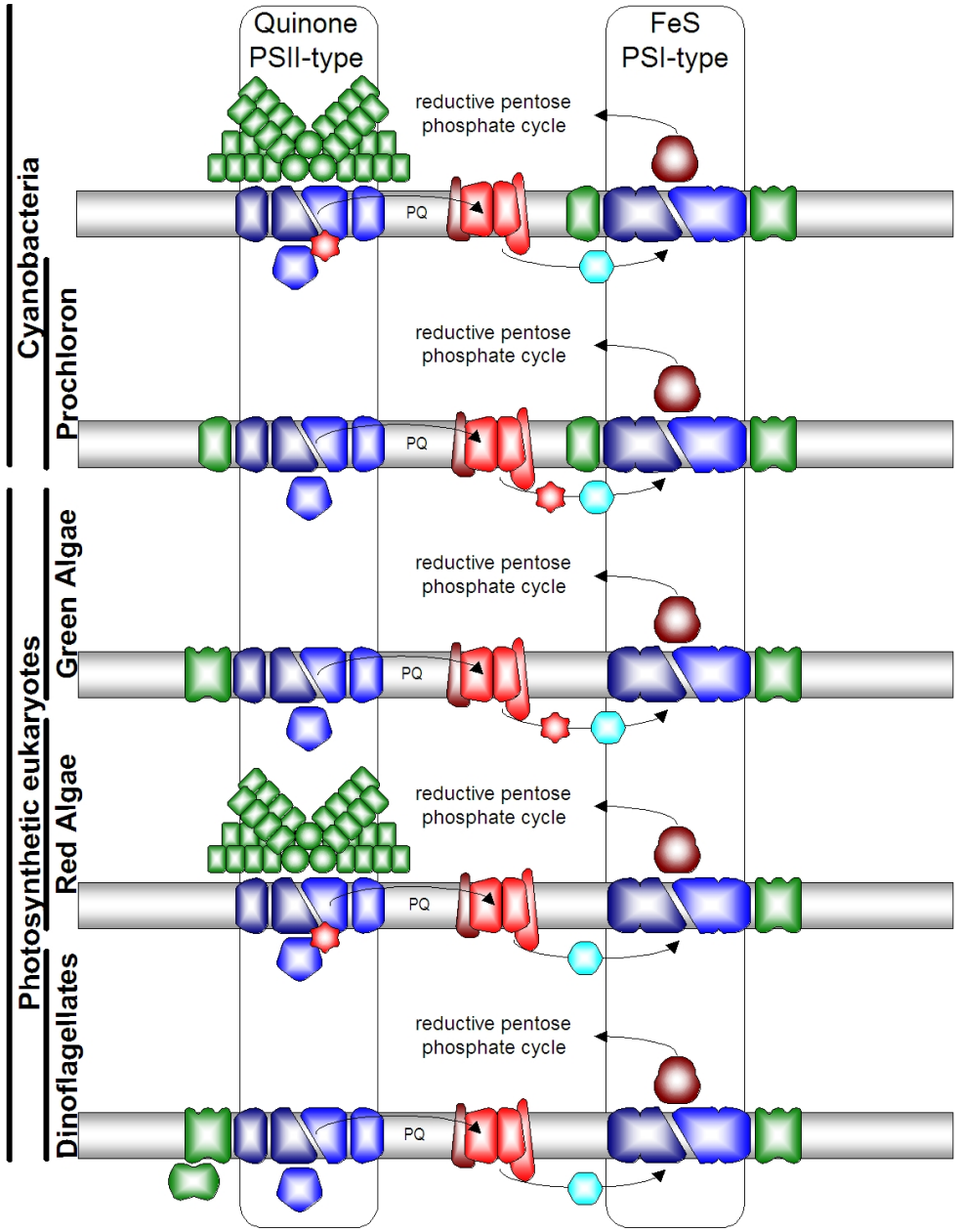
Oxygenic Photosynthetic Organisms



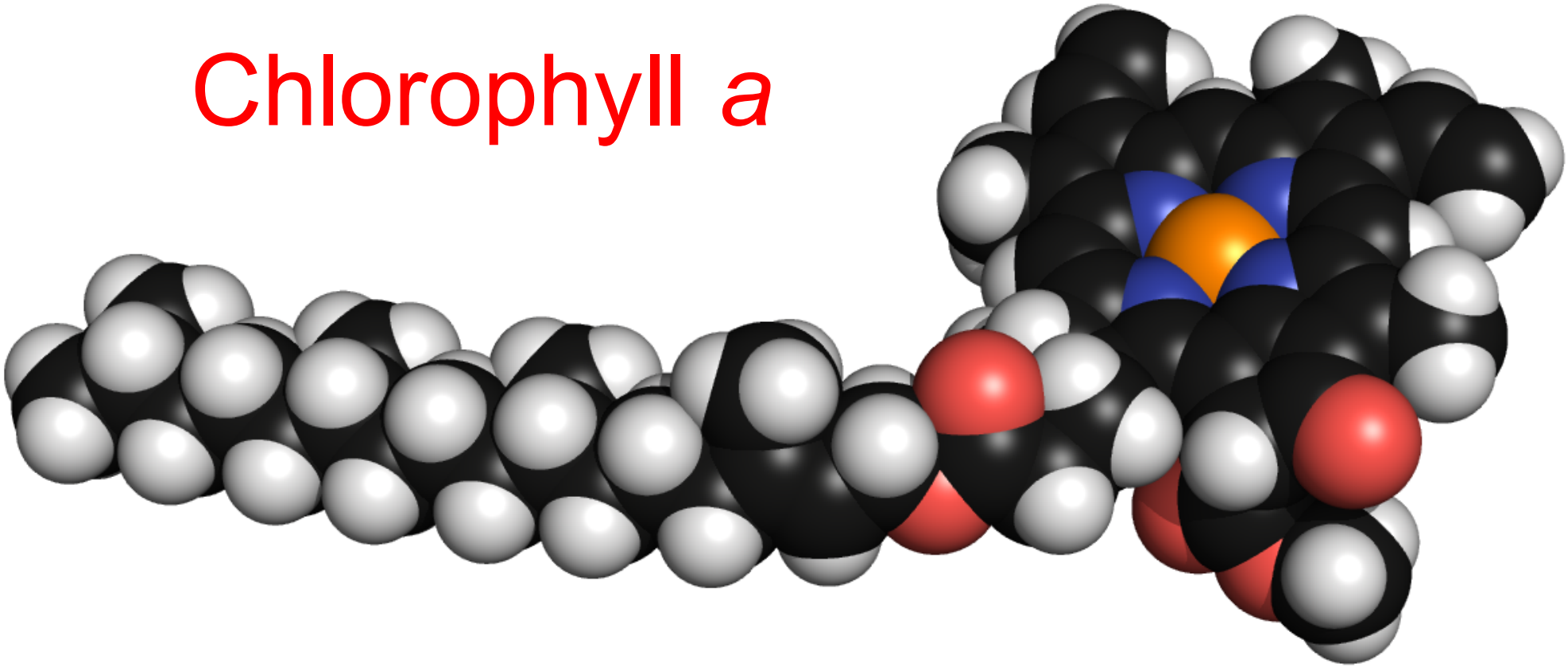




Oxygenic phototrophs have two RCs working in tandem.

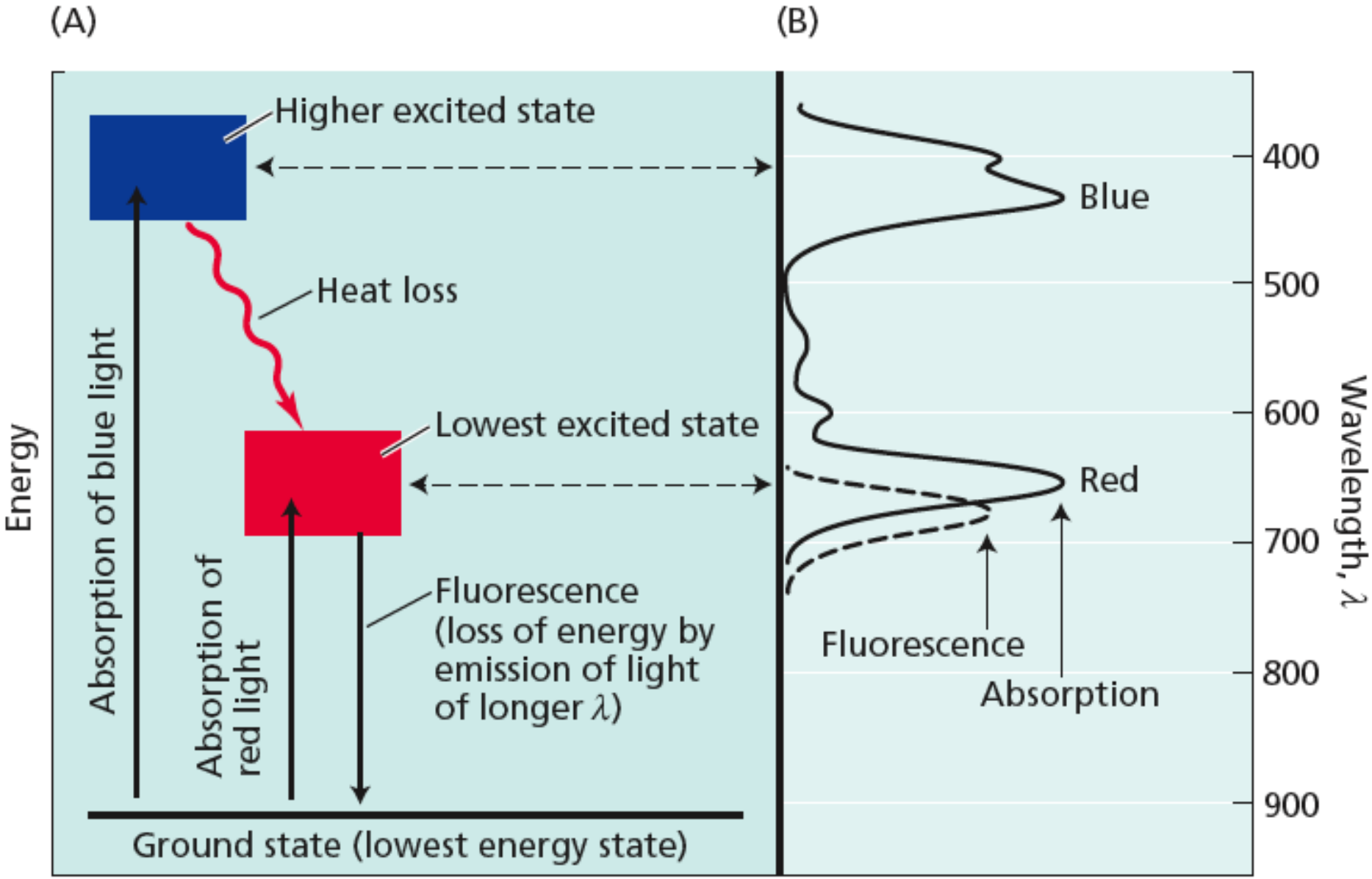


Chlorophyll *a*



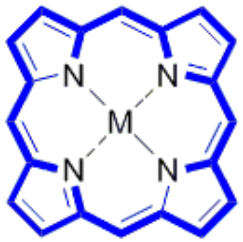
- Chlorophyll is a highly colored molecule that is central to photosynthesis.
- Light must first be absorbed by chlorophyll or other pigments before it can be stored as chemical energy.
- Chlorophyll is usually associated with specific proteins.

Chlorophyll Photon Absorption

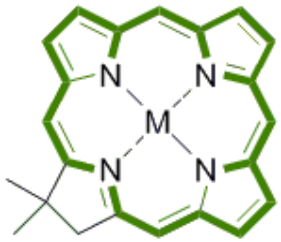


Electron transfer takes place from the lowest excited state.

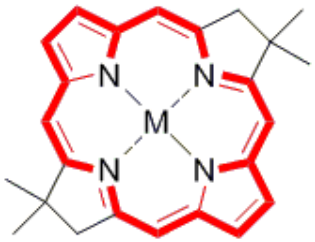
Pigment Conjugation and Electronic Properties



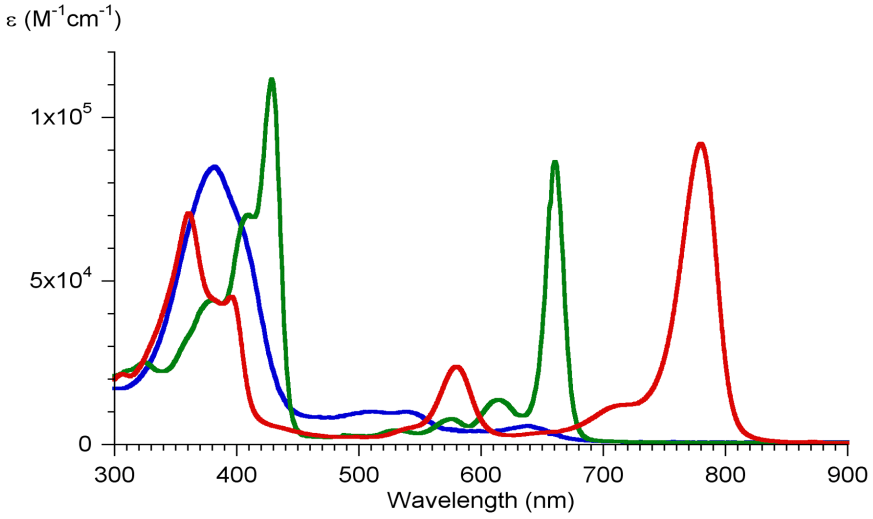
Porphyrin

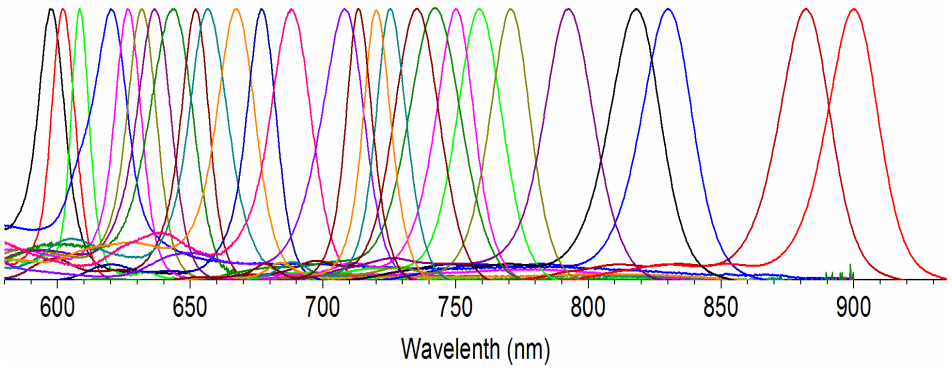


Chlorin



Bacteriochlorin

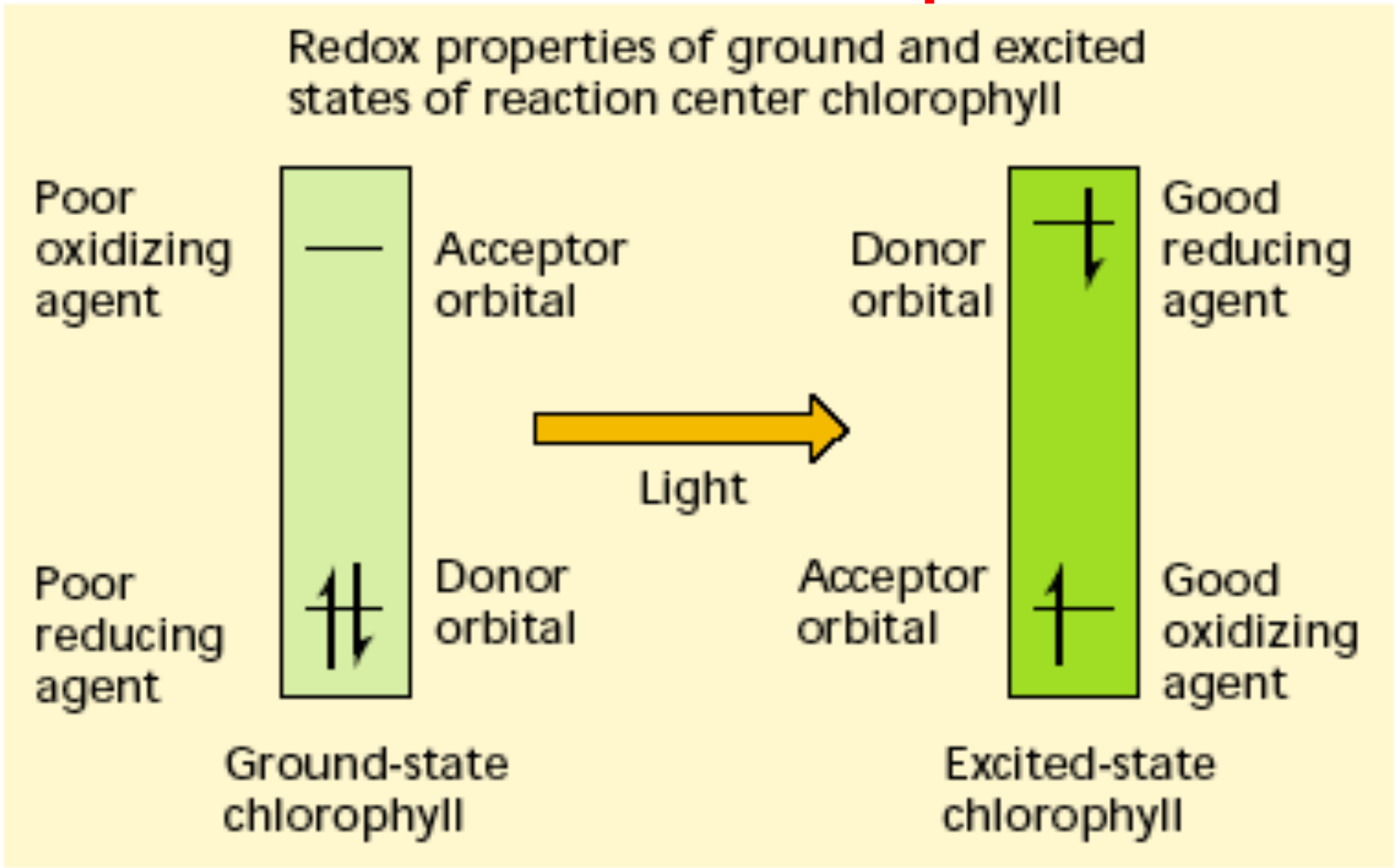




- Pyrrole-ring reduction: Decreased size of π-e^- system (porphyrin → chlorin → Bchlorin) gives bathochromic Q_y shift.
- Substituent type and position: 3-formyl etc. add conjugation length and give bathochromic Q_y shift; 7-formyl (chlorin) and 7-oxo (bacteriochorin) do the opposite.

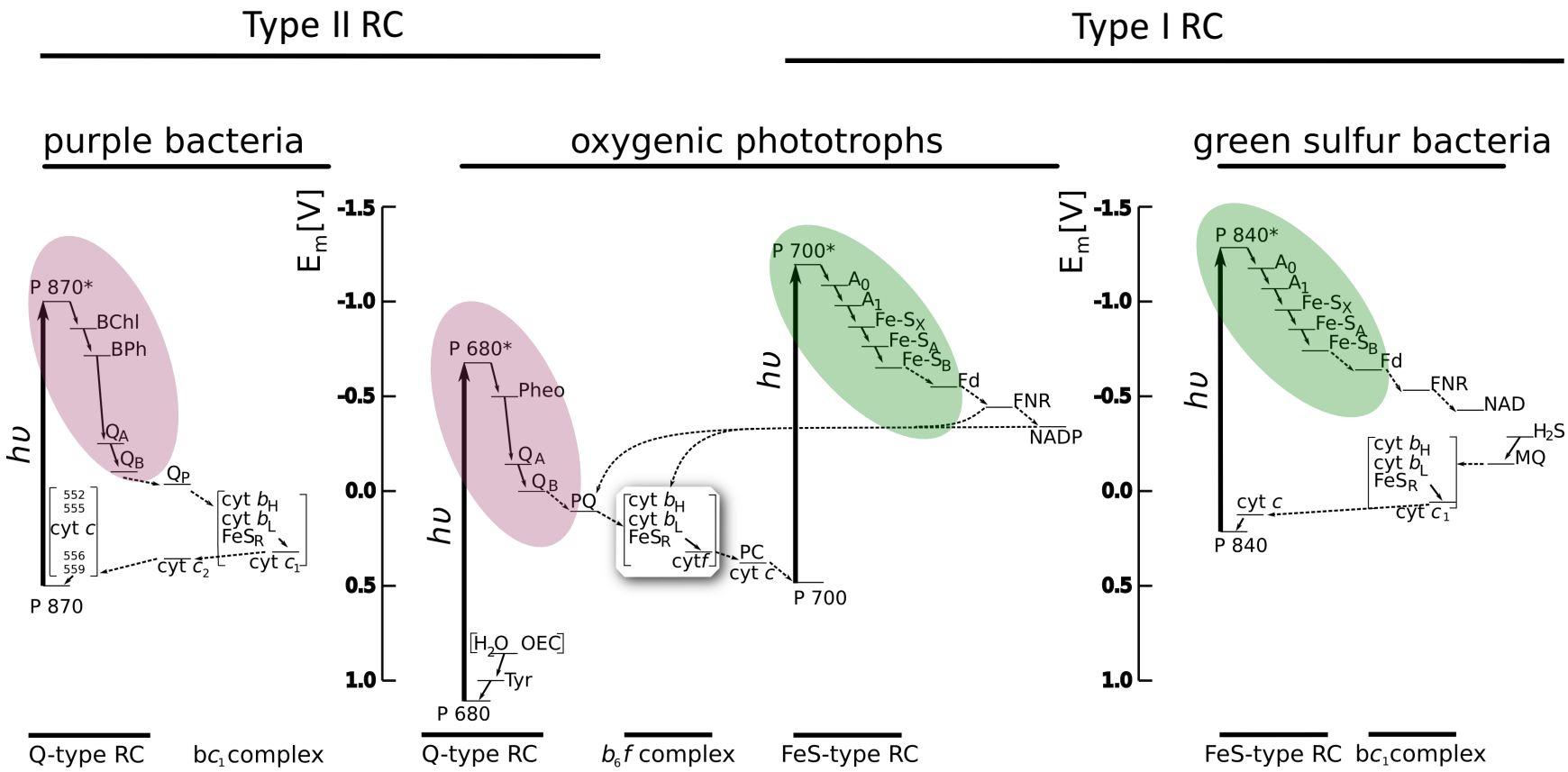
Slide courtesy of Dewey Holten and Jon Lindsey

Excited state redox processes



- Excited states can be both strong oxidizing and strong reducing agents--very chemically reactive.
- The primary energy storing step in chlorophyll-based photosynthesis is the excited state acting as a reductant.

RC energy-kinetic diagrams

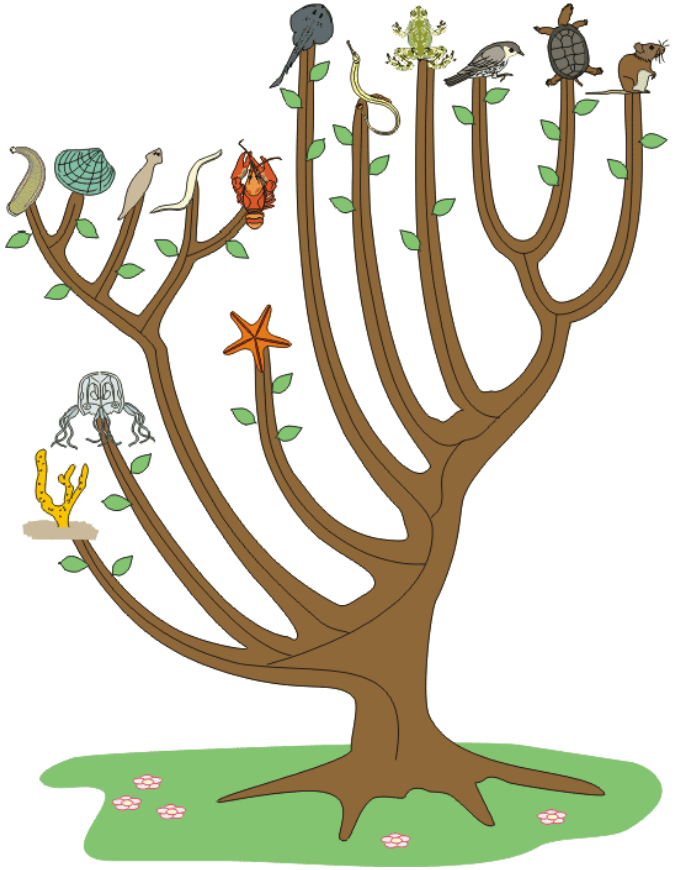


These diagrams incorporate both kinetic and thermodynamic information, and also suggest evolutionary relationships among photosynthetic reaction centers.

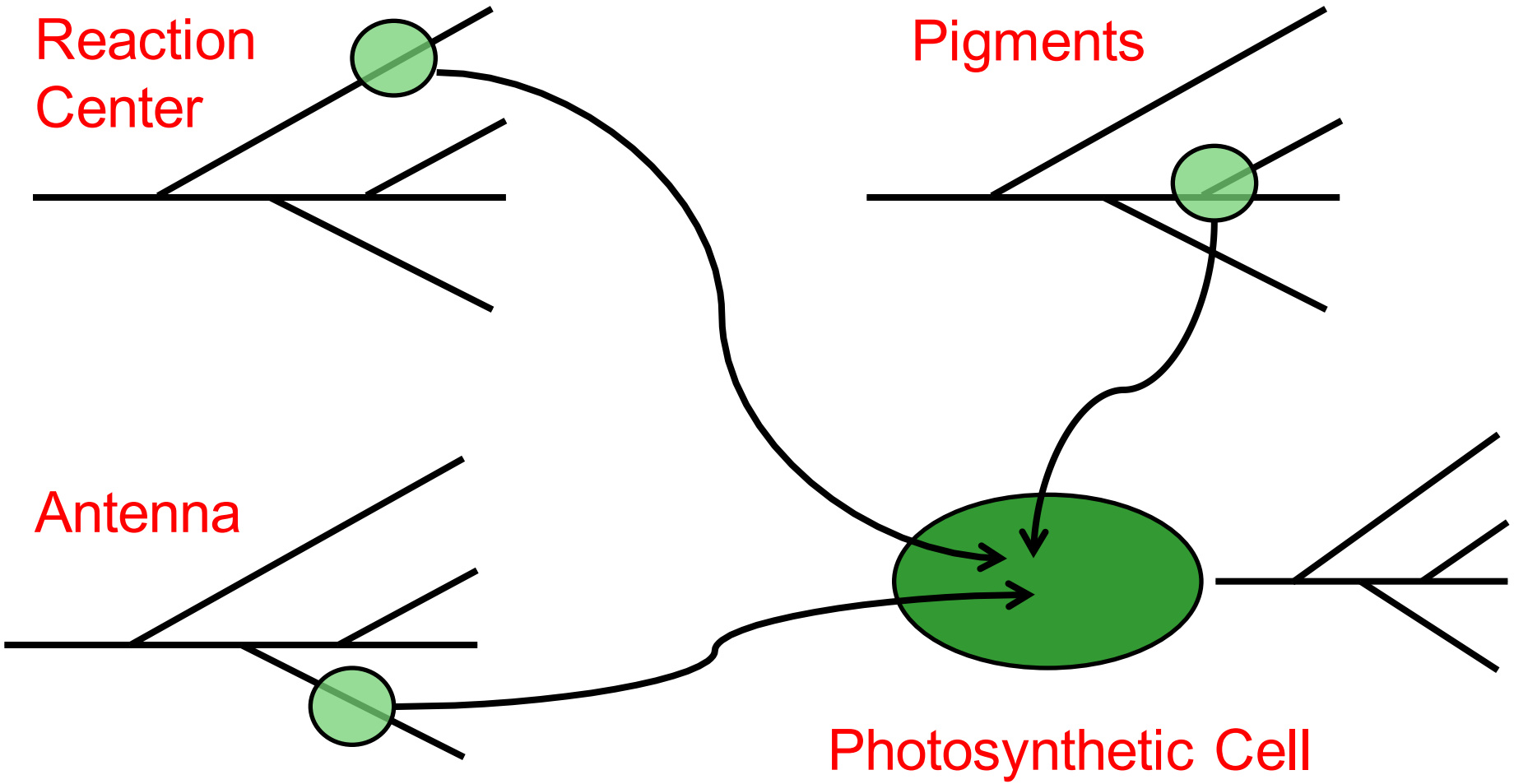
Hohmann-Marriott and Blankenship, (2011) *Ann. Rev. Plant Biol.*

Origin and Early Evolution of PS

- To understand the origin and early evolution of photosynthesis, must consider mechanisms and evolution of many subsystems and processes:
  - **Reaction centers (including**
  - **O_2 Evol Center)**
  - Pigments (Chls, carotenoids, bilins)
  - Antenna complexes
  - Electron transfer pathways
  - Carbon fixation pathways
  - Photoprotection mechanisms
- Horizontal gene transfer has been widespread.

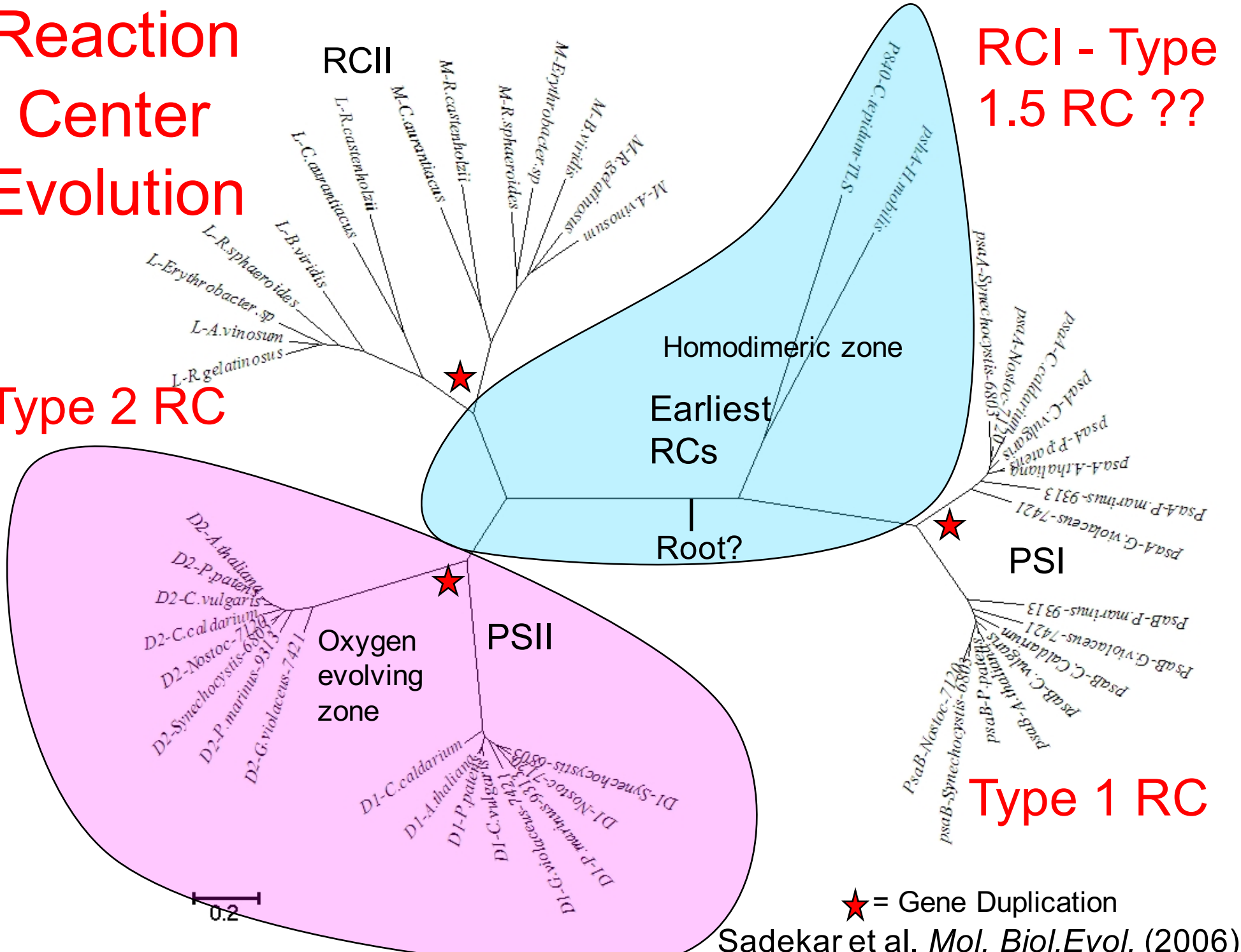


Mosaic Evolution of Photosynthesis



- All photosynthetic organisms are chimeric.
- Different parts of the photosynthetic machinery have distinct evolutionary histories.
- There is no simple path for “evolution of photosysnthesis”.

Reaction Center Evolution

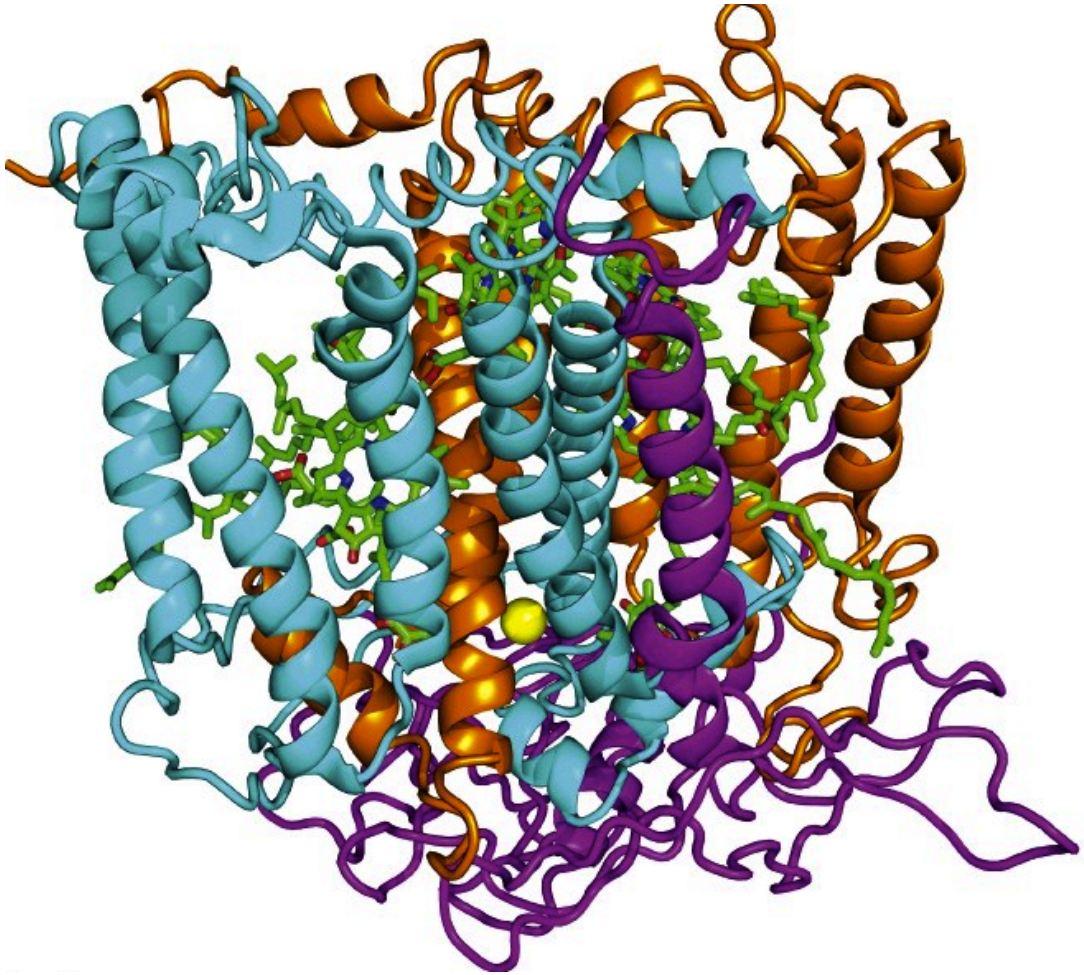


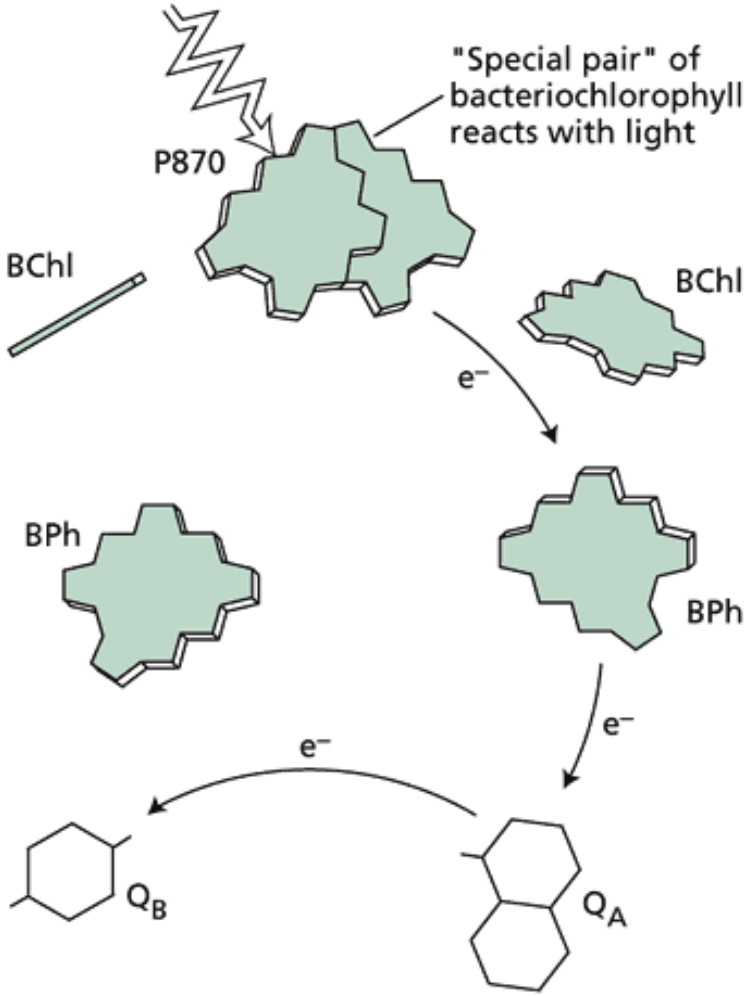
Type 1 RC

★ = Gene Duplication

Sadekar et al. *Mol. Biol.Evol.* (2006)

Purple Bacterial Heterodimeric Type II Reaction Center

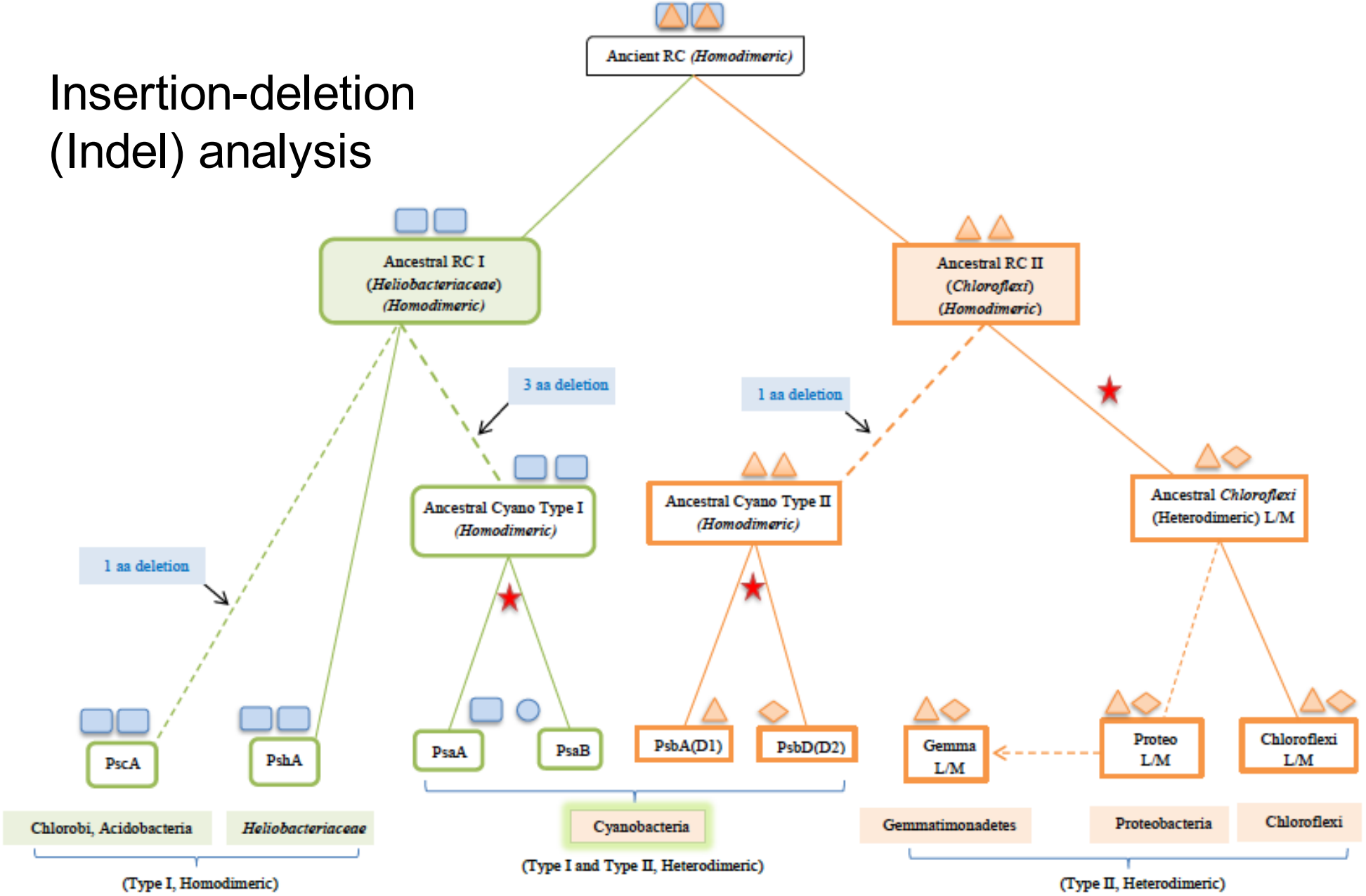




The slight structural asymmetry of the reaction center L and M subunits gives rise to a strong functional asymmetry of electron transfer pathway and the 2 e^- Q_A/Q_B gate.

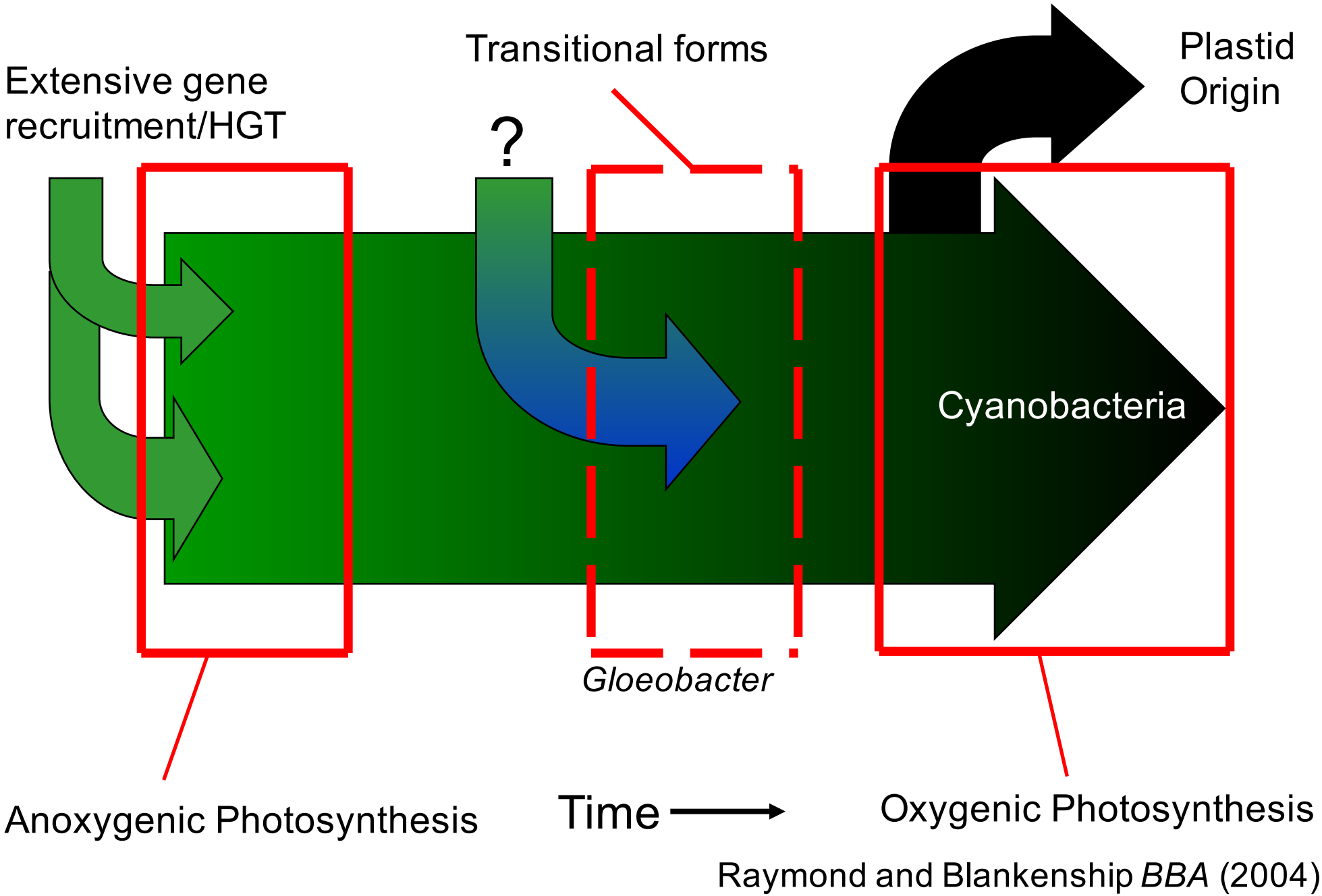
Reaction Center Evolution

Insertion-deletion (Indel) analysis



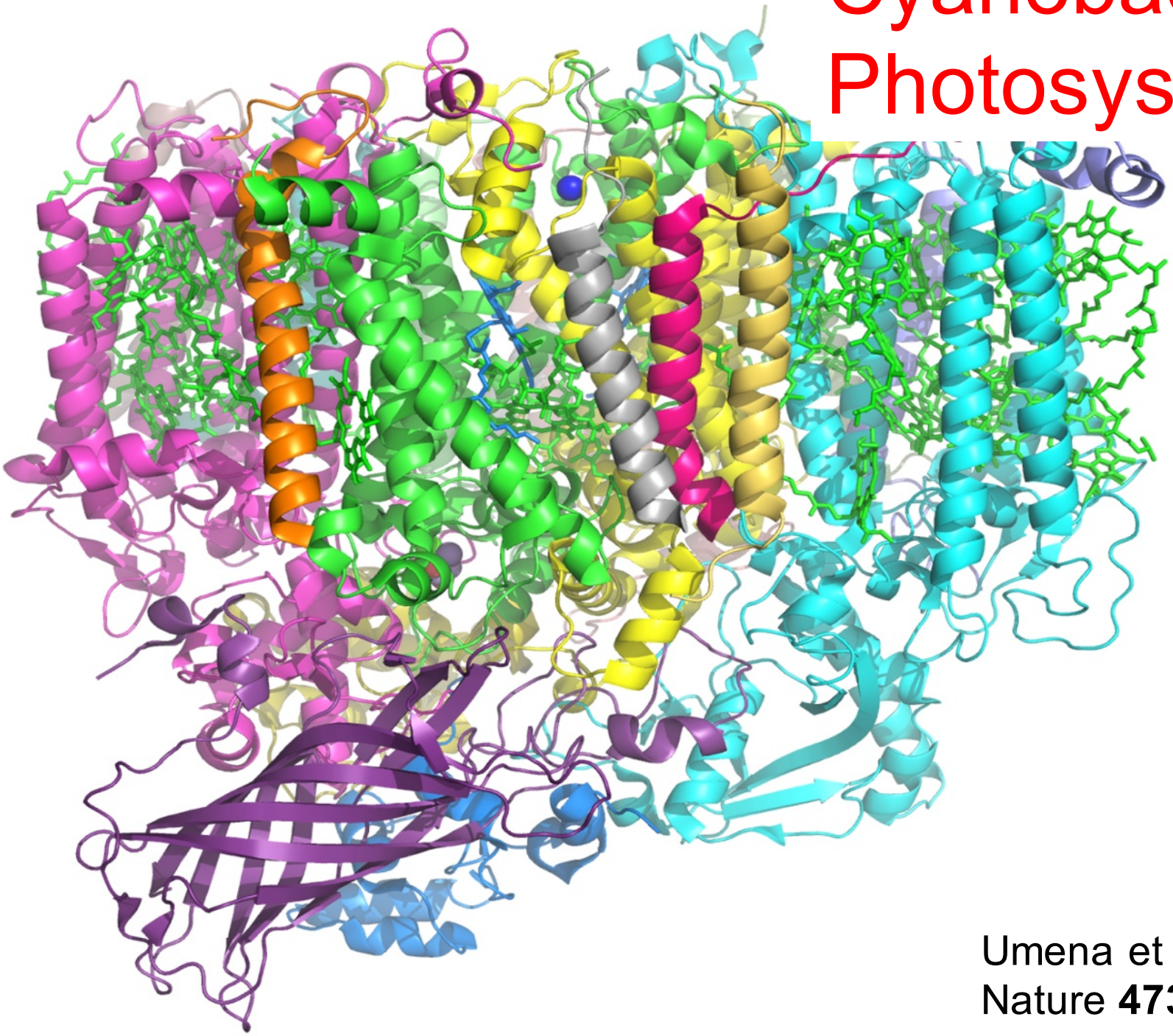
Khadka et al. Submitted

Transition to Oxygenic Photosynthesis



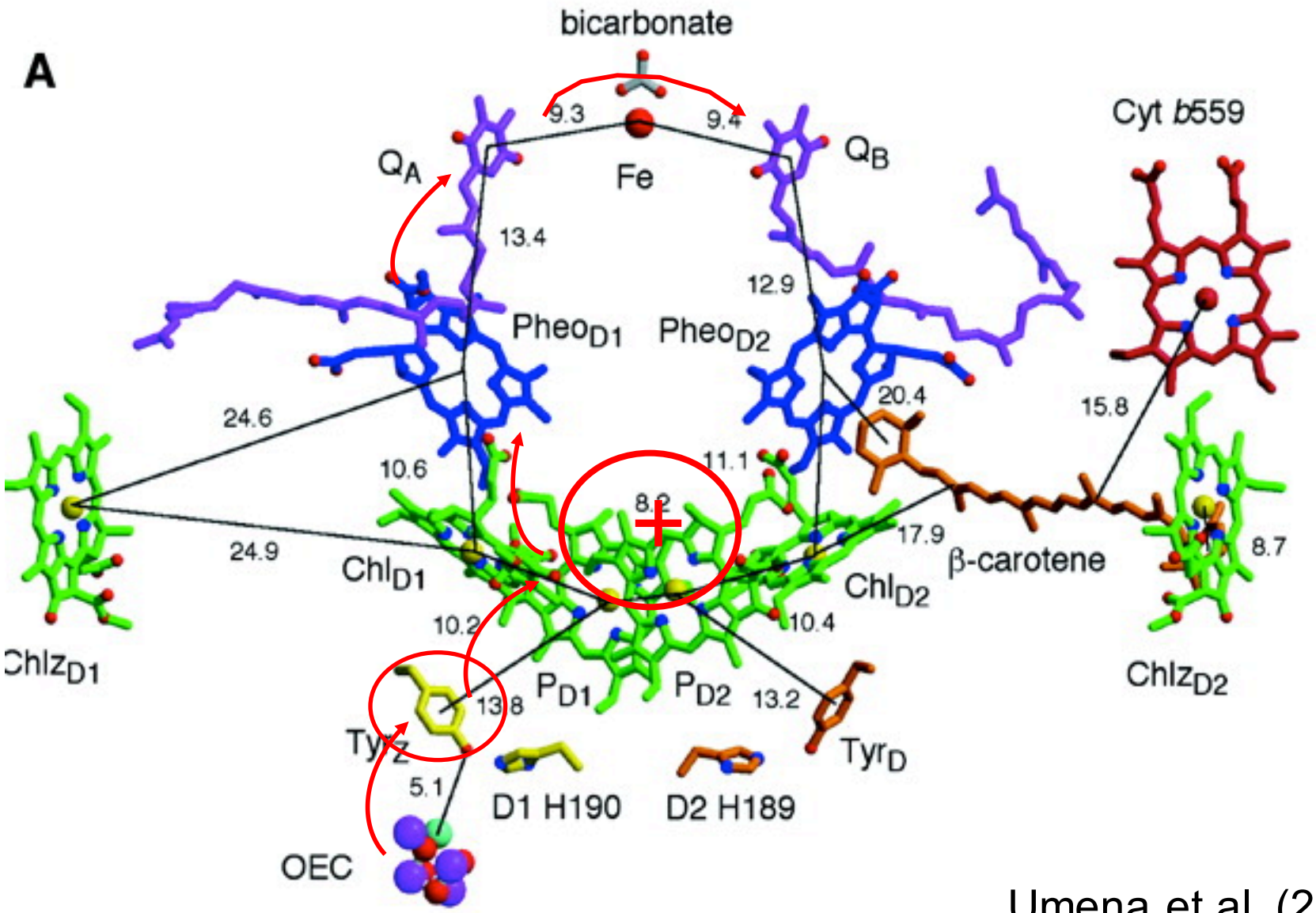
Raymond and Blankenship *BBA* (2004)

Cyanobacterial Photosystem II



Umena et al. (2011)
Nature **473**: 55-61

Photosystem II from cyanobacteria



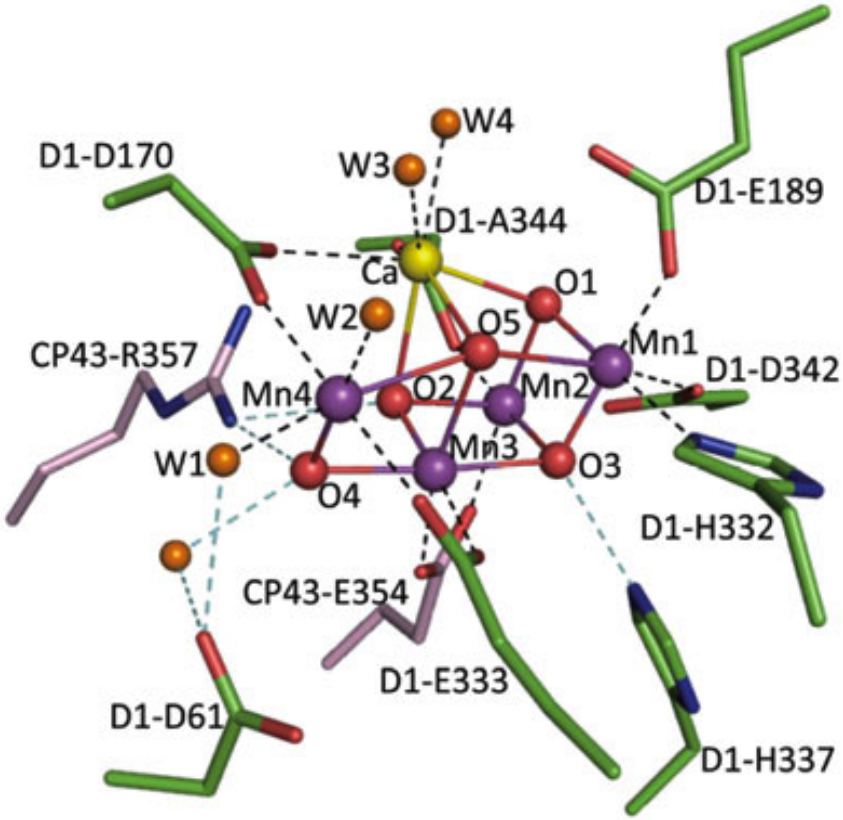
Umena et al. (2011)
Nature **473**: 55-61

Origin of Oxygen Evolution

Reaction: $2H_2O \rightarrow O_2 + 4H^+ + 4e^-$

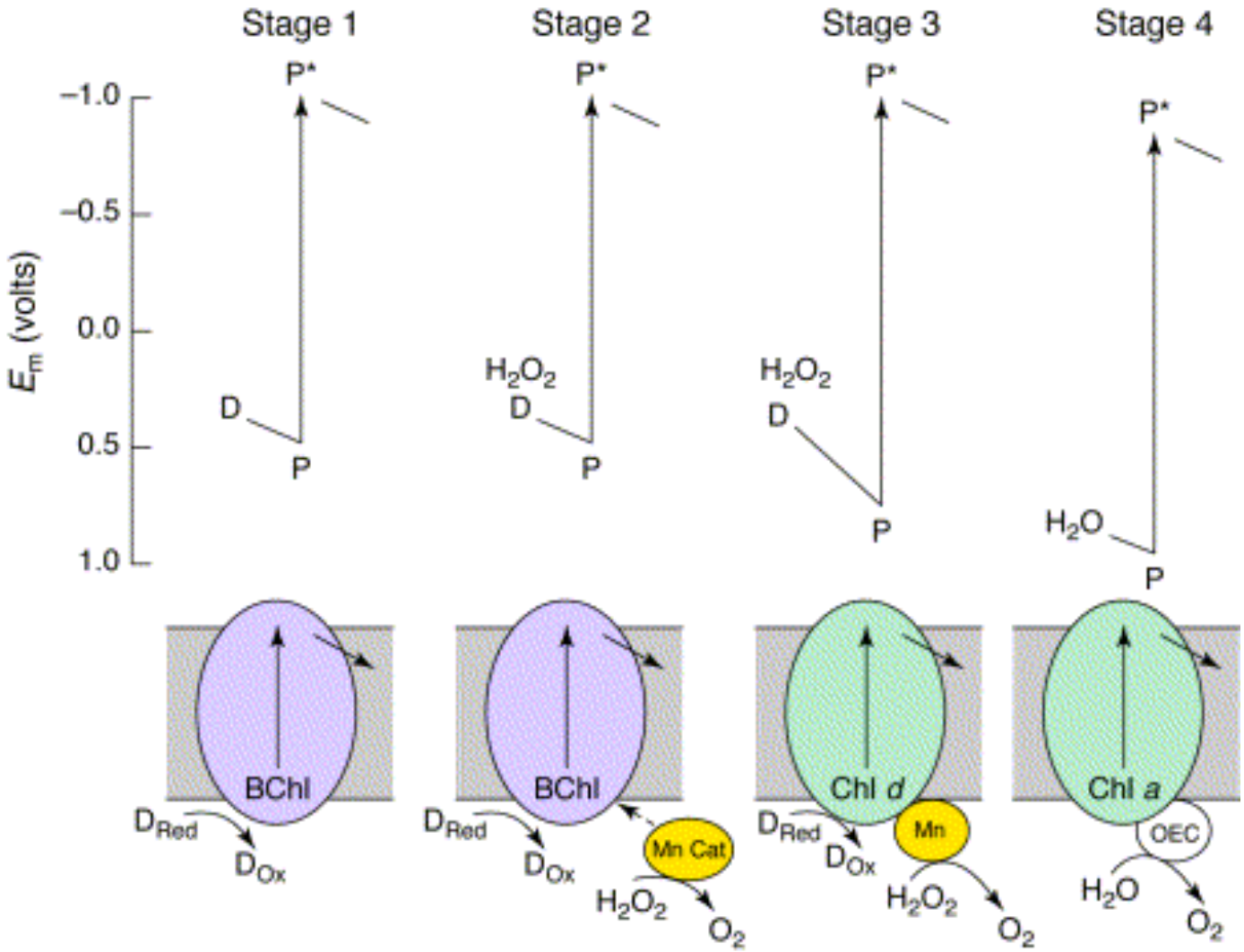
Changes between the anoxygenic RC and PS2 are:

- A redox potential > 1 V, which requires change from BChl (870 nm) to Chl (680 nm)
- A charge-accumulating system to interface 1 e^- photochemistry to 4 e^- oxygen chemistry - Mn cluster - Singular event!
- A much more complex protein complement
- Linked photosystems ??



Umena et al.
Nature (2011)

Evolutionary Transition from Anoxygenic to Oxygenic Photosynthesis



Too big of a change to occur in one step

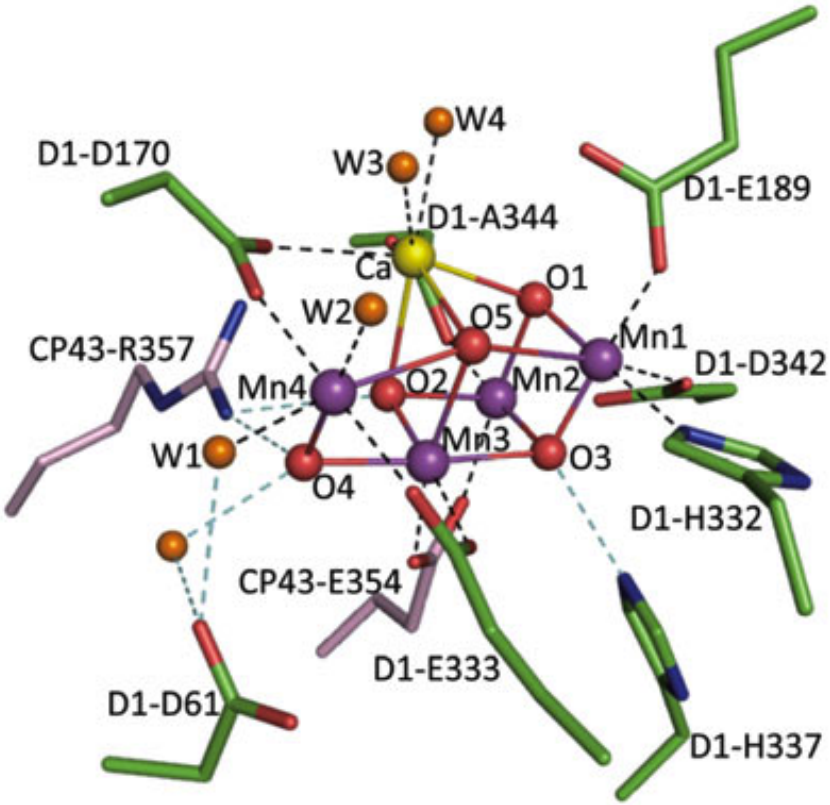
Possible intermediate stages involve:

- Transitional electron donor, eg H_2O_2
- Recruitment of Mn center, eg catalase or Mn mineral
- Switch of pigment to Chl from BChl

Blankenship and Hartman, *TIBS* (1998)

Is oxygenic photosynthesis an inevitable evolutionary development?

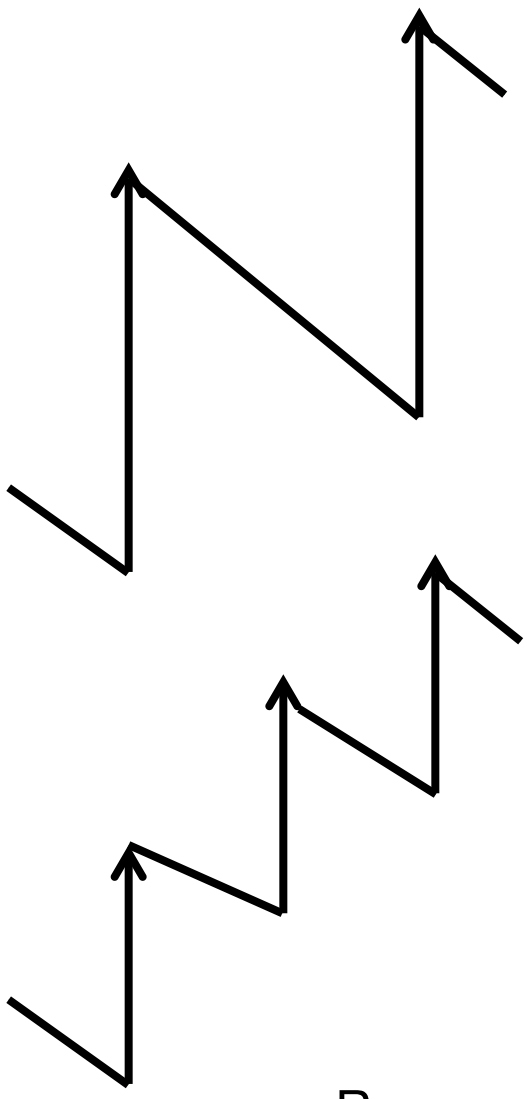
- Oxygenic photosynthesis is mechanistically much more complex than anoxygenic PS.
- It is very unlikely to be an early form of PS on any world.
- Oxygenic PS uses a ubiquitous electron donor molecule, H_2O, and produces a high energy form of stored products.
- It is so efficient that it is likely to be the dominant form of PS, providing that the very high barrier to its evolution can be surmounted.



Umena et al. *Nature* (2011)

What is the long wavelength limit for oxygenic photosynthesis?

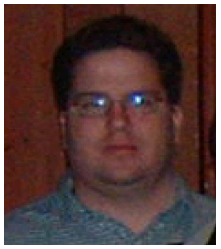
- The red limit for oxygenic PS using the familiar two photosystem architecture is not certain but is probably about 750 nm.
- Using a three or more photosystem architecture, it could be at significantly longer wavelengths.
- Anoxygenic PS works out to 1000 nm.
- Depending on the type of photopigments used, the red edge might be in the visible or near IR or there may be multiple red edges or a gradual one.
- It is difficult to see how photosynthesis could be driven using infrared light that only excites vibrational transitions.



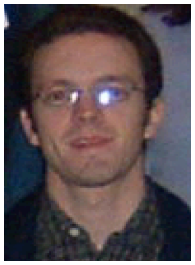
Raven

Acknowledgements

Former Group Members



Jason Raymond



Wes Swingley

Martin Hohmann-Marriott

Sumedha Sadekar

Supported by NASA Exobiology and Astrobiology

Collaborators
Peter Gogarten-U Conn.
Hyman Hartman-MIT
Radhey Gupta-McMaster U
Nancy Kiang-NASA GISS
Niki Parenteau-NASA Ames