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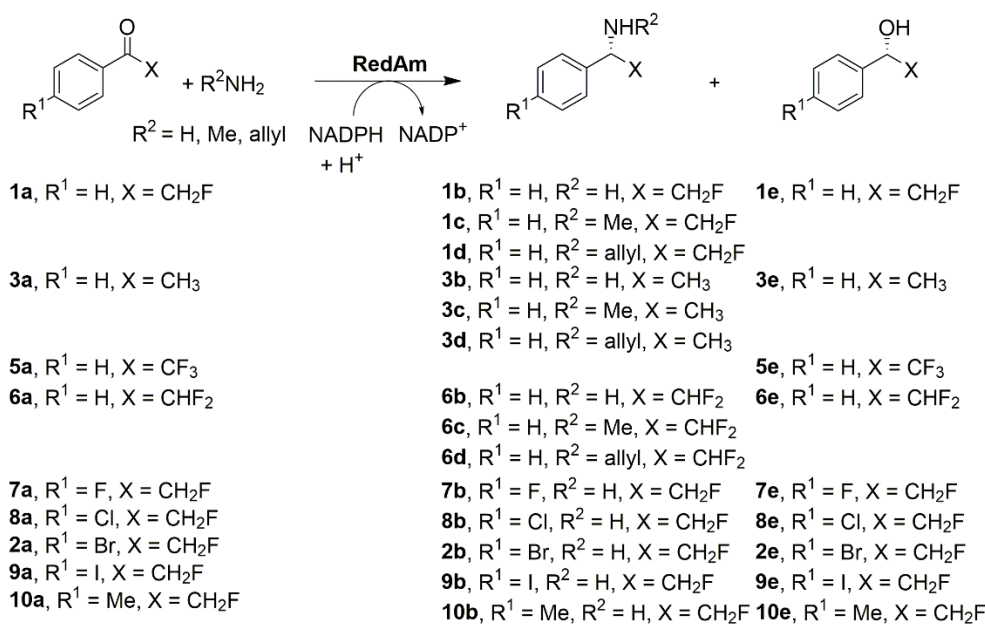
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**Scheme 2.** RedAm-catalyzed transformations described in this study.

#### Biotransformations of fluorinated acetophenones by fungal RedAms

In initial experiments,  $\alpha$ -fluoroacetophenone **1a** at 5 mM initial concentration, and on an analytical scale, was transformed using AdRedAm from *Ajellomyces dermatitidis*<sup>16</sup> as the catalyst, in the presence of a large excess (250 mM) of methylamine (MeNH<sub>2</sub>) and with glucose-6-phosphate (G6P) and glucose-6-phosphate dehydrogenase (G6PDH) to regenerate the NADPH cofactor. Under these conditions, we assume that the RedAms are acting in an IRED mode, binding and reducing the imine formed in solution, as acetophenones are not good substrates for equimolar reductive amination reactions.<sup>16,19</sup> Details on gene cloning and protein purification can be found in the Supporting Information (SI, Sections III-IV). The synthesis of substrates and product standards is detailed in SI Section XI. In initial experiments, conversions of up to 65% to the amine product **1c** were achieved, with only 3% evolution of alcohol product **1e** at 30 °C (Scheme 2, Table 1, entry 1).

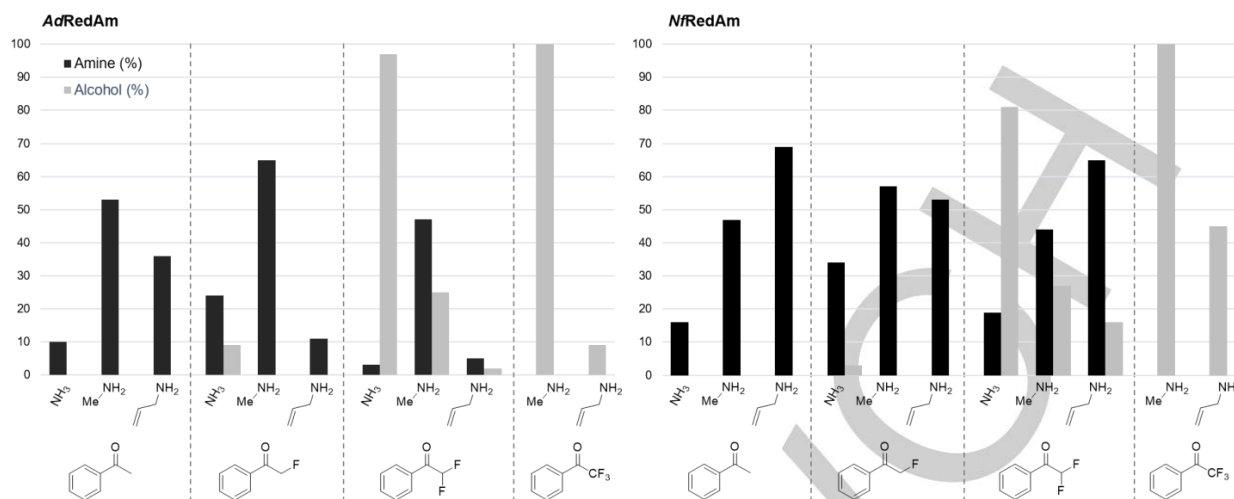
After optimization (SI, Table S1), 37 °C was selected as the best temperature (Table 1, entry 2) and also an increase of the amine donor up to 500 mM (Table 1, entry 3) afforded a conversion of 92% into **1c**. Experiments (Table 1, entries 4-9) also showed that  $\alpha$ -fluoroacetophenone (**1a**) was a superior substrate to acetophenone (**3a**) when aminated with either ammonia or methylamine, giving 18% and 46% conversion to products **1b** and **1c** respectively after 20 h, compared to 6% and 28% for the transformation of **3a** into **3b** or **3c**. However, in the case of the reaction of **1a** with ammonia, the fluorinated alcohol **1e** was detected in a significant amount of 14% (Table 2, entry 4). The proportion of amine to alcohol product was not only influenced by the amine donor, but also by the extent of fluorination on the acetophenone substrate (Table 1, Figure 1). In order to better compare the results, enzymatic transformations

were stopped at 20 h. Hence acetophenone (**3a**) was transformed only to amine products when incubated with AdRedAm and ammonia, methylamine or allylamine;  $\alpha$ -fluoroacetophenone (**1a**) was converted into a mixture of products only when ammonia was the donor; while  $\alpha,\alpha$ -difluoroacetophenone (**6a**) was transformed to predominantly the alcohol when ammonia was the donor, but to more equal proportions of alcohol and amine with methylamine or allylamine; finally,  $\alpha,\alpha,\alpha$ -trifluoroacetophenone (**5a**) was transformed exclusively into the alcohol **5e** in each case.

**Table 1.** Transformations of  $\alpha$ -fluoroacetophenone (**1a**, X=CH<sub>2</sub>F) with AdRedAm and several amine donors. Reactions between acetophenone (**3a**, X=CH<sub>3</sub>) and amine donors have been added for comparison.

Entry	Ketone	Amine Donor	t (h)	Amine b-d (%) <sup>[a]</sup>	Alcohol e (%) <sup>[a]</sup>
1	<b>1a</b> <sup>[b]</sup>	MeNH <sub>2</sub>	64	65	3
2	<b>1a</b>	MeNH <sub>2</sub>		77	4
3	<b>1a</b>	MeNH <sub>2</sub> <sup>[c]</sup>		92	5
4	<b>1a</b>	NH <sub>3</sub>	20	18	14
5		MeNH <sub>2</sub>		46	<1
6		AllylNH <sub>2</sub>		27	<1
7	<b>3a</b>	NH <sub>3</sub>	20	6	<1
8		MeNH <sub>2</sub>		28	<1
9		AllylNH <sub>2</sub>		35	<1

[a] Conversions were determined by GC-FID analysis of the reaction crude. Reaction conditions: ketone (5 mM), amine (50 eq.), AdRedAm (1 mg/mL), NADP<sup>+</sup> (1 mM), G6P (30 mM), G6PDH (2 U), MeCN (2% v/v), buffer Tris-HCl (100 mM, pH 9.0, 500  $\mu$ L) at 37 °C. [b] Reaction was carried out at 30 °C. [c] 100 eq. of amine donor were used.



**Figure 1.** Percentages of amine (black) and alcohol (grey) products obtained by biotransformation ( $t = 20$  h) of fluorinated acetophenone derivatives by *AdRedAm* (left) and *NfRedAm* (right). These results are tabulated in **Table S2** in the Supporting Information.

A similar trend was observed for equivalent biotransformations catalyzed by *NfRedAm* from *Neosartorya fumigatus* (**Figure 1**). Additional results obtained for *AtRedAm* from *Aspergillus terreus*,<sup>19</sup> *NfisRedAm* from *Neosartorya fischeri*, and *AspRedAm* from *Aspergillus oryzae*<sup>16</sup> can be found in the Supporting Information (**SI, Section VII, Figure S5, Table S2**). It is important to note that in control reactions, which were performed in the absence of RedAm, but with both the cofactor and the cofactor recycling system, neither amination reactions, nor reduction of the ketones to alcohols, were observed. The stereoselectivity of the RedAm-catalyzed biotransformations is shown in **Table 2** and in the **SI (Table S3)**, and the analytical methods and results detailed in the Supporting Information (**SI, Section X**), with details on the assignment of absolute configuration (**SI, Section XII**). In most cases the enantioselectivity of the reactions was very high (up to 99%), and although these enzymes have been described as (*R*)-selective,<sup>16,19</sup> products were of the (*S*)-enantiomeric series, except amine **3b**, due to the change in Cahn-Ingold-Prelog (CIP) priority. The *ee* values for amines **1b**, **6c** and **6d** were especially high, with products obtained in enantiopure form for most examples (**SI, Table S3**).

*AdRedAm* and *NfRedAm* appeared to be the best biocatalysts overall for the transformations (**Table 2**), giving amine products with high conversions and in excellent *ee* using an excess of the amine donor (80–100 eq.) and in the presence of a small percentage of an organic co-solvent. Alcohols that were formed in the reactions were also of the (*S*)-enantiomeric series and displayed *ee* values >97% in many cases (**Table S3**). RedAms also catalyze the amination of *para*-halogenated  $\alpha$ -fluoroacetophenones with F (**7a**), Cl (**8a**), Br (**2a**) and I (**9a**) as substituents with ammonia (**SI, Section IX**). Although activities decreased with increasing size of the halogen atom, enantioselectivity was largely conserved, obtaining (*S*)-amine products with high to excellent *ee* (**Table 2**). With these substrates, in no case were the corresponding alcohol derivatives observed. The *p*-iodo derivative **9a** was only poorly transformed using ammonia, as was the *p*-methyl derivative **10a** (<2% conversion). 2-chloro  $\alpha$ -fluoroacetophenone (not shown) was also transformed

by *AdRedAm* with only poor conversion (<5%) using either ammonia or methylamine.

The biotransformation of **1a** to **1c** by *AdRedAm* was performed on a 70 mg scale, giving a GC conversion of 68% and a crude yield of 55% following extractive work up as described in **SI Section XIII**. Column chromatography yield the pure product in 44% yield with 96% *ee*.

**Table 2.** Conversions and *ee* in the reductive amination of fluorinated acetophenones using RedAms and different amine donors (**b**:  $\text{NH}_3$ , **c**:  $\text{MeNH}_2$ , **d**:  $\text{AllylNH}_2$ ).

Product	Enzyme	eq. amine	Co-solvent	t (h)	c (%) <sup>[a]</sup>	<i>ee</i> (%) <sup>[a]</sup>
<b>1b</b> <sup>[b]</sup>	<i>AdRedAm</i>	80	MeOH (1%)	44	81	99
<b>1c</b>	<i>AdRedAm</i>	100	MeOH (1%)	20	84	96
<b>1d</b>	<i>NfRedAm</i>	100	MeOH (1%)	20	69	93
<b>6c</b> <sup>[c]</sup>	<i>NfRedAm</i>	100	MeCN (2%)	70	71	99
<b>6d</b>	<i>NfRedAm</i>	100	MeCN (2%)	20	65	99
<b>7b</b>	<i>NfisRedAm</i>	100	MeOH (1%)	40	76	99
<b>8b</b>	<i>NfRedAm</i>	100	MeOH (1%)	40	76	99
<b>2b</b>	<i>NfRedAm</i>	100	MeOH (1%)	40	34	85

[a] Conversions and enantiomeric excess values were determined by GC-FID analysis of the reaction crude after *in situ* derivatisation with acetic anhydride. [b] 10 mM **1a**. [c] 0.05 mM  $\text{NADP}^+$  used to minimise the alcohol **6e** formation (16%).

*Studies on the promiscuous reduction of ketones fluorinated at the  $\alpha$ -position by IREDs/RedAms*

In addition to expanding the applicability of RedAms to the production of primary and secondary  $\beta$ -fluoro-arylamines, this study also sheds more light on the observation that  $\alpha,\alpha,\alpha$ -trifluoroacetophenone **5a** is reduced exclusively to the alcohol by a promiscuous reaction catalyzed by the *Sr*RED from *Streptosporangium roseum*.<sup>20</sup> We observed this to be a general trend for other IRED/RedAm enzymes, particularly for **5a**, but also to a lesser extent when the mono- and di-fluorinated substrate analogues **1a** and **6a** are used. A number of factors may contribute to the promiscuous activity observed. The results suggest that the hydride transfer process is easier for fluoroacetophenones than for non-fluorinated analogs, as the electrophilicity of the carbonyl carbon is steadily increased with successive fluorine substitutions. When comparing the Gibbs free energies of the carbonyl reduction using DFT calculations, we observed that reduction of **1a**, **6a** and **5a** were 20.2, 37.0 and 40.1 kJ mol<sup>-1</sup> more favorable, respectively, than for the reduction of **3a** (SI Section XIV, Table S11). On the other hand, the imine formation from **1a**, **6a** and **5a** was also more favorable with respect to acetophenone (SI, Tables S11-S12), but in this case the influence of the number of fluorine atoms was not significant (15.8-17.9 kJ mol<sup>-1</sup>). Overall, these energetic values are in agreement with the formation of the alcohols, especially for di- and tri-fluorinated ketones, when compared to non- and also mono-fluorinated ketones. However, the different amine:alcohol product ratios obtained when using different amine donors for the same ketone substrate, such as **1a** and **6a** suggests that molecular recognition of both substrates may also play a part in switching the chemoselectivity of the reaction. For the reactions presented, where a large excess of amine is used, a preference for alcohol over amine production (or *vice versa*) must reflect the preferred binding of the ketone substrate over the imine recruited from solution within the active site. In a recent study by one of our groups together with Nestl and co-workers, we determined the structure of the imine reductase *Sr*RED in complex with the hydrate of  $\alpha,\alpha,\alpha$ -trifluoroacetophenone.<sup>21</sup> This revealed that, in the presence of this fluorinated substrate, two of the  $\alpha$ -fluorine atoms make a direct interaction with one of the ribose hydroxyl groups of NADP<sup>+</sup>, and may, in the case of the fluoroketone substrate **5a**, draw the electrophilic carbon of the substrate within a suitable distance for reduction by the cofactor. These interactions may be less pronounced in either  $\alpha,\alpha$ -difluoroacetophenone **6a** or  $\alpha$ -fluoroacetophenone **1a** and of course absent for acetophenone **3a**, in which series a decreasing proportion of alcohol products are observed. The increasing proportion of amine products obtained when **1a** or **6a** are aminated with ammonia, methylamine and allylamine is therefore a reflection of the increasingly successful competition of the *N*-alkylated imine for the active site over the fluoroketone. These phenomena therefore constitute an interesting example of substrate-directed enzyme promiscuity dependent upon both electronic and thermodynamic effects.

The synthesis of chiral amines from readily available prochiral substrates remains a challenge for asymmetric catalysis, and IRED/RedAm-type enzymes can offer sustainable and atom-efficient solutions to some of these problems. The recognition that  $\alpha$ -fluorinated ketones can serve as substrates for alkyl-amination by RedAms, as well as for reduction to chiral alcohols, introduces

a new reaction to the available biocatalytic toolbox, and provides a platform for improvement of these processes through both enzyme and reaction engineering.

## Experimental Section

Details of gene cloning and expression, enzyme purification and assay, synthesis of substrates and product standards, GC and HPLC analyses, biotransformation protocols and modelling/thermodynamics studies can be found in the Supporting Information.

## Acknowledgements

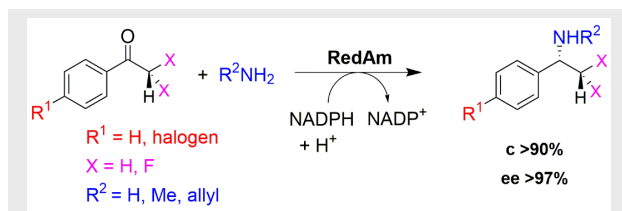
A.C. and M.S. were funded by grants BB/P005578/1 and BB/M006832/1 respectively, from the UK Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC). Financial support from the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness (MEC, Project CTQ2016-75752-R) is gratefully acknowledged. D.G.-M. thanks the Asturian regional government for a predoctoral fellowship inside the Severo Ochoa program.

**Keywords:** oxidoreductase • imine reductase • reductive amination • fluoroamine • biocatalysis

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## COMMUNICATION



A series of enantioenriched primary and secondary  $\beta$ -fluoroamines can be obtained through a stereoselective reductive amination process catalyzed by different reductive aminases with a selection of amine donors.

Daniel González-Martínez, Aníbal Cuetos, Mahima Sharma, Marina García-Ramos, Iván Lavandera,\* Vicente Gotor-Fernández\* and Gideon Grogan\*

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**Asymmetric Synthesis of Primary and Secondary  $\beta$ -Fluoro arylamines using Reductive Aminases from Fungi**