



Diversity of Microbiomes Across a 13,000-Year-Old Amazon Sediment

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Abstract

The microbiome is fundamental for understanding bacterial activities in sediments. However, only a limited number of studies have addressed the microbial diversity of Amazonian sediments. Here, we studied the microbiome of sediments from a 13,000-year BP core retrieved in a floodplain lake in Amazonia using metagenomics and biogeochemistry. Our aim was to evaluate the possible environmental influence over a river to a lake transition using a core sample. To this end, we sampled a core in the Airo Lake, a floodplain lake in the Negro River basin. The Negro River is the largest tributary of the Amazon River. The obtained core was divided into three strata: (i) surface, almost complete separation of the Airo Lake from the Negro River when the environment becomes more lentic with greater deposition of organic matter (black-colored sediment); (ii) transitional environment (reddish brown); and (iii) deep, environment with a tendency for greater past influence of the Negro River (brown color). The deepest sample possibly had the greatest influence of the Negro River as it represented the bottom of this river in the past, while the surface sample is the current Airo Lake bottom. In total, six metagenomes were obtained from the three different depth strata (total number of reads: 10.560.701; sequence length: 538 ± 24 , mean \pm standard deviation). The older (deeper) sediment strata contained a higher abundance of *Burkholderia*, *Chitinophaga*, *Mucilaginibacter*, and *Geobacter*, which represented ~25% of the metagenomic sequences. On the other hand, the more recent sediment strata had mainly *Thermococcus*, *Termophilum*, *Sulfolobus*, *Archaeoglobus*, and *Methanosarcina* (in total 11% of the metagenomic sequences). The sequence data were binned into metagenome-assembled genomes (MAGs). The majority of the obtained MAGs ($n = 16$) corresponded to unknown taxa, suggesting they may belong to new species. The older strata sediment microbiome was enriched with sulfur cycle genes, TCA cycle, YgfZ, and ATP-dependent proteolysis in bacteria. Meanwhile, serine-glyoxylate cycle, stress response genes, bacterial cell division, cell division-ribosomal stress protein cluster, and oxidative stress increased in the younger strata. Metal resistance and antimicrobial resistance genes were found across the entire core, including genes coding for fluoroquinolones, polymyxin, vancomycin, and multidrug resistance transporters. These findings depict the possible microbial diversity during the depositional past events and provided clues of the past microbial metabolism throughout time.

Keywords Microbiome · 13,000-year-old Amazon sediment · Antibiotic resistance genes

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Introduction

Microbial diversity may be influenced by biogeochemical properties of sediment and soils, precipitation seasonality-related changes, sediment nutrient, moisture regimes, and deforestation [4, 5]. The majority of the previous microbiome studies have focused on Amazon soils. In terrestrial ecosystems, decomposers, anaerobic saprophytes, and N₂ fixers are more abundant during the rainy season. An increase in sediment drying may increase methane production [11, 12, 23], with proliferation of *Methanocellales*, *Methanosarcinaceae*, and *Clostridiales*. Deforestation impacts nitrification and denitrification in Amazon soils [25]. Higher litter abundance possibly leads to higher abundance of nitrogen fixers-*Beijerinckiaceae*, suggesting canopy phenology patterns drive microbial abundance and soil nutrient patterns. *Proteobacteria* (*Burkholderiaceae*, *Pseudomonadaceae*), *Acidobacteria*, and *Bacillaceae* are typical groups at the soil surface, and *Bathyarchaeota* and *Thaumarchaeota* appear in deep soils [33]. Antibiotic and metal resistance genes are found in recent Amazon Forest soils [39], as a possible contribution of *Proteobacteria*. However, it is unclear if these resistance genes also occur in deeper sediment layers as a possible effect of microbial competition for sediment habitats.

Deforestation decreased sediment organic matter content and factors linked to sediment acidity and raised sediment pH, base saturation, and exchangeable bases, and increased diversity of *Actinomycetales* [34]. A decrease in the relative abundances of *Chlamydiae*, *Planctomycetes*, and *Verrucomicrobia* was also observed in the deforested sediments. A co-occurrence microbial network analysis disclosed possible pairs: *Planctomycetes* and aluminum content, and *Actinobacteria* and nitrogen sources in Amazon sediments. Modulation of biodiversity is clear after deforestation, suggesting a microbial buffer capacity. Apparently, healthy Amazon Forest sediments contain mycelium-forming actinomycete (*Catenulispora acidiphila*), nitrite-oxidizing rhizobia bacteria (*Nitrobacter hamburgensis*), the photoautotrophic/photoheterotrophic/chemoautotrophic/chemoheterotrophic and nitrogen fixer Alphaproteobacteria (*Rhodopseudomonas palustris*), and chemoautotrophic (*Oligotropha carboxidovorans*) [18]. It is unclear if these taxonomic groups or guilds can be found in old Amazon sediments which would also reflect past healthy conditions. Forest-to-pasture conversion leads to microbial diversity changes [38]. Potential recovery of metagenomic functional attributes may occur in secondary forest after pasture abandonment. Loss of microbial diversity occurs in soybean plantation with a decrease in *Acidobacteria*, *Actinobacteria*, and *Proteobacteria* [21].

However, diazotrophic microbial diversity may recover in secondary forests after agriculture is stopped [32].

Despite all studies on the Amazon Forest developed so far, most of the previous studies focused on the microbial diversity of surface soils with different levels of anthropogenic use and impact. The aim of the present study was to determine the microbial diversity and antibiotic/metal resistance gene contents across a sediment core. The study of sediment cores is a useful tool to unlock the microbial diversity of past events, and the original microbiome of old sediments (e.g., Holocene sediments). The study of these sediment samples may also shed light on the microbial metabolic repertoire throughout time. Here, the taxonomic and functional profiles of such old Amazon sediment microbiome were analyzed by means of metagenomics. Bulk organic matter geochemical analyses were also performed in the sediment core to determine the major features of the different sediment strata.

Materials and Methods

Study Area

The Airo Lake is a floodplain lake in the Negro River basin (0°19'37.225"S, 66°8'33.266"W), Municipality of São Gabriel da Cachoeira, Amazonas State (Fig. S1). The Negro River is the largest tributary of the Amazon River, considered the fifth largest river in the world [19]. In the Negro River basin, Podzol soil type develops as a result of the intense weathering of typical Amazonian Latosols [9]. This natural process leads to the formation of a deep soil horizon rich in organic matter and iron and aluminum oxides characteristic of Podzols. This organic matter is exported to the rivers, hence their typical black color. The Airo Lake has approximately 3 m of depth, maximum width of 300 m, pH around 3.5, and nowadays has almost no connection with the Negro River except during the most extreme floods. Thus, the Airo Lake is located in the equatorial region, in the Amazon Forest biome, with a hot and humid climate. The annual rainfall average at São Gabriel da Cachoeira city is 2853 mm [40].

Sediment Core and Geochemical Analysis

Aluminum tubes, 3 inches in diameter, mounted with "vibra-core" system retrieved an AIRO 12/01 148-cm-long sediment core (AIRO 12/01 0°19'37.225"S 66°8'33.266"W). The AIRO 12/01 sediment core samples from different depths (12–17, 34–37, 44–47, 64–67, 97–101, and 137–141 cm) were analyzed. The texture and color of the sediment (Munsell Sediment Color Chart) were described. The Munsell Sediment Color Chart

based a sediment color and texture core description. The sediment core was sliced into 1-cm sections which were stored in plastic bags. Geochemical characterization of the sediments was performed as described previously [14, 15, 48]. The bulk density of each layer was obtained by removing 8 cm³ of a wet sediment section and drying it at 60 °C to the constant weight. Seven accelerator mass spectrometry (AMS) radiocarbon dates from bulk organic matter were used to determine chronology at the Laboratoire de Mesure du Carbone 14, (LMC14-France). The 14C AMS ages were transformed into calendar ages using INTCAL98 for ages less than 24,000 ¹⁴C year before present (year BP) [45]. A laser particle analyzer (CILAS 1064) was used to measure the grain size distribution (particles between 0.04 and 500 µm) after the organic matter and carbonate destruction with H₂O₂ and HCl, respectively, and it is dispersing in a Na₄P₂O₇ solution and sonification. To determine TOC, total organic nitrogen (TN), δ¹³C, and δ¹⁵N, the samples were treated with a 0.5 mol L⁻¹ HCl solution. The treated sediment samples were analyzed for their elemental (carbon and nitrogen) and isotopic (¹³C and ¹⁵N) composition using the elemental analyzer PDZ Europa ANCA-GSL interfaced to a mass spectrometer PDZ Europa 20–20 isotope ratio (SERCON Ltd. Cheshire, UK) (UC Davies Laboratory). Chlorophyll derivatives were extracted using 90% acetone, and their absorbances were determined using a scanning spectrophotometer at the 350–800 nm interval. Background correction was performed through baseline subtraction from 500 to 800 nm. Pigment concentrations are reported as Sedimentary Pigments Degradation Units (SPDU) [46], an arbitrary unit, where 1 SPDU represents an absorbance of 1.0 in a 10-cm cell using 100 mL of acetone as a solvent for 1.0 g of OM [13].

DNA Extraction

DNA was extracted from 2 g of sediment from each sample using Power Soil DNA Isolation kit (Mo Bio, Carlsbad, CA, USA). DNA integrity was quantified in a NanoDrop ND 1000 instrument (Thermo Scientific, DE, USA) and with a fluorimetric QuBit dsDNA High Sensitivity Assay system (Life Technologies, Waltham, MA USA). DNA was stored at –20 °C until library construction. GenomiPhi amplification prior Nextera XT sample preparation was required. GenomiPhi reactions (containing 10–100 ng of template DNA) were performed to produce ~4 µg of amplified DNA, using the Illustra GenomiPhi DNA v2 Kit (GE Healthcare). Afterwards, DNA was purified by Power Clean – DNA Clean Up kit (Mo Bio), and again, quantified, prior library construction (16, 49).

Metagenomic Sequencing and Data Analyses

Metagenomic libraries were prepared using the Nextera XT DNA Sample Preparation Kit, according to manufacturer's instructions. Library DNA was purified using AMPure XP beads and quantified using the fluorimetric Qubit dsDNA High Sensitivity Assay system (Life Technologies). Quantification of libraries was performed with the 7500 Real-Time PCR (Applied Biosystems, Foster City, CA, USA) and the KAPA Library Quantification Kit (Kapa Biosystems, Wilmington, MA, USA). Library size distribution was accessed using the 2100 Bioanalyzer (Agilent). All ten metagenomes were sequenced by Illumina MiSeq—paired-end sequencing (2×300 base pairs).

Low base quality (Phred average quality score <30) and duplicated sequences were removed using PRINSEQ [42]. The resulting forward and reverse paired-end sequences were merged with SHERA [41]. Taxonomic and functional annotation of merged reads were performed using MG-RAST [31].

We used all metagenomes to build metagenome-assembled genomes (MAGs) [20, 48] using metaSPAdes v. 3.10 [35]. The genome assembly starts with metagenomic binning, in which assembly DNA reads into contigs. These contigs are then binned into putative partial or complete MAGs [3]. In the next step, we evaluated the MAGs' completeness and contamination using checkM [37] and we used GTDB-Tk [8] to perform a taxonomic classification.

Results and Discussion

Airo Sedimentological and Geochemical Features

Core AIRO 12/01 is composed of sand from the base to 54 cm. This unit is very compacted, with water contents of 20 to 40%, making it difficult for microorganisms to migrate. From 54 to 29 cm, more silty layers appear indicating a decrease in the hydrodynamics of the river at the sampling site. From 29 cm to the top of the core, the sediment is clayey-silt indicating the end of the direct influence of the river, the sediment arriving only in suspension during the highest floods. Between 230 cm and the top, bulk density decreased and water content (%) increased. Values of TOC, C:N, δ¹³C, and δ¹⁵N show clear differences along the sediment profile (Table S1). TOC ranged between 0.6% (depth) and 33.17% (surface), while the highest C:N ratio occurred in the deep sediment strata (57.72) (Table S1; Fig. 1). These extremely high C:N ratios are characteristic of the organic matter from the Podzols of the Negro River basin that give the river its black color [2]. δ¹⁵N showed significant changes between surface (1.90‰) and depth (0.07‰), indicating a relatively higher autochthonous

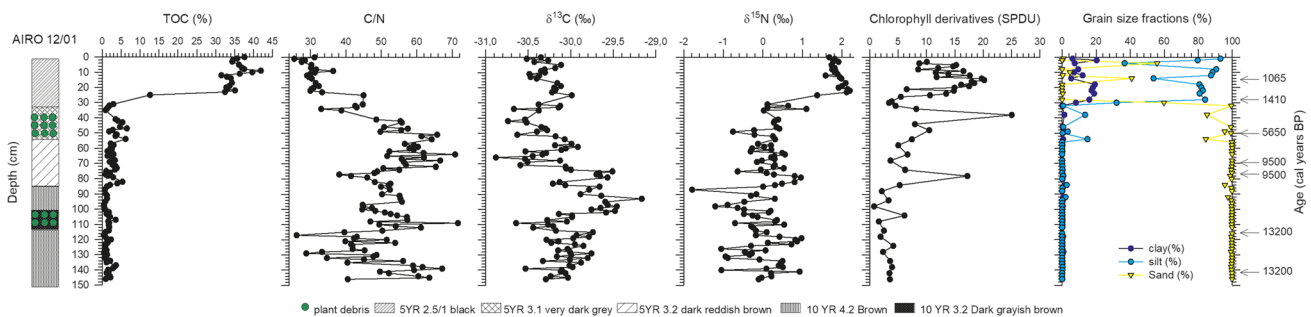


Fig. 1 Geochemical features of the AIRO 12/01 core. Total organic carbon (TOC), carbon:nitrogen molar ratios (C:N), nitrogen stable isotopes ($\delta^{13}\text{C}$ and $\delta^{15}\text{N}$), chlorophyll derivatives, and grain size distribution

productivity, since less organic matter came from the river, and perhaps a more active recycling of nitrogen at the time of deposition of the upper 24 cm of sediment [22, 47], and total nitrogen had an opposite trend (surface: 1.10%, depth: 0.03% (Table S1; Fig. 1). The age of the stratigraphic profile varied from 13,245 to the present to calibrated years before present (cal year BP; years BP thereafter). This corresponds to the Holocene, including the Pleistocene/Holocene transition. The core was divided into three phases according to the sedimentological and geochemical characteristics: (i) surface (black-colored sediment) (29–0 cm; 1,800–0 cal year BP). It is the period of Lake Airo formation with an almost complete separation from the Negro River except during extreme flood events. The environment becomes more lentic with greater deposition of organic matter from the lacustrine vegetation; (ii) transitional environment (reddish brown) (84–29 cm; 10,800–1,800 cal year BP). During this phase, we observe a progressive decrease of the hydrodynamics of the paleochannel of the Negro River whose abandonment will form the Airo Lake; and (iii) deep (brown color) (148–84 cm; 13,250–10,800 cal year BP) (Table S1; Fig. 1). During this period, the Negro River had a much stronger hydrodynamic force than today and transported a large quantity of sand from the erosion of the soils of its drainage basin. It is the period of construction of the Negro River floodplain by a braided river made up of several channels. One of these channels, very active, passed at the location of the current Airo Lake where it deposited the sandy sediment and organic matter from the Podzols.

Taxonomic Features of Metagenomes Across Sediment Strata

Bacteria were the most abundant domain (52.5 to 79.7% of the total metagenomic sequences) in all depths, followed by Archaea (10.1 to 49.2% of the total metagenomic sequences) (Table S2). Bacterial sequences were more abundant at deep samples ($p < 0.008$); meanwhile, Archaea were more abundant at surface ($p < 0.0002$). Virus (mean \pm standard

deviation: 0.21 ± 0.2) and Eukarya (mean \pm standard deviation: 3.9 ± 5.6) represented a smaller fraction of the metagenomes. Eukarya was significantly more abundant at deeper layers (mean \pm standard deviation: 0.9% and 9.8%; $p < 0.046$). *Ascomycota* was found in the two sampling points (97 cm: 5.9%; 137 cm: 1.5%). *Basidiomycota* (0.62%), *Phaeophyceae* (0.9%), and *Streptophyta* (0.75%) occurred at 97 cm depth, but not at 137 cm depth (Table S2).

Archaeal members of *Euryarchaeota* (6.8 to 33.0% of abundance) and *Crenarchaeota* were dominant (2 to 3.7% of abundance) at all depths followed by *Thaumarchaeota* (0 to 3% of abundance) (Table S2). Abundance of Archaea in sediment cores related to reduced availability of organic matter was observed [4, 17, 20]. We obtained 16 MAGs (13 archaeal and 3 bacterial). The *Proteobacteria* *Burkholderiaceae*, *Chitinophagaceae*, and *Sphingobacteriales* occurred among the 16 identified MAGs; however, the majority of the MAGs did not have a taxonomic identification as they may belong to new groups (Table S3). Further work is required to determine the exact taxonomic position of these unidentified MAGs.

Two major clusters were found based on the taxonomic profiles obtained in MG-RAST (Table S2). The surface cluster comprised mainly of *Thermococcus* (2.9%), *Thermophilum* (2.4%), *Sulfolobus* (2%), *Archaeoglobus* (1.8%), and *Methanosarcina* (1.7%). *Thermococcus* species are strictly anaerobes, thermophilic, and found in a variety of depths [1, 6]. *Thermococcus* are described as heterotrophic, chemotrophic, and organotrophic sulfanogens, using elemental sulfur and carbon sources. Some *Thermococcus* species produce CO_2 , H_2 , and H_2S as products of metabolism and respiration. The releases of these molecules are used by other autotrophic species [43]. *Sulfolobus* are sulfur-oxidizing bacteria, and *Archaeoglobus* are sulfate-reducing Archaea, coupling the reduction of sulfate to sulfide with the oxidation of many different organic carbon sources [26, 49]. *Methanosarcina* species are known as anaerobic methanogens that produce methane using all three metabolic pathways for methanogenesis.

Burkholderia (12%), *Chitinophaga* (8.3%), *Mucilaginibacter* (2.4%), and *Geobacter* (2.4%) were more abundant in the deep cluster. *Burkholderia* are common soil inhabitants and some species can oxidize sulfur [7]. *Chitinophaga* can be found in soil and have the capability to hydrolyze chitin and some species contained deferroxamine producing genes [24]. *Mucilaginibacter* are heterotrophic bacteria capable of degrading pectin, xylan, laminarin, and some other polysaccharides [36]. *Geobacter* species have been found in anaerobic conditions in soils and aquatic sediment [30] and can oxidize organic

compounds and metals, including iron, radioactive metals, and petroleum compounds into carbon dioxide [10].

Transition from River to Lake Influenced Sediment Microbiome

An evident change of gene content across the sediment strata was observed (Fig. 2a, b). Sulfur metabolism genes (0.92% at deep strata; 0.27% surface) were more abundant in the deep strata than in the surface (Fig. 2a). Today, the Negro River contains very little sulfate

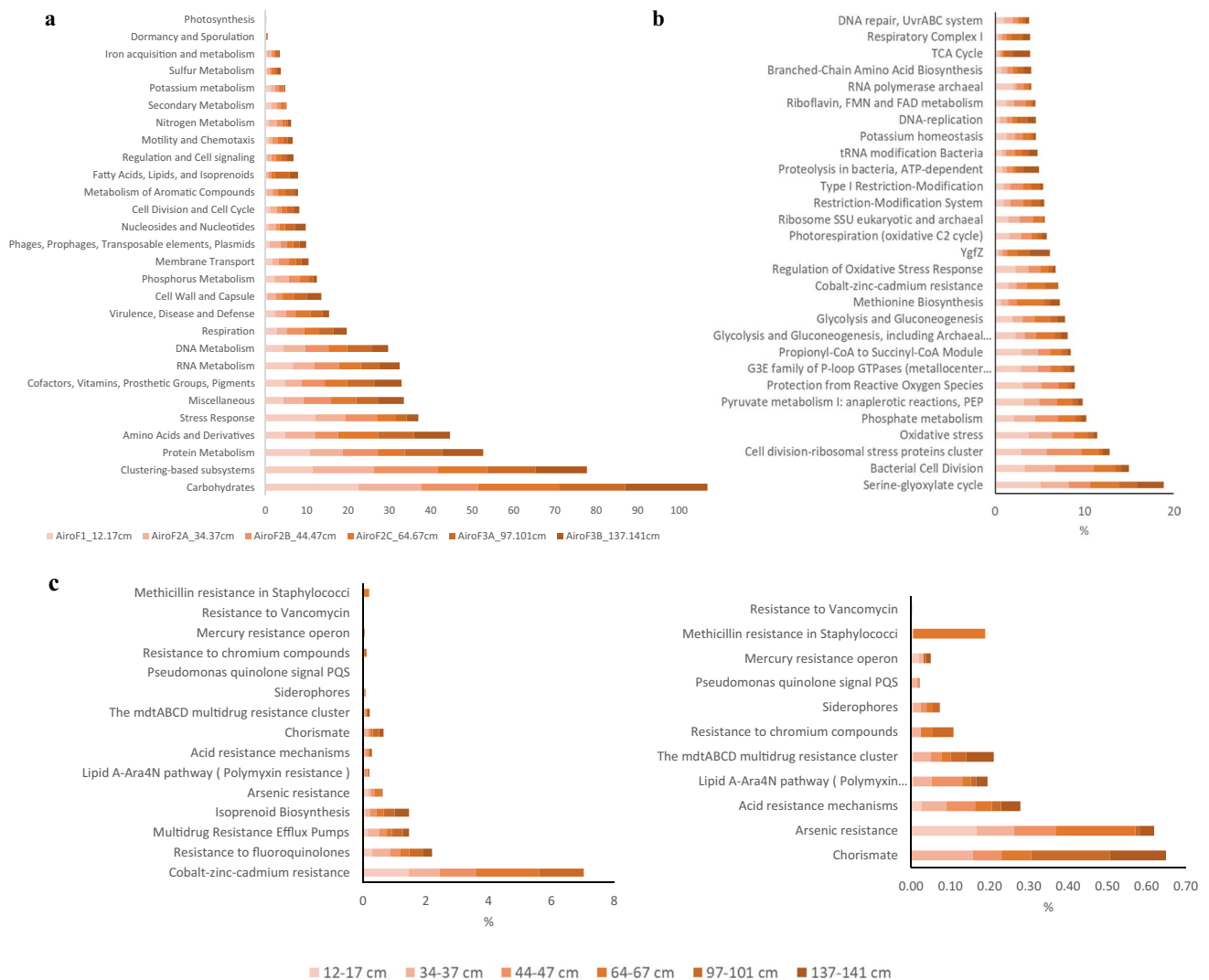


Fig. 2 Functional identification of metagenomes using MG-RAST. **a** The most abundant subsystems were carbohydrates and clustering-based subsystems that amounted to 30.75% relative abundance across metagenomes, followed by protein metabolism (8.77% relative abundance) and amino acid and derivatives (7.43% relative abundance). **b** Serine-glyoxylate cycle ranging from 2.01% (97–101 cm) to 5.10% (12–17 cm) followed by bacterial cell division ranging from 4.31% (44–47 cm) to 0.60% (97–101 cm), cell division-ribosomal stress protein cluster (from 3.87% at 44–47 cm to 0.43% at 97–101 cm),

and oxidative stress from 3.74% (12–17 cm) to 0.43% (137–141 cm) which were the most abundant level 3 subsystems and decreased with depth. TCA cycle, YgfZ, proteolysis in bacteria–ATP-dependent were increased in high depths. **c** Antimicrobial and metal resistance genes using MG-RAST. Siderophore = siderophore assembly kit, pyoverdine, yersiniabactin, bacillibactin, anthrachelin, staphylobactin, achromobactin. chorismate: intermediate for synthesis of tryptophan, PAPA antibiotics

(0.002 mmol l⁻¹) compared to the Amazon downstream (Obidos: 0.05 mmol l⁻¹) [44]. The presence of bacteria using sulfur compounds in the basal unit suggests that the ionic composition of the Negro River waters was very different at the beginning of the Holocene, which corresponds to a phase of intense erosion of the Negro River basin soil [29]. TCA cycle, YgfZ, and ATP-dependent proteolysis in bacteria were also increased in deep strata. On the other hand, serine-glyoxylate cycle (2.01% at deep strata; 5.10% at surface), stress response genes (12% in the surface; 2.8% in deep), bacterial cell division (4.31% at intermediate; 0.60% at deep strata), cell division-ribosomal stress protein cluster (3.87% at intermediate; 0.43% at deep strata), and oxidative stress (3.74% at surface; 0.43% at deep strata) decreased with depth (Fig. 2b). The greater environmental stress in the upper part of the core may be related to the fact that the lake is then isolated from the Negro River. It is a small aquatic system that responds easily to climatic and hydrological variability. These results are consistent with an environment with low microbial growth and abundance at deep strata (9.3Kbp). The variation of gene content across the core profile suggests major environmental changes throughout time which influenced the biochemical properties of the sediments. The results indicate a greater influence of the Negro River in deep strata and minor influence of this river in surface strata. The presence of a diverse arsenal of genes related to resistance to metals and antibiotics was also clear from the results of this study (Fig. 2c).

Genes responsible for antibiotic resistance were found in small amounts (up to 0.06%) across the entire sediment core (polymyxin resistance protein ArnA_DH, UDP-glucuronic acid decarboxylase EC 4.1.1.-, polymyxin resistance protein PmrJ, predicted deacetylase, polymyxin resistance protein ArnT, undecaprenyl phosphate- α -L-Ara4N transferase, polymyxin resistance protein ArnA_FT, UDP-4-amino-4-deoxy-L-arabinose formylase EC 2.1.2.-, polymyxin resistance protein PmrL, sucrose-6 phosphate hydrolase, polymyxin resistance protein ArnC, glycosyl transferase EC 2.4.-.-, ABC-type transport system involved in resistance to organic solvents, permease component USSDB6A, vancomycin resistance protein VanH, multidrug resistance transporter, and the Bcr/CflA family). Genes related to metal resistance were also found in small amounts (up to 0.06%; mercuric resistance operon regulatory protein, arsenic resistance protein ArsH, mercuric resistance operon coregulator, cobalt-zinc-cadmium resistance protein CzcA) (Fig. 2c). These findings suggest antibiotic and metal resistance genes may play roles in bacterial niche occupancy in sediments as antibiotic- and metal-resistant microbes may have a competitive advantage to colonize certain types of sediments throughout time. Metal and antibiotic resistance genes occur in proximal genomic regions and have co-evolved in certain

bacteria [16, 27, 28]. Certain microbial species are relevant bioindicators of contamination as they are both metal and antibiotic resistant [16].

Conclusions

The gene content variation across the core profile suggests major environmental changes throughout time which influenced the biochemical properties of the sediments. These changes imprinted clear modifications in the sediment microbiomes, separating the sediment in different groups. The results indicate a greater influence of the Negro River in deep strata and minor influence of this river in surface strata in agreement with sedimentological and geochemical proxies. The presence of a diverse pool of genes related to resistance to metals and antibiotics was also clear from the results of this study, which contribute to the diversification of microbiomes throughout time. The results of this study depict the possible microbial diversity during the depositional past events, and provided clues of the past microbial metabolism throughout time.

Supplementary Information The online version contains supplementary material available at <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00248-023-02202-0>.

Author Contribution C.C.T. and F.L.T. conceived and designed the study. Material preparation, data collection, and analysis were performed by D. T., F. H. C., L. L., G. D. G, K. O., B. J. T., L. S. M., P. F. M.T., R. C. C., and N.E.A. The first draft of the manuscript was written by C.C.T. and F.L.T. and all authors commented on previous versions of the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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Declarations

Conflict of Interest The authors declare no competing interests.

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