

1 **Canonical and non-canonical autophagy pathways in microglia**

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20 **Key Words:**

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22 phagocytosis, microglia, neurodegeneration

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24 **Abstract:**

25 Besides the ubiquitin-proteasome-system, autophagy is a major degradation pathway within
26 cells. It delivers invading pathogens, damaged organelles, aggregated proteins and other
27 macromolecules from the cytosol to the lysosome for bulk degradation. This so-called canonical
28 autophagy activity contributes to the maintenance of organelle, protein and metabolite
29 homeostasis as well as innate immunity. Over the past years, numerous studies rapidly
30 deepened our knowledge on the autophagy machinery and its regulation; driven by the fact that
31 impairment of autophagy is associated with several human pathologies including cancer,
32 immune diseases and neurodegenerative disorders. Unexpectedly, components of the
33 autophagic machinery were also found to participate in various processes that did not involve
34 lysosomal delivery of cytosolic constituents. These functions are hereafter defined as non-
35 canonical autophagy. Regarding neurodegenerative diseases, most research was performed in
36 neurons, while for a long-time microglia received considerably less attention. Concomitant with
37 the notion that microglia greatly contribute to brain health, the understanding of the role of
38 autophagy in microglia expanded. To facilitate an overview of the current knowledge, we
39 present herein the fundamentals as well as the recent advances of canonical and non-canonical
40 autophagy functions in microglia.

41

42 **AUTOPHAGY PROCESSES**

43 Maintaining cellular homeostasis involves controlled protein, organelle and metabolite
44 degradation systems, which are conserved among all eukaryotic cells. Autophagy, Greek for

45 "self-eating", is an intracellular recycling process by which cytoplasmic material is targeted for
46 lysosomal degradation (1). Depending on the type of cargo delivery to the lysosome three
47 different autophagy processes can be classified: i) Microautophagy describes the internalization
48 of smaller cytosolic portions by inward-budding vesicles from the lysosomal membrane (2),
49 whereas in ii) chaperone-mediated autophagy, cytosolic proteins are specifically recognized by
50 chaperones and taken up by the lysosome in a transporter dependent manner (2). Finally, iii)
51 macroautophagy (hereafter abbreviated autophagy) is characterized by the engulfment of
52 cytosolic constituents by double-membrane structures, termed autophagosomes, which fuse
53 with lysosomes (Figure 1). Regardless of the delivery route, autophagic cargo is eventually
54 digested by lysosomal enzymes and the degradation products are released to the cytosol as new
55 building blocks (3).

56 During autophagy, autophagy-related (ATG) proteins regulate the formation of the
57 autophagosome in a hierarchical manner through different phosphorylating and ubiquitin-like
58 conjugating events (Figure 1). Initiation of autophagy requires assembly of the unc-51-like
59 kinase 1 (ULK1) complex including its subunits ULK1, ATG13, ATG101 and RB1-inducible coiled-
60 coil protein 1 (RB1CC1) with dephosphorylation of ATG13 being a main triggering factor (4).
61 Following activation, ULK1 kinase phosphorylates and recruits the transmembrane protein ATG9
62 and class III phosphatidylinositol 3-kinase (PI3KC3) complex I, which in turn promote
63 autophagosome biogenesis (5-7). Mammalian PI3KC3 complex I consists of a core composed of
64 hVps34, hVps15, Beclin-1 (BECN1) and ATG14 as well as associated factors such as activating
65 molecule in Beclin-1-regulated autophagy (AMBRA1) and nuclear receptor-binding factor 2
66 (NRBF2)(8, 9). PI3KC3 produces phosphatidylinositol 3-phosphate (PI3P) which then induces
67 the formation of the omegasome, a membrane platform tightly associated with the endoplasmic
68 reticulum (ER) that gives rise to a pre-autophagosomal structure termed phagophore or isolation
69 membrane (10, 11). Enrichment of PI3P leads to the recruitment of WD repeat domain

70 phosphoinositide-interacting protein 2 (WIPI2) and FYVE domain-containing protein 1 (DFCP1)
71 to the omegasome (11, 12). Subsequently, WIPI2 orchestrates the conjugation of ubiquitin-like
72 human ATG8 (hATG8) proteins to phosphatidylethanolamine (PE) which anchors them to the
73 nascent phagophore (12). The family of hATG8 proteins comprises seven members which are
74 categorized in two protein subfamilies: i) the microtubule-associated proteins 1A/1B light chain 3
75 (LC3A, LC3B, LC3B2 and LC3C) and ii) the γ -aminobutyric acid receptor-associated proteins
76 (GABARAP, GABARAPL1 and GABARAPL2) (13). This conjugation is exerted by a ubiquitin-like
77 machinery where ATG7 is equivalent to an E1 activating-enzyme, ATG3 to an E2 conjugating-
78 enzyme and the ATG12-ATG5-ATG16 complex to an E3 scaffolding-ligase (14). Upon lipidation
79 to the concave phagophore membrane hATG8 proteins are retained in the autophagosome and
80 degraded along with its engulfed cargo, whereas hATG8-PE conjugates on the outer membrane
81 of autophagosomes are eventually removed by the family of ATG4 hydrolases (15). The
82 dynamics of LC3 and GABARAP conjugation play a central role in autophagosome formation by
83 controlling the tethering and hemifusion of membranes (16, 17). In addition, LC3 was found to
84 participate in transporting autophagosomes to lysosomes by forming a complex with Rab7 and
85 its effector protein FYCO1 which facilitates microtubule transport of vesicles (18).

86 Importantly, the hierarchical orchestration of ATG proteins is not absolutely mandatory for
87 autophagic degradation of cytosolic content. BECN1-independent autophagy, for example, can
88 be induced among other conditions by resveratrol and was shown to be insensitive to the
89 knockdown of PI3KC3 complex components such as BECN1 or hVps34 (19). In the following
90 years, other independent forms were discovered including the bypassing of ATG3, ATG5, ATG7
91 or ULK1 and ULK2 (20-22).

92 Most cell types exert basal levels of autophagy but can upregulate the pathway in response to a
93 variety of stimuli such as nutrient deprivation. Thereby, autophagy provides the cell with
94 metabolic building blocks for the synthesis of proteins, carbohydrates and lipids. Key energy

95 sensors are the mammalian target of rapamycin complex I (mTORC1) and the AMP-activated
96 protein kinase (AMPK) which induce bulk autophagic degradation of cytosolic constituents
97 according to the nutrient status of the cell (23). As a negative autophagy regulator, mTORC1
98 couples the sensing of amino acids, growth factors and metabolic stress to the phosphorylation-
99 mediated repression of the ULK1 complex at high nutrient stages (24, 25). Decline of
100 intracellular ATP levels triggers the activation of AMPK, which in turn positively controls ULK1
101 complex activation by direct phosphorylation of ULK1 and suppressing mTOR activity (26). The
102 urge of the cell to overcome starvation and to promote cell survival requires autophagic activity
103 to be elevated above basal levels and represents a rather non-selective pathway.

104 In contrast, selective autophagic degradation pathways exert cellular quality and quantity
105 control through a number of soluble and membrane-bound receptors which mediate autophagic
106 engulfment of specific substrates including protein aggregates, damaged organelles or
107 pathogens (27-29). The ability of these autophagy receptors to recognize and tether their
108 targets to the forming autophagosome is mediated by distinct functional domains. Here,
109 polyubiquitination of cargo is a major signal for selective autophagy allowing the binding of
110 cargo by receptors via their ubiquitin-binding domain (UBD) (30, 31). It remains unclear how
111 different polyubiquitin chains confer specificity for different autophagy receptors. Several studies
112 demonstrated lysine-63 ubiquitination to be predominantly associated with autophagic turnover.
113 However, in autophagy-deficient mice several different types of polyubiquitin chains accumulate
114 suggesting that substrate oligomerization rather than ubiquitin topology is the driving signal for
115 receptor selectivity (32-34).

116 Apart from target recognition, autophagy receptors directly interact with members of the hATG8
117 family causing the autophagosome to zip around specific cargo (35). This interaction is mediated
118 by the so-called LC3-interaction region (LIR), a characteristic linear motif among autophagy
119 receptors and other hATG8-interacting proteins (36). Several autophagy receptors have been

120 identified to carry both, UBD and LIR, including sequestosome-1 (SQSTM1 also known as p62),
121 next to BRCA1 gene 1 (NBR1), optineurin (OPTN), Calcium-binding and coiled-coil domain-
122 containing protein 2 (CALCOCO2 alias NDP52), Tax1-binding protein 1 (TAX1BP1) and Toll-
123 interacting protein (TOLLIP) (37). Genetic mutations within some of these autophagy receptor
124 domains are linked to neurodegenerative diseases, thus assigning selective autophagy as a
125 contributor to preserving neuronal homeostasis (38).

126 Throughout the brain and spinal cord, tissue maintenance and removal of cellular debris is
127 accomplished by parenchymal macrophages, the microglia (39). Given the vital role of microglia
128 in the central nervous system (CNS), this article discusses the latest findings regarding microglial
129 autophagy in context of inflammatory response and different degradation pathways. Besides the
130 degradation of cytosolic components by canonical autophagy, recently identified non-canonical
131 pathways participate in the clearance of extracellular entities. Here, we focus on the molecular
132 aspects of both autophagy pathway variants in microglia.

133

134 **MICROGLIA**

135 Microglia are the major resident immune cells of the central nervous system (CNS) that
136 constitute up to 10 ~ 15 % of all CNS cells. They arise early in development and originate from
137 a pool of primitive macrophages derived from the embryonic yolk sac. During development as
138 well as during adulthood they contribute in multiple ways to overall brain function (40).
139 Microglia are capable of orchestrating the tissue homeostasis by releasing inflammatory and
140 neurotrophic factors as well as by phagocytosis (41, 42). Phagocytosis is the ingestion and
141 digestion of extracellular particles, for example bacteria or dead cells. In an intact brain,
142 microglial processes undergo rapid extensions and retractions thereby scanning their
143 environment for tissue abnormalities (43). They can sense disturbances due to a variety of
144 neurotransmitter and immune receptors as well as ion channels (44-50). As a response,

145 microglia can undergo multiple morphological and functional changes depending on micro-
146 environmental factors and migrate to the site of injury. These transformations include the
147 retraction of the processes accompanied by a more amoeboid appearance as well as changes in
148 signaling transduction, receptor expression and phagocytic capacity. When microglia are faced
149 with potentially harmful entities, they can recognize these through Toll-like receptors (TLRs),
150 triggering receptor expressed on myeloid cells 2 (TREM2) or other receptors like the mannose
151 receptor (51-53). The variety of activated receptors triggers different signaling pathways, which
152 initiate reorganization of the actin cytoskeleton and phagosome formation (54, 55). Firstly, the
153 target is engulfed by the plasma membrane leading to interiorization, also called ingestion (56).
154 Thereby, a membrane vesicle containing the particle, termed phagosome, buds inwards and
155 fuses with lysosomes (Figure 3A). This phagocytic mechanism serves for the clearance of all
156 kind of harmful targets. Furthermore, microglial activation can result in the release of a broad
157 range of pro- and anti-inflammatory factors as cytokines or chemokines (57, 58). Interestingly,
158 accumulating evidence indicates that autophagy plays a crucial role in the immune functions of
159 microglia.

160

161 **CANONICAL AUTOPHAGY IN MICROGLIA**

162 Canonical autophagy pathways follow a stepwise variable assembly of the autophagic
163 machinery. While in most cells there is no strict dependency on distinct components, autophagy
164 induction often includes the association of the ULK1 kinase complex, the recruitment of the
165 PI3KC3 complex, ATG9, PI3P effector proteins and the conjugation of hATG8s to PE on the
166 expanding phagophore. In this way, constituents from the cytosol are engulfed and delivered to
167 lysosomes. Whether these autophagy components are compulsory for microglial autophagy is
168 unknown. Within the CNS, autophagic activity has been mainly examined in neurons leaving

169 unanswered questions regarding microglia as the key players in neuronal immune response in
170 the brain (59).

171

172 **Microglial autophagy and intracellular aggregates**

173 Accumulation of protein aggregates is a pathological hallmark in neurodegenerative diseases
174 (60). Intracellular aggregates are predominantly found in neurons whereas they are remarkably
175 less abundant in microglia. Interestingly, recent studies showed that extracellular aggregates,
176 which reach the cytosol of microglia, can be cleared by autophagy.

177 Synucleinophagy, the degradation of neuron-released α -synuclein by selective autophagy in
178 microglia, was discovered by Yue and colleagues studying *in vivo* and *in vitro* models (61).

179 α -synuclein is thought to function in vesicular trafficking and is predominantly known due to its
180 pathological contribution in Parkinson's disease (PD) where it aggregates in neuronal inclusions
181 called Lewy bodies (62, 63). Following overexpression of human α -synuclein in transgenic mice,

182 microglia are activated and engulf extracellular α -synuclein deposits (61). Binding of α -synuclein
183 to TLR4 on the microglial cell surface is accompanied by a significant increase of p62 whereas
184 levels of other autophagy receptors remain unchanged (61). This process is mediated by nuclear

185 factor 'kappa-light-chain-enhancer' of activated B-cells (NF- κ B) which regulates the transcription
186 of p62 (61). Upregulated p62 is thought to associate with internalized α -synuclein to promote its
187 sequestration in autophagosomes (61). This selective binding is assumed to be mediated by

188 p62's recognition of ubiquitinated α -synuclein (64). The mechanism of how α -synuclein is taken
189 up by microglia and released into the cytosol remains unclear. Different from other TLR4
190 signaling, binding of α -synuclein does not stimulate TLR4 endocytosis, thus excluding
191 phagocytosis or receptor-mediated endocytosis as internalization mechanism (61, 65).

192 Alternatively, α -synuclein might permeate the microglial cell membrane in a lipid-raft dependent
193 manner (66). When exposed to neuronal SH-SY5Y cells, biochemically generated α -synuclein

194 fibrils were shown to escape intracellular vesicles by rupturing their membrane after endocytosis
195 (67). Consistent with this study, exogenous fibrillary α -synuclein is able to trigger lysosomal
196 rupture following internalization by microglia-derived BV2 cells and primary microglia (68). In
197 response to this damage, TANK-binding kinase 1 (TBK1), OPTN and LC3 are recruited to
198 ubiquitin ear-marked rupture sites and drive the removal of irreparable lysosomes by autophagy
199 (68).

200 Moreover, Yoon and colleagues described a function of autophagy in the clearance of
201 extracellular β -amyloid ($A\beta$) fibrils using primary microglia and BV2 cells (69). Here, autophagy
202 initiation is thought to be depending on AMPK and serine/threonine-protein kinase 11 (STK11)
203 signaling (69, 70). OPTN and LC3B were found to coimmunoprecipitate with $A\beta$ and deletion of
204 OPTN resulted in higher intracellular $A\beta$ concentrations (69). Accordingly, OPTN was suggested
205 to be an autophagy receptor that recruits the autophagy machinery to cytosolic $A\beta$ via binding
206 to LC3B (69). How $A\beta$ aggregates are selectively targeted by OPTN is not yet understood.
207 However, OPTN was also found to associate with protein aggregates in a ubiquitin-independent
208 manner and to mediate their autophagic clearance (71). While the uptake of extracellular $A\beta$ can
209 be accomplished by receptor-mediated phagocytosis (72, 73), $A\beta$ might leak through the
210 phagosomal membrane causing its release into the cytosol and thereby allowing the binding of
211 OPTN for autophagic degradation (69).

212 Understanding the molecular dependencies between internalization of extracellular $A\beta$ and
213 microglial autophagy requires further investigations. For instance, TREM2 is capable of sensing
214 $A\beta$ through lipoproteins and mediates the phagocytic uptake of $A\beta$ in microglia (74). Deletion of
215 TREM2 in turn, has severe impact on mTOR signaling and causes increased activation of
216 autophagy (75).

217

218 **Microglial autophagy and pathogen defense**

219 Autophagy is able to modulate the immune response as it functions as an intracellular defense
220 mechanism by capturing cytosol invading pathogens and delivering them for lysosomal
221 degradation (76), a selective autophagy pathway termed xenophagy. In macrophages,
222 recognition of pathogen-associated molecular patterns and damage-associated molecular
223 patterns stimulates phagocytosis and subsequent elimination of pathogens by autophagy (77).
224 Comparable to selective degradation of other cytosolic cargo, xenophagy involves the core
225 autophagic machinery, autophagosome formation and ubiquitination as "eat-me" signal. Several
226 autophagy receptors (p62, NDP52 and OPTN) can target ubiquitinated pathogens or damaged
227 pathogen-containing phagosomes to the autophagosome via binding to LC3 (29, 78-80). In
228 addition, NDP52 interacts with galectin-8, a cytosolic lectin and danger receptor that recognizes
229 cytosol accessible β -galactosides on damaged phagosomes (81, 82). This specific interaction
230 represents an alternative way to selectively target invading bacteria for autophagic degradation.
231 As host cell invasion serves for microbe replication, several bacterial pathogens possess
232 strategies to escape xenophagy. For instance, after infection of epithelial MDCK cells with the
233 gram-negative bacterium *Shigella flexneri*, binding of the *Shigella* virulence factor VirG to ATG5
234 triggers autophagy induction (83). By secreting the bacterial effector IscB, *Shigella flexneri* is
235 capable to conceal the presence of its virulence factor VirG (83). IscB binds VirG in a competitive
236 manner, thereby ultimately preventing the autophagic capture of *Shigella flexneri* (83).
237 Disrupting lysosomal degradation by inhibiting components of the xenophagy machinery is
238 another strategy of pathogens to ensure bacterial multiplication and survival. During invasion of
239 HEK 293T cells and primary macrophages, *Legionella pneumophila* utilizes the bacterial effector
240 RavZ, a cysteine protease, to hydrolyze the linkage of LC3 to PE (84). This irreversible cleavage
241 results in a conjugation-deficient LC3 protein and inhibits autophagy in the host cell (84, 85).
242 Furthermore, the *Salmonella* Typhimurium virulence factors SseF and SseG inhibit autophagy

243 initiation by interfering with Rab1A signaling (86). Rab1A belongs to the family of small GTPases
244 and is involved in translocation of the ULK1 kinase complex to the phagophore (87). In murine
245 macrophage-like cells infected with SseF- or SseG-deficient *Salmonella* variants, bacterial
246 replication was impaired whereas downregulation of Rab1A could restore this effect (86).
247 To which extent microglia deploy autophagy as pathogen defense mechanism and in what way
248 bacterial effectors impact microglial autophagy remains largely elusive. Given that several
249 bacterial pathogens are able to cross the blood-brain barrier and infect cells in the CNS,
250 microglial xenophagy could serve as an important neuroprotective mechanism.

251

252 **Microglial autophagy and proinflammatory response**

253 Microglia-dependent secretion of cytokines is a key event in regulating the stimulation of
254 proinflammatory response after brain injury. Evidence arises that autophagy proteins act at the
255 intersection of microglial inflammation by exhibiting either inductive or suppressive effects (69,
256 88, 89). In general, proinflammatory signaling is executed by the activation of the
257 inflammasome, a cytoplasmic tripartite protein complex consisting of a sensory component for
258 recognizing ligands, an adaptor component for the binding of caspases and caspases for
259 proteolytic processing of cytokines (90).

260 Belonging to the inflammasome sensors, NACHT, LRR and PVD domains-containing protein 3
261 (NLRP3) can be activated in the presence of A β followed by oligomerization of the adaptor
262 component apoptosis-associated speck-like protein containing a CARD (ASC) and the intrinsic
263 cleavage of caspase-1 (CASP1) (91-93). These molecular events in turn, promote the secretion
264 of the cytokine interleukine-1 β (IL- β) and the proinflammatory response to A β plaques (Figure
265 2) (91). Studies on the A β -induced activation of the NLRP3 inflammasome indicate that
266 dysfunctional autophagy enhances the inflammasomal activation state (69). For example,
267 primary microglia treated with A β showed intensified cleavage of CASP1 and increased release

268 of IL-1 β when the autophagy proteins LC3B and ATG7 were depleted (69). A constitutive and
269 abnormal high inflammatory response can also lead to neuronal toxicity and cell damage. In this
270 context, elevated autophagic activity points towards a reduction of A β -induced inflammation,
271 thereby possibly promoting cell survival (69, 94). Which autophagy proteins directly participate
272 in the regulation of microglial inflammation is poorly understood. Jendrach and colleagues
273 describe a novel function of microglial autophagy in regulating NLRP3 inflammasome via BECN1
274 (88). In comparison to microglia from wild-type mice, the activation of BECN1 deficient microglia
275 resulted in higher amounts of IL-1 β secretion and NLRP3 protein levels (88). Furthermore,
276 NLRP3 colocalizes with LC3 and NDP52 at autophagosomes (88). It is hypothesized that NDP52
277 recruits NLRP3 for autophagosomal turnover since downregulation of NDP52 leads to elevated
278 levels of IL-1 β (Figure 2) (88). In addition, Kehrl and colleagues showed a p62-dependent
279 colocalization of ubiquitinated inflammasomes with autophagosomes in macrophages (95).
280 Hence, microglia presumably modulate the activity of inflammasomes via autophagosomal
281 degradation of NLRP3. Akira and colleagues demonstrate an ATG16L1-dependent regulation of
282 endotoxin-induced inflammation in macrophages (89). ATG16L1 is essential for the formation
283 and phagophore localization of the ATG12-ATG5-ATG16L1 E3 ligase scaffold and thus, for the
284 lipidation of LC3 to the autophagosomal membrane (96). Upon endotoxic activation, ATG16L1-
285 depleted macrophages elicit higher expression of IL-1 β compared to wild-type macrophages
286 (89). In what way this observation translates to microglia function needs to be further
287 elucidated. However, clearly these findings suggest that autophagy has an important role in
288 balancing microglial proinflammatory response.

289 Given the morphological changes accompanied by frequent encounter of invading pathogens
290 and toxic aggregates, activation of microglia is in urgent need of high energy levels in order to
291 maintain microglial function. Therefore, autophagy is not only critical for the regulation of
292 proinflammatory response and elimination of extracellular aggregates but also needs to be

293 considered as catabolic process for permanently supplying microglia with essential nutrients and
294 controlling intracellular protein and organelle quality.

295

296 **NON-CANONICAL AUTOPHAGY IN MICROGLIA**

297 In non-canonical autophagy processes, components of the autophagy machinery are deployed
298 to fulfill functions, which do not involve lysosomal delivery of cytosolic entities. Initial indicators
299 for these pathways in microglia were provided by Lucin and colleagues who were able to show
300 that BECN1 is required for phagocytic uptake and subsequent degradation of A β . In *ex vivo*
301 studies, deletion of BECN1 in microglia-derived BV2 cells exposed to APP transgenic mouse brain
302 slices resulted in insufficient phagocytosis of A β (97). More importantly, isolated microglia from
303 postmortem human AD brains exhibit reduced levels of BECN1 suggesting a link between
304 autophagic regulation and phagocytic uptake of A β deposits (97). Recently, two pathways with
305 key roles in myeloid cells deepened the understanding of non-canonical autophagy: LC3-
306 associated phagocytosis (LAP) and LC3-associated endocytosis (LANDO) (98, 99). During LAP
307 and LANDO autophagy machinery components are used to conjugate LC3 to the membrane of
308 phagosomes and endosomes, respectively. Due to their important function in myeloid cells,
309 these two pathways will be discussed below in more detail.

310

311 **LC3-associated phagocytosis (LAP)**

312 The LAP pathway makes use of components of the canonical autophagy machinery to conjugate
313 LC3 to the phagosome (Figure 3B). Several membrane receptors can initiate this process, which
314 is mainly studied in macrophages. Among others, these receptors include TLRs (1/2, 2/6 and 4)
315 that are able to detect pathogen-associated patterns, immunoglobulin receptors that recognize
316 antigens and pathogens opsonized with IgG, and T-cell immunoglobulin mucin receptor 4 that
317 binds to phosphatidylserine on the surface of dead cells (100-103). Binding to the receptor

318 mediates the phagocytosis of the extracellular target. Upon complete engulfment of the cargo
319 and the sealing of the phagosome, LAP effectors are recruited. However, it remains unclear how
320 exactly this recruitment is triggered. The most upstream autophagy complex present in LAP is
321 the PI3KC3 complex II, which shares the core subunits hVps34 and hVps15 with PI3KC3
322 complex I but instead of ATG14 it contains UV radiation resistance-associated gene protein
323 (UVRAG) and Rubicon (RUBCN) (8, 9). While RUBCN is a known negative regulator of PI3KC3
324 during canonical autophagy (104), it is also compulsory for LAP (99). During LAP, RUBCN is on
325 the one side essential for PI3KC3 mediated PI3P generation and on the other side, it recruits
326 and stabilizes the NADPH oxidase-2 (NOX2) complex at the phagosome (99, 105). NOX2 activity
327 itself as well as NOX induced reactive oxygen species (ROS) production are crucial for the
328 following LC3 lipidation. However, the underlying mechanism remains unknown (99, 101, 106).
329 PI3P generation and NOX2 association to the phagosome results in conjugation of LC3 to PE on
330 the phagosomal membrane. Notably, lipidation of LC3 and GABARAP proteins during LAP differs
331 in two important mechanistic aspects from its use in canonical autophagy: First, WIPI2 is not
332 necessary but probably substituted by another, yet undiscovered effector protein (107). Second,
333 the WD40 domain of ATG16L1 is indispensable (107, 108). One other main difference between
334 canonical autophagy and LAP is the timing and the location of LC3 lipidation. In canonical
335 autophagy, LC3 lipidation occurs during autophagosome formation on the inner and outer
336 autophagosomal membrane (109). In contrast, LC3 conjugation during LAP occurs after
337 formation of the single membrane phagosome, leading to LC3 lipidation on the outer leaflet
338 only. The resulting structure is called LAPosome (103). Consequently, the function of conjugated
339 LC3 is not entirely overlapping between canonical autophagy and LAP. However, a potential
340 common role of LC3-PE in both pathways is to facilitate the fusion of the respective transient
341 organelle with lysosomes, leading to the degradation of the engulfed material (99, 110, 111).

342 Due to the targeting of several pathogens, LAP is critical for fighting bacterial as well as fungal
343 infection (106, 112-114). Martinez et al. highlighted an additional importance of LAP by showing
344 ineffective efferocytosis, the phagocytosis of dead cells, accompanied by an increase in
345 proinflammatory cytokines in LAP-deficient mice (115). Furthermore, LAP plays also a role in
346 major histocompatibility complex (MHC) class II restricted antigen presentation. MHC class II
347 proteins present antigens from extracellular proteins to CD4⁺ T cells and are found on a number
348 of professional antigen presenting cells including macrophages and microglia. Antigenic peptides
349 derived from partially degraded exogenous particles taken up by phagocytosis or endocytosis
350 are loaded on MHC class II molecules in late endosomes. Intriguingly, it was shown that
351 recruitment of LC3 to the phagosome facilitates MHC class II presentation of fungal antigens in
352 a murine macrophage cell line (116). This process is conserved in human macrophages in which
353 a compromised fungal antigen presentation was reported when LAP was inhibited (117).
354 Mechanistically, the coupling of LC3 to phagosomes is thought to result in a prolonged antigen
355 presentation by MHC class II molecules in human macrophages.

356 So far, LAP has mainly been studied in macrophages. Although microglia are distinct from other
357 macrophages, they share many features such as the capability to phagocyte and to release
358 cytokines. Therefore, it was generally assumed that LAP occurs in a similar or even the same
359 manner in microglia. This was recently confirmed by two independent studies, which observed a
360 role of LAP in the uptake of zymosan in microglia (98, 118). However, the physiological targets
361 of microglial LAP still remain unknown.

362

363 **LC3-associated endocytosis (LANDO)**

364 Remarkably, in microglia another uptake pathway was recently demonstrated to employ
365 autophagy proteins and therefore - in analogy to LAP - termed LANDO (98). Endocytosis is a
366 ubiquitous cellular process that is defined by the active uptake of extracellular materials as well

367 as components of the plasma membrane into the cytoplasm. It is important for many
368 physiological processes including nutrient uptake and cell signaling. Generally, endocytic
369 pathways are differentiated in clathrin-mediated and -independent whereat clathrin-independent
370 endocytosis processes are classified as macropinocytosis and phagocytosis. In comparison to
371 phagocytosis, clathrin-mediated endocytosis (CME) is common in all eukaryotic cells and
372 describes the uptake of smaller cargo into clathrin-coated vesicles (Figure 3D) (119, 120). The
373 early endosome matures to a late, multivesicular endosome which then finally fuses with
374 lysosomes, resulting in the degradation of the cargo (121). This process is driven by a constant
375 fusion and fission with other vesicles. Importantly, a considerable subset of the cargo escapes
376 lysosomal degradation. For example, a large fraction of membrane components including
377 receptors are often recycled back to the plasma membrane while other cargo is targeted to the
378 trans-Golgi-network (122-124).

379 LANDO is characterized by LC3 conjugation to clathrin- and Rab5-positive endosomes (Figure
380 3C). As in LAP, the conjugation process is dependent on BECN1, VPS34, ATG5, ATG7 and
381 RUBCN. In contrast to LAP, the absence of LC3 conjugation does not result in defects in cargo
382 degradation but in reduced receptor recycling. Therefore, a secondary uptake of the cargo is
383 diminished. So far, roles for LANDO have been observed for the recycling of the putative A β
384 receptors TREM2, CD36 and TLR4 in microglia (98). It is conceivable that this non-canonical
385 function of autophagic proteins plays not only a role for other receptors but also in other cell
386 types. Notably, previous studies reporting a link between autophagy, retromer trafficking and
387 receptor recycling are in line with the proposed role of LANDO. The retromer complex sorts
388 endosomal cargo back to the plasma membrane, the trans-Golgi network or other
389 compartments. Popovic et al. reported that induction of autophagy results in dissociation of the
390 retromer-associated Rab GTPase-activating protein TBC1D5 from the retromer complex (125).
391 This partition was observed to be due to an activation of Rab7a and resulted in enhanced

392 retromer receptor recycling (126, 127). Furthermore, Lucin et al. described a dependency of
393 TREM2 as well as CD36 receptor recycling on BECN1 and VPS34 in microglia (97). Taken
394 together, LANDO is a newly discovered non-canonical pathway in microglia involved in receptor
395 recycling. Although, so far, evidence is limited to one report, several previous studies are in
396 accordance with such a pathway. Clearly, there is a need for further investigation to dissect the
397 mechanisms of LANDO, in microglia and other cell types, in detail.

398

399 **RELEVANCE IN DISEASE**

400 The human brain comprises only 2 % of total body weight, but consumes 20 % of total body
401 oxygen (128). This highlights its relevance for the human body. Among others, it senses and
402 coordinates information and controls body movements, personality as well as thoughts.
403 Accordingly, disruption of brain functions has severe consequences as impaired mental abilities,
404 memory damage, loss of muscle coordination and strength or vision and language impairment.
405 Therefore, CNS repair and protection strategies are indispensable. The brain is not only
406 protected by the skull and the blood-brain barrier, but a multitude of molecular mechanisms.
407 Among others, these include enzymatic antioxidant systems, the ubiquitin-proteasome pathway,
408 neuroinflammation and autophagy. Due to the role of autophagy in organelle and protein quality
409 control, its impairment results in accumulation of aggregated proteins and damaged organelles,
410 common hallmarks of neurodegenerative diseases including amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS),
411 Alzheimer's disease (AD) and PD. The essentiality of autophagic processes for the CNS is
412 substantiated by the multiplicity of autophagic genes, which are known to be linked to
413 neurological diseases. Ranging from autophagic receptors, regulators and adaptors (including
414 OPTN, SQSTM1, TBK1, C9orf72, UBQLN2, HTT, PICALM) which are risk genes for
415 neurodegenerative diseases to AMBRA1 that has been linked to autism and schizophrenia (129-
416 139). Furthermore, mutations in the hATG8 binding protein Tectonin β -propeller containing

417 protein 2 (TECPR2) are known to result in hereditary spastic paraplegias while absence of the
418 autophagic protein WD repeat domain phosphoinositide-interacting protein 4 (WIPI4) causes
419 beta-propeller protein-associated neurodegeneration (140, 141). Although the value of
420 autophagic processes for brain health is widely appreciated, they were mainly studied in
421 neurons. However, the contribution of canonical as well as non-canonical autophagy functions in
422 microglia increasingly receives more attention in several CNS diseases (Figure 4).

423

424 **Relevance of microglial autophagy in diseases**

425 As aging progresses, loss of protein homeostasis is a generic consequence (142). The tight
426 regulation of inflammatory response and degradation of extracellular aggregates by microglial
427 autophagy supports a link between disease development and impaired autophagic processes at
428 different stages. During AD progression, alterations in AMPK signaling is a central issue (143,
429 144). As a homeostasis sensor, AMPK activates microglial autophagy in presence of A β plaques
430 consequently leading to their lysosomal degradation (69). Inactivation of AMPK with compound
431 C decreases A β clearance, thereby making AMPK a potential target for AD treatment. In PD,
432 neuron-released α -synuclein and its accumulation in Lewy bodies results in degeneration of the
433 dopaminergic system (145). Intriguingly, impaired microglial autophagy provokes a decrease of
434 dopaminergic neurons when α -synuclein is expressed in mice (61). Hence, removal of
435 extracellular α -synuclein by microglial autophagy is suggested to have a vital role in maintaining
436 neuronal protection and function.

437 Modulation of proinflammatory response by autophagy was found to be crucial in Crohn's
438 disease, where excessive production of cytokines results in chronic inflammations compromising
439 the entire gastrointestinal tract (146, 147). Among patients suffering from Crohn's disease a
440 genetic missense variant of ATG16L1 was identified (148). This disease-related polymorphism
441 shows an elevated sensitivity to cleavage by caspase-3 which eventually leads to the

442 degradation of ATG16L1 (146, 149). Following ATG16L1 loss-of-function in macrophages,
443 autophagic activity is reduced and as a consequence, levels of cytokines increase (146).
444 Therefore, microglial autophagy could own a similar role in controlling proinflammatory response
445 within the CNS.

446 Despite neurodegeneration and inflammatory diseases, microglia were shown to have a critical
447 impact on neuropsychological behaviors (150). In autism spectrum disorders (ASD), impaired
448 microglial autophagy pathways studied in mice led to defective synaptic pruning, which becomes
449 visible by an abnormal high dendritic spine density (151). Synapsis formation and elimination is
450 fundamental as it ensures proper brain development (152). Here, autophagy could have a
451 modulatory role in neuronal connectivity by clearing excessive and dysfunctional synapses (151).
452 Uncovering the molecular basis of autophagy pathways in microglia is an essential objective in
453 order to provide a wide-ranging platform for neurotherapeutic approaches.

454

455 **Relevance of microglial non-canonical autophagy in diseases**

456 LANDO contributes to the clearance of A β plaques. Furthermore, an upregulation of
457 proinflammatory cytokines was detected in LANDO-deficient cells, which resulted in microglia
458 hyperactivation in mice containing several mutations associated with human familial AD. These
459 mice also presented accelerated tau phosphorylation. In this model, the deficiency of microglial
460 LANDO caused neuronal cell death accompanied by behavioral and memory impairment,
461 emphasizing the role of microglia as well as LANDO in AD (98). Although the relevance of
462 microglial LANDO has so far only been reported for AD, it is likely that this process targets other
463 molecules or particles besides A β . Especially, since LANDO supports the recycling of the
464 receptors CD36, TLR4 and TREM2, which can bind a broad range of ligands besides A β .
465 Although LANDO is suggested to be a major player in A β clearance, it is not known to what
466 extent this process is physiologically relevant. Still, it is tempting to speculate that stimulation of

467 LANDO could be a promising target for therapeutic interventions in neurodegenerative diseases
468 especially in AD. However, it needs to be clarified to what extent increased LANDO is beneficial
469 for microglia and at what point negative effects arise. In contrast to LANDO, to-date, LAP was
470 not investigated in detail in microglia. Interestingly, LAP is firmly entangled with inflammation.
471 Mice, which lack LAP-obligatory proteins release more proinflammatory cytokines and are
472 defective in the clearance of apoptotic cells (115). Since microglia are responsible for the
473 phagocytosis of apoptotic cells in the CNS and neuroinflammation is a common feature of
474 neurodegenerative disorders, it is plausible that defective LAP could play an important role in
475 the onset or progression of neurodegenerative diseases (153, 154). Another known function of
476 LAP in macrophages is the elimination of pathogens. Several of these LAP-targeted pathogens,
477 including *Streptococcus pneumoniae* and *Listeria monocytogenes*, can penetrate through the
478 blood brain barrier into the CNS and are common causes for bacterial meningitis (155, 156).
479 While it remains to be firmly established that microglial LAP is part of the defense against these
480 pathogens in the CNS, increasing LAP activity in microglia could represent a potential target for
481 anti-bacterial therapeutic approaches. However, due to the two-sided role of neuroinflammation
482 in neurodegenerative diseases, both, a beneficial as well as a detrimental impact could result
483 from an overactivation of LAP.

484

485 **CONCLUSION**

486 As resident immune cells of the brain and spinal cord, microglia accomplish vital functions
487 including synaptic pruning, neurogenesis and immune response. Growing evidence indicates that
488 microglia utilize autophagy to meet CNS homeostasis thereby strictly controlling proinflammatory
489 response and removal of protein aggregates and damaged organelles from the cytosol.
490 Compared to canonical autophagy, non-canonical pathways allow microglia to target also non-
491 cytosolic entities for lysosomal degradation. LAP and LANDO are two non-canonical pathways,

492 which were shown to be present in microglia. While it was observed that microglial LANDO is
493 crucial for the uptake of A β , so far, the exact role of LAP in microglia remains unknown.
494 Regarding the decline of protein function during aging and various neuronal diseases, these
495 non-canonical features contribute to the maintenance of CNS homeostasis and their defect can
496 have detrimental consequences. With regard to the energetic aspect, microglia may omit and
497 exploit specific signaling pathways to activate autophagy, thereby recycling nutrients and
498 sustaining energy. Taken together, canonical as well as non-canonical autophagy pathways play
499 a key part in microglia functioning, most likely in complementary ways. Yet, several questions as
500 the role of LAP in microglia and the detailed interplay between canonical and non-canonical
501 autophagy remain unanswered and should be elucidated by further research.

502

503 **CONTRIBUTION**

504 J.J., L.S. and C.B. contributed to the drafting of the article. J.J. and L.S. wrote the manuscript
505 and designed the figures. L.S. realized digital illustrations. All authors reviewed the final
506 manuscript. Funding acquisition: C.B.

507

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512

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956

957 **Figure Legends:**

958

959 **Figure 1: The autophagy pathway.**

960 The energy sensors mTORC1 and AMPK control autophagy activation via the ULK1 complex.
961 Following activation, the ULK1 and PI3KC3 complex regulate the formation of the omegasome
962 and cargo is then recruited by autophagic receptors to the phagophore. Finally, the matured
963 autophagosome fuses with lysosomes to autolysosomes and the cargo is degraded.

964

965 **Figure 2: Selective autophagy as possible regulator of inflammasome activity in** 966 **microglia.**

967 Presence of A β causes activation of proinflammatory response and release of the cytokine IL-1 β .
968 Autophagy receptors p62 and NDP52 might recognize and target ubiquitinated inflammasomes
969 for lysosomal degradation thereby controlling A β -induced inflammation and survival of the cell.

970

971 **Figure 3: An overview of phagocytosis, LAP, LANDO and clathrin-mediated** 972 **endocytosis.**

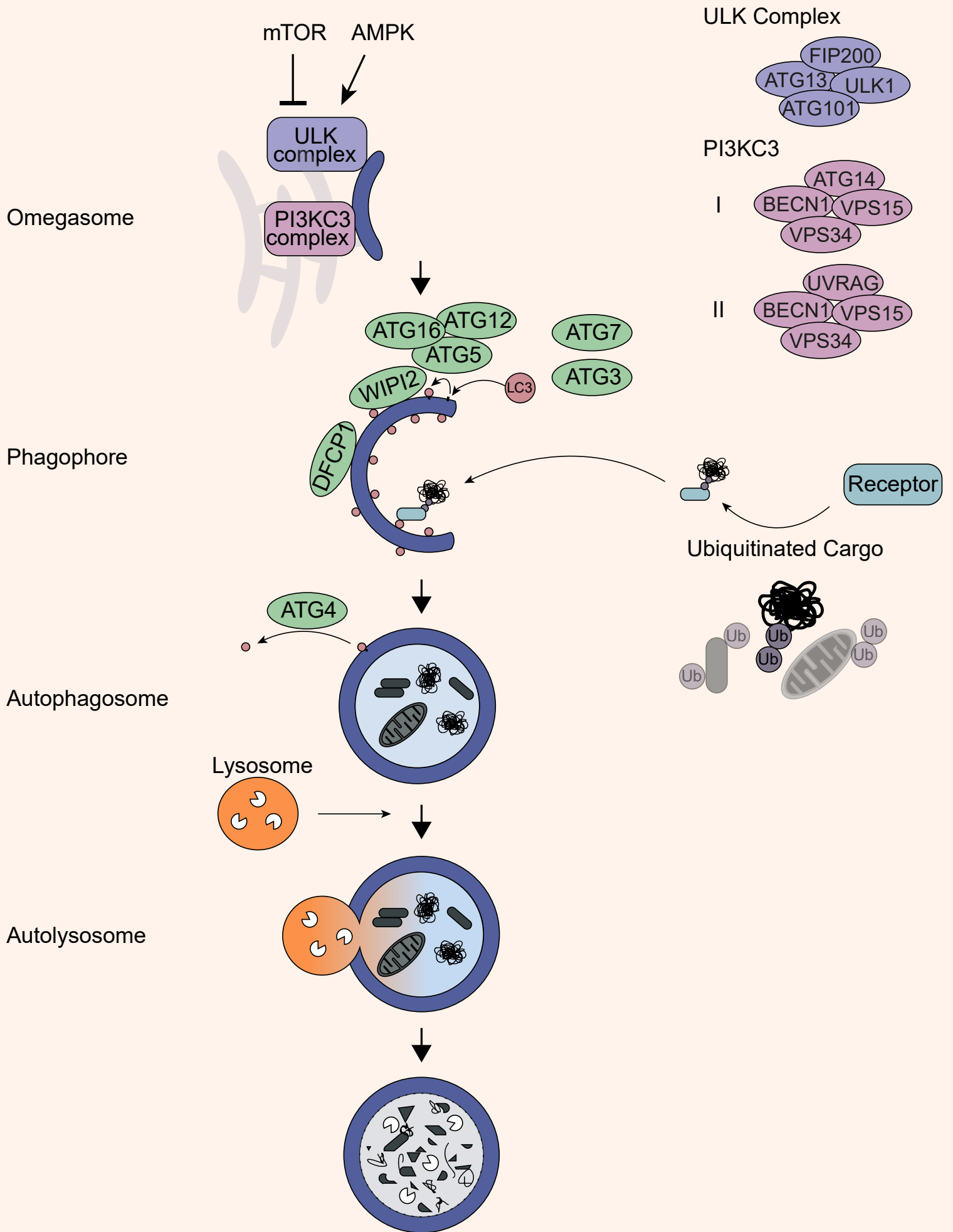
973 (A) During phagocytosis, large extracellular particles are recognized by specific receptors,
974 engulfed by the plasma membrane and finally internalized by phagosomes. (B) When LC3 is
975 recruited via the PI3KC3 II complex and other autophagy proteins to the phagosome before its
976 fusion with the lysosome, the pathway is referred to as LAP. (C) When conjugation of LC3 by

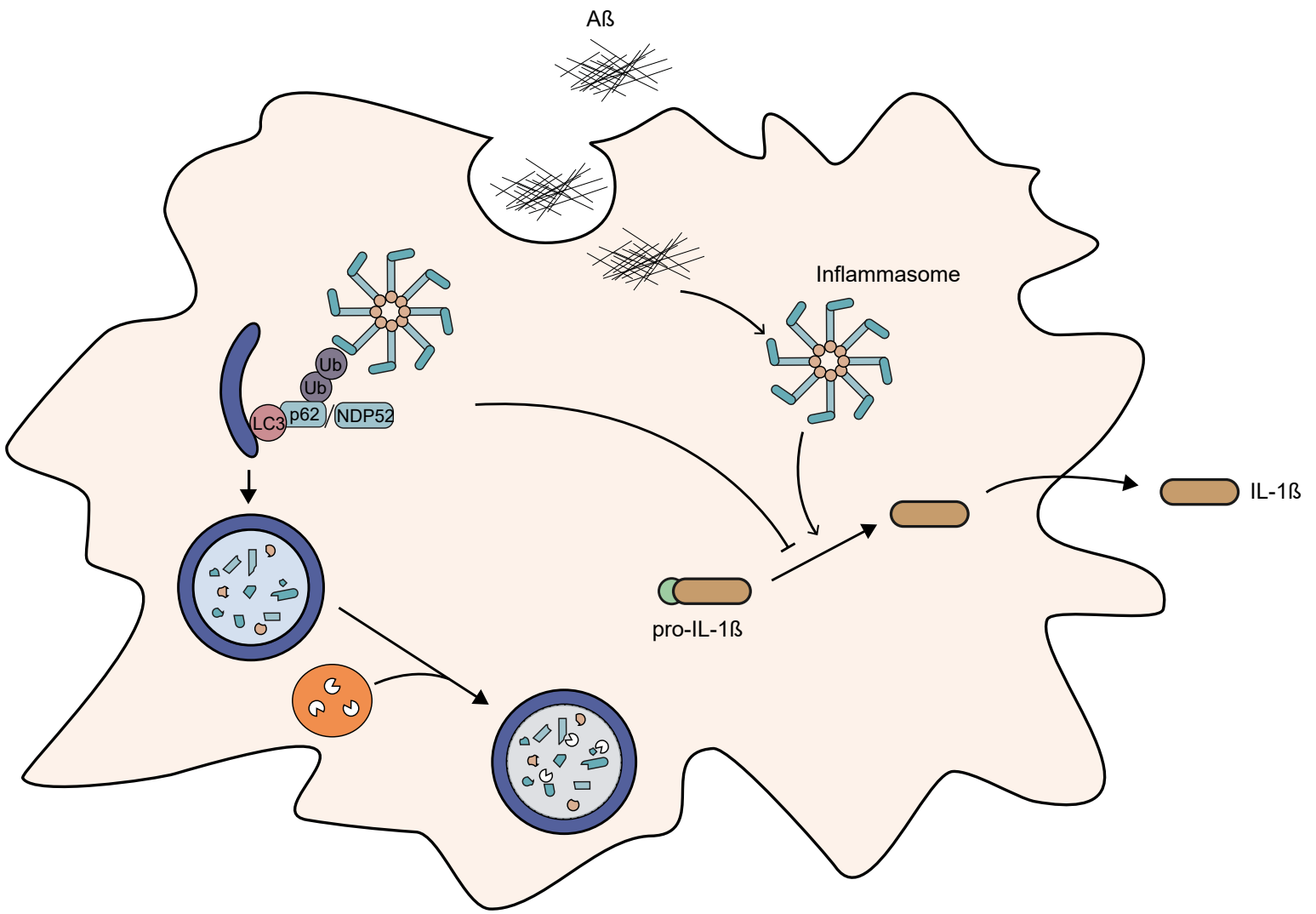
977 autophagy proteins to Rab5- and clathrin-positive endosomes is necessary for receptor
978 recycling, the pathway is called LANDO. (D) Clathrin-mediated endocytosis describes the uptake
979 of smaller extracellular cargo into clathrin-coated vesicles. After uncoating, the nascent vesicle is
980 trafficked further within the cell for example to the sorting endosome.

981
982 **Figure 4: Canonical and non-canonical autophagy functions associated to**
983 **neurological diseases.**

984 The inner circle presents canonical and the outer circle non-canonical autophagy processes. So
985 far, these pathways were most extensively studied in neurodegenerative diseases. However,
986 only little is known about their functions in neuropsychological diseases. Further aspects still
987 need to be identified. Concerning neuroinfectious diseases, either canonical xenophagy or LAP
988 can eliminate the invading particle, depending on its pathogenic characteristics.

989





(A) Phagocytosis

(B) LAP

(C) LANDO

(D) Clathrin-mediated Endocytosis

