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### In vivo Monitoring of Nicotine Biosynthesis in Tobacco Leaves by Low-temperature Plasma Mass Spectrometry

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#### Abstract

Low-temperature plasma (LTP) is capable of ionizing a broad range of organic molecules at ambient conditions. The coupling of LTP to a mass analyzer delivers chemical profiles from delicate objects. To investigate the suitability of LTP ionization for mass spectrometry (MS) based *in vivo* studies, we monitored the auxin-regulated nicotine biosynthesis in tobacco (*Nicotiana tabacum*) and evaluated possible biological effects. The measured nicotine concentrations in different experiments were comparable to literature data obtained with conventional methods. The observed compounds suggest the rupture of trichomes, and cell damage was observed on the spots exposed to LTP. However, the lesions only affected a negligible proportion of the leaf surface area and no systemic reaction was noted. Thus, our study provides the proof-of-concept for measuring the biosynthetic activity of plant surfaces *in vivo*.

#### Keywords:

ambient ionization, low-temperature plasma, biosynthesis, *in vivo* analysis, nicotine

#### 1. Introduction

Ambient ionization mass spectrometry (AIMS) represents a major advance in chemical analysis, since objects of complex composition can be studied without prior sample manipulation [1]. Among the multiple AIMS methods, lowtemperature plasma (LTP) jets are an attractive option, because of their simple

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