UV light-driven prebiotic synthesis of iron-sulfur clusters

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Materials and Methods Figs. S1 to S65 Tables S1 to S8 References

Materials and Methods

Unless otherwise specified, all reactions and manipulations were carried out at room temperature using vinyl anaerobic chambers that provide a strict anaerobic atmosphere of 0-5 parts per million (ppm) using a palladium catalyst and a hydrogen gas mix of 5%. The products were maintained under inert atmosphere and transferred to NMR tubes sealed with rubber septa, anaerobic sealed Hellma quartz cuvettes, or sealed glass vials for NMR, UV-Vis spectroscopy, and Mössbauer spectroscopy, or vesicle experiments, respectively. Reagents and solvents were from Sigma-Aldrich, including ⁵⁷Fe, and VWR International and were used without further purification, unless otherwise stated. Peptides ACG, ECG, FCG, KCG, QCG, WCG, and GMG were bought from ProteoGenix SAS. The *N*-acetylated compounds Ac-Ala-OH and Ac-Ala-OMe were prepared according to published procedures¹.

A Mettler Toledo InLab Flex-Micro pH Meter was used to monitor pH. H₂O was degassed by the freeze-pump-thaw method. Unless otherwise stated, all irradiations were carried out in a RPR-200 Rayonet reactor using 8 lamps with principal emission at 254 nm and with the cooling fan turned on resulting in an internal reactor temperature of ca. 35 °C. Kinetic irradiation studies at variable wavelengths were carried out with a Photon Technology International UV tunable lamp with a 75 W Xenon lamp as the power source. Tunable wavelength selection was enabled by adjusting the angle between the diffraction grating and the slit. The bandwidth of radiation used for all trials was set to 10 nm. Kinetic values obtained from these studies were normalized by the incident photon flux, as the flux varies from one wavelength to another. ¹H-NMR spectra were acquired using a Bruker Ultrashield 400 Plus operating at 400.1 MHz ¹H frequency, equipped with a cryogenic inverse probe. The sample temperature was 298 K. Samples consisting of H₂O/D₂O mixtures were analyzed using HOD suppression to collect ¹H-NMR data. Chemical shifts (δ) are shown in ppm. The yields of conversion were determined by relative integrations of the signals in the ¹H-NMR spectrum or by spiking with internal standards, unless otherwise stated. UV-Vis absorption spectra of freshly prepared solutions were recorded with an Agilent 8453 UV-Vis diode array spectrophotometer with an integration time of 0.5 s and an interval of 1 nm. Mössbauer spectra were recorded at 80 K in zero magnetic field in the solid state on an ES-Technology MS-105 Mössbauer spectrometer with a 60 MBg ⁵⁷Co source in a rhodium matrix at ambient temperature. Spectra were referenced against a 25 µm iron foil at 298 K and spectrum parameters obtained by fitting with Lorentzian lines. Samples were prepared by grinding with boron nitride under an inert atmosphere. Mass spectra for glutathione samples were acquired on an Agilent 1200 LC-MS system that employs a 6130 Quadrupole spectrometer. The solvent system used for liquid chromatography (LC) was 0.2 % formic acid in H₂O as buffer A, and 0.2 % formic acid in acetonitrile (MeCN) as buffer B. Samples were injected into Phenomenex Jupiter C18 column (150 x 200 mm, 5 µm) and subsequently into the mass spectrometer using a fully automated system. Spectra were acquired in the positive mode and analyzed using the MS Chemstation software (Agilent Technologies). The deconvolution program provided by the software was used to obtain the mass spectra. Absorbance and fluorescence analyses of vesicle experiments were performed with a SpectraMax i3x Multi-Mode Detection Platform (Molecular Devices).

Solid-phase peptide synthesis (SPPS)

All the peptides were synthesized according to previously published SPPS procedures by using Fmoc-protected L-amino acids². *N*,*N*-dimethyl formamide (DMF) was used as the solvent and preloaded fluorenylmethyloxycarbonyl-glycyl-Wang resin (Fmoc-Gly-Wang) was used as the starting polymeric support. Trityl-protected Fmoc-Cysteine (Fmoc-Cys(Trt)-OH) and tert-butyl (OtBu) side chain-protected Fmoc- α -amino acid were used as building blocks. In general, the peptide chain was elongated by sequential Fmoc deprotection of the residue anchored to the resin and Fmoc-AA-OH coupling. Acetic anhydride in DMF was used to achieve *N*-acetylation. Fmoc deprotection was obtained by washing the mixture with 20% (v/v) solution of piperidine in DMF. For each coupling, an excess (Fmoc-AA-OH: anchored AA, 4:1) of the Fmoc- α -amino acid

derivative was added to the resin. Apart from Fmoc-Cys(Trt)-OH, Fmoc- α -amino acid derivatives were activated with a mixture of hydroxyl-benzotriazole (HOBt), *N*,*N*,*N'*,*N'*-tetramethyl-*O*- (benzotriazol-1-yl)uronium tetrafluoborate (TBTU), and *N*,*N*-diisopropylethyl amine (DIPEA). Fmoc-Cys(Trt)OH was activated with a *N*,*N'*-diisopropylcarbodiimide (DIC)/HOBt mixture. At the end of the coupling, the polymers were cleaved from the resin and deprotected by treatment with a solution of trifluoroacetic acid (TFA):H₂O:triisopropyl silane (TIS):1,2-ethanedithiol (EDT) (volume ratio 97:1:1:1) for 2 h. The volume was successively reduced under nitrogen atmosphere to avoid cysteinyl thiol oxidation, and the product was precipitated with a cold solution of diethyl ether/petroleum ether (30:70 (v/v)) followed by washing cycles with diethyl ether or extracted 3 times with 20% acetic acid/chloroform and finally dried under inert atmosphere.

Sulfide-release studies

An aqueous solution containing each thiol (5 mL, 0.24 M) was prepared and the pH was adjusted to the pK_a of the thiol under anaerobic conditions. Subsequently, the solution was transferred to an NMR tube, capped with a rubber septum, and irradiated at 254 nm. Hypophosphite was used only in the set of experiments described in Fig. 2a-2b. That is, hypophosphite was not used for the synthesis of iron-sulfur clusters unless specifically indicated.

Photo-oxidation colorimetric assay

An aqueous solution of Fe^{2+} (1 mL, 0.001 M) and an aqueous glutathione- Fe^{2+} solution (1 mL, glutathione 0.24 M, Fe^{2+} 0.001 M) were irradiated (254 nm) for 5 min. An excess of 1,10-phenantroline (0.005 M), which reacts with Fe^{2+} ions, or potassium thiocyanate (0.005 M) solution, which reacts with Fe^{3+} ions, was added to each solution before transfer to anaerobic sealed Hellma quartz cuvettes.

[2Fe-2S] cluster synthesis

Ferric chloride hexahydrate (25 uL, 0.1 M) was added to an aqueous solution containing each thiol (5 mL, 0.24 M) and sodium sulfide nonahydrate (10 uL, 0.1 M) after pH adjustment under anaerobic conditions. For UV-driven experiments, ferric chloride hexahydrate (25 uL, 0.1 M) was added to an aqueous solution containing each thiol (5 mL, 0.24 M) after pH adjustment under anaerobic conditions. Subsequently, the solution was transferred to a NMR tube capped with a rubber septum or an anaerobic sealed Hellma quartz cuvette and irradiated with UV light. For Mössbauer experiments, degassed 2-propanol was added in a 40-fold excess to solutions containing glutathione mononuclear Fe²⁺ complex, a [2Fe-2S] cluster, and a [4Fe-4S] cluster to induce precipitation. The solution was centrifuged for 20 min at 5000 g and the solvent was discarded. The obtained precipitate was dried under N₂ atmosphere.

Vesicle formation

Under anaerobic conditions, 100 mM oleic acid and 100 mM decanoic acid:decanol:glycerol monodecanoate 4:1:1 vesicles were prepared as previously described³ by direct dispersion of the amphiphiles in either buffer (0.2 M glutathione, pH 8.6) or in solution containing the Fe²⁺ mononuclear complex (0.2 M glutathione, 5 mM Fe²⁺, pH 8.6) with 0.5 equivalents of NaOH. Samples were briefly vortexed, tumbled at room temperature for 2 h, then extruded with 11 passages through a 400 nm pore membrane (Avanti Polar Lipids) using a Mini-Extruder (Avanti Polar Lipids). Vesicles containing Fe²⁺ mononuclear complex were then loaded for purification onto a Sepharose 4B (6 mL bed volume) size exclusion column to remove unencapsulated material, using 0.2 M Tris-HCl pH 8.5 as the running buffer supplemented with 0.25 mM of oleic acid or 25 mM 4:1:1 decanoic acid:decanol:glycerol monodecanoate. Elution was monitored at 420 nm and the fractions containing vesicles were collected.

Vesicle stability assay

100 mM oleic acid and 100 mM 4:1:1 decanoic acid:decanol:glycerol monodecanoate vesicles containing 0.1 mM FITC-dextran (MW 4000) were prepared and purified by size exclusion chromatography with a Sepharose 4B column. 500 μ L of the vesicle solution was then incubated for 60 min with 500 μ L of 200 mM Tris-HCl, pH 8.5, 500 μ L of 200 mM glutathione, pH 8.6, and 500 μ L of a glutathione-Fe²⁺ mononuclear complex (5 mM Fe²⁺, 200 mM GSH) or an aqueous solution containing 5 mM Fe²⁺. All the samples were loaded onto a Sepharose 4B (6 mL bed volume) size exclusion column to assess vesicle stability, using 0.2 M Tris-HCl, pH 8.5 as the running buffer supplemented with 0.25 mM oleic acid or 25 mM 4:1:1 decanoic acid:decanol:glycerol monodecanoate. The elution profile was monitored by fluorescence (emission 525 nm, excitation 490 nm).

Vesicle sulfide-release assay

A fluorescence assay was performed to detect the release of sulfide from glutathioneencapsulated within oleate vesicles. Freshly prepared 100 mM 7-azido-4-methyl coumarin in DMSO was added to each fraction (200 uL) of 100 mM oleate vesicles containing 200 mM glutathione that was previously exposed to UV light (254 nm). The formation of 7-amino-4-methyl coumarin upon reaction with sulfide ions was detected by fluorescence (excitation wavelength: 345 nm, emission wavelength: 440 nm).

Colorimetric assays for iron-sulfur cluster formation within fatty acids vesicles

A tiron assay was performed to detect fractions containing iron. Freshly prepared 100 mM tiron in 0.20 mM Tris-HCl, 0.25 mM oleic acid, pH 8.6 was added to each fraction (2.5 mM) that was previously incubated with ethanol (25% v/v) for 5 min. The formation of the tiron complex was detected by absorbance at 484 nm. Alternatively, a methylene blue assay was employed to detect fractions containing sulfide⁴. *N*,*N*-dimethyl-*p*-phenylenediamine (DMPD) (10 mg) was dissolved in 10 mL 35% (v/v) HCl to make a DMPD stock solution. DMPD was added to each fraction (2.5 mM) in the presence of Fe³⁺ (1.25 mM) to increase the sensitivity of the assay and left to react for 1 h. The samples were then centrifuged and the absorbance at 668 nm recorded.





Fig. S1 | UV-vis absorption spectra of non-irradiated L-glutathione solution with Fe^{3+} . In the absence of UV light the Fe^{3+} mononuclear complex (solid line) undergoes reduction to the Fe^{2+} mononuclear complex (dashed line) without conversion to the corresponding [2Fe-2S] cluster up to 24 h.

Fig. S2.



Fig. S2 | LC-MS analysis of glutathione solution before irradiation. One peak was detected in the chromatogram (inset, elution time: 3.56 min, detector: 215 nm) which corresponds to glutathione, as shown by the mass spectrum.

Fig. S3.



Fig. S3 | LC-MS analysis of glutathione solution after 15 min irradiation. Two peaks were detected in the chromatogram (inset, elution time: 2.66 and 3.54 min, detector: 215 nm), which correspond to the alanyl analogue of glutathione, as shown by the mass spectrum, and glutathione.



Fig. S4 | \mathbf{a} , ¹H-NMR spectrum of a glutathione solution before exposure to UV light in the absence of hypophosphite. \mathbf{b} , ¹H-NMR spectrum of a glutathione solution after 15 min exposure to UV light in the absence of hypophosphite. The alanyl species is already detectable at 1.33 ppm together with the disulfide species of glutathione at 2.94 and 3.23 ppm. \mathbf{c} , The conversion to the alanyl-analogue is almost complete after 90 min of exposure to UV light. \mathbf{d} , ¹H-NMR spectrum of a glutathione solution without exposure to UV light after 90 min. \mathbf{e} , Time course of conversion as obtained by integration of NMR peaks for the irradiated solution of glutathione in the absence of hypophosphite. Blue, reduced glutathione; light blue, oxidized glutathione; red, alanyl-analogue.





Fig. S5 | \mathbf{a} , ¹H-NMR spectra of an irradiated solution of glutathione in the presence of ferric ions. The bottom spectrum is of the starting solution. The top spectrum is after 15 min of irradiation, which shows a new peak at 1.33 ppm indicating that photolysis occurs also in the presence of iron ions. Significant line broadening due to the paramagnetism of the iron ions and ligand exchange were observed⁵. **b**, ¹H-NMR spectra of an irradiated solution of oxidized glutathione. Upon prolonged irradiation up to 90 min of the starting material (bottom spectrum) it is possible to detect the appearance of a peak at 1.33 ppm due to the alanyl-analogue (top spectrum).

Fig. S6.



Fig. S6 | **a**, Starting from a solution of Fe^{2+} , S²⁻, and glutathione (dashed line), a [2Fe-2S] cluster could not be synthesized unless subsequently exposed to air to oxidize the iron ions (solid line). **b**, When S²⁻ is premixed with glutathione, the addition of Fe³⁺ leads to the formation of a [2Fe-2S] cluster. **c**, If Fe³⁺ is incubated with glutathione prior to the addition of S²⁻, then the [2Fe-2S] cluster does not form. Here we report the sulfide addition after 60 s from premixing of glutathione and iron ions (solid line), after 60 min (dashed line) and after 6 h (dotted line). **d**, The [2Fe-2S] cluster can form by irradiation of a solution of glutathione and Fe²⁺ ions.





Fig. S7 | **a**, UV-vis absorption spectra of a solution of Fe^{2+} ions in water before (solid line) and after (dotted line) exposure to UV light (254 nm) for up to 15 min in the presence of 1,10phenanthroline, an indicator of Fe^{2+} ions. **b**, UV-vis spectra of a solution of Fe^{2+} ions in water before (solid line) and after (dotted line) exposure to UV light (254 nm) in the presence of thiocyanate, an indicator of Fe^{3+} ions, for 15 min. **c**, Change in concentration of Fe^{2+} (green bars) and Fe^{3+} (violet bars) ions upon exposure to UV light in aqueous solution. **d**, Change in concentration of Fe^{2+} (green bars) and Fe^{3+} (violet bars) ions upon exposure to UV light in the presence of glutathione.

Fig. S8.



Fig. S8 | Photolysis⁶ and photooxidation reactions during the synthesis of iron-sulfur clusters in the presence of ferrous ions and organic thiols.





Fig. S9 | Proposed light-driven conversion routes to iron-sulfur clusters from mononuclear Fe^{3+} -thiolate complexes, showing intermediate structures.





Fig. S10 | MS analysis of the peptide GC. The overall mass spectrum is shown as an inset.

Fig. S11.



Fig. S11 | MS analysis of the peptide CG. The overall mass spectrum is shown as an inset.

Fig. S12.



Fig. S12 | MS analysis of the peptide AcCG. The overall mass spectrum is shown as an inset.

Fig. S13.



Fig. S13 | MS analysis of the peptide γ EGC. The overall mass spectrum is shown as an inset.

Fig. S14.



Fig. S14 | MS analysis of the peptide CyEG. The overall mass spectrum is shown as an inset.

Fig. S15.



Fig. S15 | MS analysis of the peptide AcCγEG. The overall mass spectrum is shown as an inset.

Fig. S16.



Fig. S16 | MS analysis of the peptide GGC. The overall mass spectrum is shown as an inset.

Fig. S17.



Fig. S17 | MS analysis of the peptide CGG. The overall mass spectrum is shown as an inset.

Fig. S18.



Fig. S18 | MS analysis of the peptide AcCGG. The overall mass spectrum is shown as an inset.

Fig. S19.



Fig. S19 | MS analysis of the peptide ACA. The overall mass spectrum is shown as an inset.

Fig. S20.



Fig. S20 | MS analysis of the peptide ACT. The overall mass spectrum is shown as an inset.

Fig. S21.



Fig. S21 | MS analysis of the peptide DCG. The overall mass spectrum is shown as an inset.

Fig. S22.



Fig. S22 | MS analysis of the peptide βDCG. The overall mass spectrum is shown as an inset.

Fig. S23.



Fig. S23 | MS analysis of the peptide ECE. The overall mass spectrum is shown as an inset.

Fig. S24.



Fig. S24 | MS analysis of the peptide GCA. The overall mass spectrum is shown as an inset.

Fig. S25.



Fig. S25 | MS analysis of the peptide GCE. The overall mass spectrum is shown as an inset.

Fig. S26.



Fig. S26 | MS analysis of the peptide GCG. The overall mass spectrum is shown as an inset.

Fig. S27.



Fig. S27 | MS analysis of the peptide GCK. The overall mass spectrum is shown as an inset.

Fig. S28.

Fig. S28 | MS analysis of the peptide GCQ. The overall mass spectrum is shown as an inset.

Fig. S29.

Fig. S29 | MS analysis of the peptide GCS. The overall mass spectrum is shown as an inset.

Fig. S30.

Fig. S30 | MS analysis of the peptide GCT. The overall mass spectrum is shown as an inset.

Fig. S31.

Fig. S31 | MS analysis of the peptide GCV. The overall mass spectrum is shown as an inset.

Fig. S32.

Fig. S32 | MS analysis of the peptide KCK. The overall mass spectrum is shown as an inset.
Fig. S33.



Fig. S33 | MS analysis of the peptide NCG. The overall mass spectrum is shown as an inset.

Fig. S34.



Fig. S34 | MS analysis of the peptide SCA. The overall mass spectrum is shown as an inset.

Fig. S35.



Fig. S35 | MS analysis of the peptide SCG. The overall mass spectrum is shown as an inset.

Fig. S36.



Fig. S36 | MS analysis of the peptide SCS. The overall mass spectrum is shown as an inset.

Fig. S37.



Fig. S37 | MS analysis of the peptide TCG. The overall mass spectrum is shown as an inset.

Fig. S38.



Fig. S38 | MS analysis of the peptide TCT. The overall mass spectrum is shown as an inset.

Fig. S39.



Fig. S39 | MS analysis of the peptide VCG. The overall mass spectrum is shown as an inset.

Fig. S40.



Fig. S40 | MS analysis of the peptide VCV. The overall mass spectrum is shown as an inset.





Fig. S41 | **a**, UV-vis spectrum of the C γ EG peptide in the presence of Fe³⁺ and S²⁻ ions. The [2Fe-2S] cluster is not detectable. **b**, UV-vis spectrum of [2Fe-2S] cluster coordinated by γ ECG. **c**, UV-vis spectrum of [2Fe-2S] cluster coordinated to γ EGC. **d**, UV-vis spectrum of [2Fe-2S] cluster coordinated to α C γ EG.





Fig. S42 | **a**, UV-vis spectrum of [2Fe-2S] cluster coordinated to DCG. **b**, UV-vis spectrum of [2Fe-2S] cluster coordinated to γ ECG. **c**, UV-vis spectrum of [2Fe-2S] cluster coordinated to β DCG. **d**, UV-vis spectrum of [2Fe-2S] cluster coordinated to ECG.





Fig. S43 | UV-vis spectrum of a solution containing 40 mM GMG, 0.5 mM iron ions, 0.2 mM sulfide at pH 8. The [2Fe-2S] cluster is not detectable.





Fig. S44 | **a**, pH titration of SCG. **b**, pH titration of ECG. **c**, pH titration of γ ECG. The first inflection point is highlighted for each titration. Acetylation of the amino-terminus increased the pK_a of the thiol to 8.1. For amino-terminal cysteine peptides, the pK_a was lower (ca. 6.9) due to the proximity of the α -amino group to the side-chain thiol. For these cases, the pH was adjusted to 6.9 or 7.3, in order to shift the equilibrium of H₂S dissociation. However, N-terminal Cys peptides failed to coordinate a [2Fe-2S] cluster in both the cases.

Fig. S45.



Fig. S45 | **a**, UV-vis spectrum of L-cysteine methyl ester in the presence of Fe³⁺ and S²⁻ ions. The [2Fe-2S] cluster is not detectable. **b**, UV-vis spectrum of [2Fe-2S] cluster coordinated by *N*-acetyl L-cysteine methyl ester. **c**, UV-vis spectrum of [2Fe-2S] cluster coordinated by *N*-acetyl L-cysteine. **d**, UV-vis spectrum of L-cysteine in the presence of Fe³⁺ and S²⁻ ions. The [2Fe-2S] cluster is not detectable.





Fig. S46 | \mathbf{a} , ¹H-NMR of 2-mercaptoethanol solution before UV light (254 nm) irradiation. \mathbf{b} , ¹H-NMR of 2-mercaptoethanol solution after 15 min UV light irradiation. \mathbf{c} , ¹H-NMR of irradiated 2-mercaptoethanol solution after spiking with ethanol.





Fig. S47 | \mathbf{a} , ¹H-NMR of 3-mercaptopropionic acid solution before UV light (254 nm) irradiation. \mathbf{b} , ¹H-NMR of a 3-mercaptopropionic acid solution after 15 min UV light irradiation. \mathbf{c} , ¹H-NMR of an irradiated 3-mercaptopropionic acid solution after spiking with propionic acid.





Fig. S48 | \mathbf{a} , ¹H-NMR of a *N*-acetyl L-cysteine solution before UV light (254 nm) irradiation. \mathbf{b} , ¹H-NMR of *N*-acetyl L-cysteine solution after 15 min UV light irradiation. \mathbf{c} , ¹H-NMR of an irradiated *N*-acetyl L-cysteine solution after spiking with *N*-acetyl alanine.



Fig. S49 | \mathbf{a} , ¹H-NMR of *N*-acetyl L-cysteine methyl ester solution before UV light (254 nm) irradiation. \mathbf{b} , ¹H-NMR of *N*-acetyl L-cysteine methyl ester solution after 15 min UV light irradiation. \mathbf{c} , ¹H-NMR of irradiated *N*-acetyl L-cysteine methyl ester solution after spiking with *N*-acetyl alanine methyl ester.

Fig. S50.



Fig. S50 | Dependence of the conversion rate constant on the irradiation wavelength for 2mercaptoethanol. The rate constant (expressed as s⁻¹) was normalized by the photon flux (expressed as s) and each wavelength measurement had a bandwidth of 10 nm. Data represent $n \ge 3$ replicates for kinetic analysis (mean and SEM).





Fig. S51 | UV-vis spectra of a solution of 2-mercaptoethanol and Fe^{3+} exposed to UV light (254 nm). The Fe^{3+} -mononuclear complex (violet line) is converted within 30 s to the corresponding [2Fe-2S] cluster (red line). Upon further irradiation (180 s) the formation of the [4Fe-4S] cluster can be detected (orange line).





Fig. S52 | UV-vis spectra of a solution of 3-mercaptopropionic acid and Fe^{3+} exposed to UV light (254 nm). The Fe^{3+} -mononuclear complex (violet line) is converted within 30 s of exposure to UV light to the corresponding [2Fe-2S] cluster (red line). Upon further irradiation (180 s) the formation of the [4Fe-4S] cluster can be detected (orange line).





Fig. S53 | UV-vis spectra of a solution of *N*-acetyl L-cysteine and Fe^{3+} exposed to UV light (254 nm). The Fe^{3+} -mononuclear complex (violet line) is converted within 30 s of exposure to UV light to the corresponding [2Fe-2S] cluster (red line). Upon further irradiation (180 s) the formation of the [4Fe-4S] cluster can be detected (orange line).

Fig. S54.



Fig. S54 | UV-vis spectra of a solution of *N*-acetyl L-cysteine methyl ester and Fe^{3+} exposed to UV light (254 nm). The Fe^{2+} -mononuclear complex (violet line) is converted within 30 s of exposure to UV light to the corresponding [2Fe-2S] cluster (red line). Upon further irradiation (180 s) the formation of the [4Fe-4S] cluster can be detected (orange line).





Fig. S55 | UV-vis spectra of a solution of ACG and Fe^{3+} exposed to UV light (254 nm). The Fe^{2+} -mononuclear complex (violet line) is converted within 30 s of exposure to UV light to the corresponding [2Fe-2S] cluster (red line). Upon further irradiation (180 s) the formation of the [4Fe-4S] cluster can be detected (orange line).





Fig. S56 | UV-vis spectra of a solution of KCG and Fe^{3+} exposed to UV light (254 nm). The Fe^{2+} -mononuclear complex (violet line) is converted within 30 s of exposure to UV light to the corresponding [2Fe-2S] cluster (red line). Upon further irradiation (180 s) the formation of the [4Fe-4S] cluster can be detected (orange line).





Fig. S57 | UV-vis spectra of a solution of GCK and Fe^{3+} exposed to UV light (254 nm). The Fe^{2+} -mononuclear complex (violet line) is converted within 30 s of exposure to UV light to the corresponding [2Fe-2S] cluster (red line). Upon further irradiation (180 s) the formation of the [4Fe-4S] cluster can be detected (orange line).





Fig. S58 | UV-vis spectra of a solution of TCT and Fe^{3+} exposed to UV light (254 nm). The Fe^{2+} -mononuclear complex (violet line) is converted within 30 s of exposure to UV light to the corresponding [2Fe-2S] cluster (red line). Upon further irradiation (180 s) the formation of the [4Fe-4S] cluster can be detected (orange line).





Fig. S59 | UV-vis spectra of a solution of ACT and Fe^{3+} exposed to UV light (254 nm). The Fe^{2+} -mononuclear complex (violet line) is converted within 30 s of exposure to UV light to the corresponding [2Fe-2S] cluster (red line). Upon further irradiation (180 s) the formation of the [4Fe-4S] cluster can be detected (orange line).

Fig. S60.



Fig. S60 | Oleate vesicle stability in the presence of Fe^{2+} and Fe^{2+} - glutathione. Oleate vesicles containing encapsulated FITC-dextran were incubated with either 200 mM Tris-HCl, pH 8.5 (blue dots), 200 mM glutathione (green dots), 5 mM Fe^{2+} (orange dots), or 5 mM Fe^{2+} plus 200 mM glutathione (violet dots) for 60 min. The integrity of the vesicles was then assessed by quantifying unencapsulated, leaked FITC-dextran by size exclusion chromatography with Sepharose 4b followed by fluorescence spectroscopy.

Fig. S61.



Fig. S61 | 4:1:1 decanoic acid:decanol:monocaprin vesicle stability to Fe^{2+} and Fe^{2+} -glutathione. 4:1:1 decanoic acid:decanol:monocaprin vesicles containing encapsulated FITC-dextran were incubated with either 200 mM Tris-HCl, pH 8.5 (blue dots), 200 mM glutathione (green dots), 5 mM Fe^{2+} (orange dots), or 5 mM Fe^{2+} plus 5 mM glutathione (violet dots) for 60 min. The integrity of the vesicles was then assessed by quantifying unencapsulated, leaked FITC-dextran by size exclusion chromatography with Sepharose 4B followed by fluorescence spectroscopy.





Fig. S62 | Oleate vesicle stability assay to UV light. Oleate vesicles containing encapsulated Fe^{2+} -glutathione was irradiated at 254 nm for 60 min (orange dots). Control reactions included an aliquot of the same sample prior to exposure to UV light (blue dots) and vesicles kept at room temperature for 60 min (violet dots) without exposure to UV. Absorbance of the tiron-iron complex was exploited to detect leaked iron ions, thus indicating structurally compromised vesicles. No leaked iron ions were detected.





Fig. S63 | 4:1:1 decanoic acid:decanol:monocaprin vesicle stability to UV light. 4:1:1 decanoic acid:decanol:monocaprin vesicles containing encapsulated Fe^{2+} -glutathione was irradiated at 254 nm for 60 min (orange dots). Control reactions included an aliquot of the same sample prior to exposure to UV light (blue dots) and vesicles kept at room temperature for 60 min (violet dots) without exposure to UV. Absorbance of the tiron-iron complex was exploited to detect leaked iron ions, thus indicating structurally compromised vesicles. No leaked iron ions were detected.

Fig. S64.



Fig. S64 | 7-amino-4-methyl coumarin assay for sulfide production within oleate vesicles induced by UV-light. Aliquots of oleate vesicles were irradiated for 5, 10, 15, 30, 45, 60 and 90 min. 7-azido-4-methyl coumarin was added to each aliquot and left to react for 1 h. The formation of 7-amino-4-methyl coumarin upon reaction with sulfide ions was detected by fluorescence (excitation wavelength: 345 nm, emission wavelength: 440 nm).





Fig. S65 | Methylene blue assay for sulfide production within 4:1:1 decanoic acid:decanol:monocaprin vesicles induced by UV-light. Aliquots of 4:1:1 decanoic acid:decanol:monocaprin vesicles were irradiated for 5, 10, 15, 30, 45 and 60 min. DMPD solution (2.5 mM) was added to each aliquot upon the addition of Fe³⁺ ions (1.25 mM) and left to react for 1 h. The absorbance at 668 nm was then recorded. Colorimetric data represent mean and SEM in $n \ge 3$ replicates.

Table S1.

Table S1. Absorbance maxima for Fe^{3+} mononuclear complex, [2Fe-2S] and [4Fe-4S] clusters with thiol containing molecules synthesized by photolysis and photooxidation.

Ligand	iron-sulfur system	Absorbance maximum (nm)	Absorbance maximum (nm)	
	Fe ³⁺ mononuclear complex	492	-	
2-mercaptoethanol	[2Fe-2S] cluster	420	455	
	[4Fe-4S] cluster	404	-	
3-mercaptopropionic acid	Fe ³⁺ mononuclear complex	496	-	
	[2Fe-2S] cluster	419	451	
	[4Fe-4S] cluster	405	-	
N-acetyl L-cysteine	Fe ³⁺ mononuclear complex	498	-	
	[2Fe-2S] cluster	420	454	
	[4Fe-4S] cluster	412	-	
N-acetyl L-cysteine methyl ester	Fe ³⁺ mononuclear complex	505	-	
	[2Fe-2S] cluster	422	451	
	[4Fe-4S] cluster	413	-	

Table S2.

Table S2. Mössbauer dat	a obtained on Fe ³⁺ mc	ononuclear complex,	[2Fe-2S] and [4	4Fe-4S] clusters
with glutathione (mms ⁻¹ ,	errors $\leq \pm 0.01 \text{ mms}^{-1}$	¹ unless shown other	wise in parenth	nesis, at 80 K).

Irradiation time	IS*	QS*	h.w.h.m.*	Molar contribution (%)	Identity	Geometry
0 s	0.68	3.26	0.22	100	Fe ²⁺	4-coord., T _d
	0.68	3.26	0.23	79	Fe ²⁺	4-coord., T _d
30 s	0.27	0.52	0.21	21	Fe ³⁺	[2Fe-2S], T _d
	0.68	3.32	0.23	26	Fe ²⁺	4-coord., T _d
180 s	0.31	0.57	0.22	64	Fe ³⁺	[2Fe-2S], T _d
	0.48	1.06(2)	0.26(2)	10	Fe ^{2+/3+}	[4Fe-4S], T _d

*IS, isomeric shift; QS, quadrupole splitting; h.w.h.m., half of the line width at half maximum.

Table S3.

	Reduced thiol (ppm)		Oxidized thiol (ppm)		Desulfurized analogue (ppm)	
	R-CH ₂ -	R-C <i>H</i> 2-	(R-CH ₂ -	(R-CH ₂ -	R-CH ₂ -	R-CH ₂ -
	C <i>H</i> ₂ -SH	CH2-SH	CH ₂ -S) ₂	CH ₂ -S) ₂	CH ₃	CH ₃
2-Mercaptoethanol	δ 2.57 (t,	δ 3.55 (t,	δ 2.83 (t,	δ 3.81 (t,	δ 1.11 (t,	δ 3.59 (q,
	2H)	2H)	2H)	2H)	2H)	3H)
3-Mercaptopropionic	δ 2.62 (t,	δ 2.37 (t,	δ 2.83 (t,	δ 3.81 (t,	δ 1.11 (t,	δ 3.59 (q,
acid	2H)	2H)	2H)	2H)	2H)	3H)
Cysteamine	δ 2.69 (t,	δ 3.04 (t,	δ 2.91 (t,	δ 3.25 (t,	δ 1.20 (t,	δ 2.98 (q,
	2H)	2H)	2H)	2H)	2H)	3H)

Table S3. Chemical shift (ppm) data collected from ¹H-NMR spectra of thiol containing solutions exposed to UV irradiation at 254 nm.
Table S4.

	Reduced thiol (ppm)		Oxidized th	uol (ppm)	Desulfurized analogue (ppm)	
	R-CH-CH ₂ - SH	R-C <i>H</i> - CH ₂ -SH	(R-CH- CH ₂ -S) ₂	(R-C <i>H</i> - CH ₂ -S) ₂	R-CH- C <i>H</i> 3	R-C <i>H</i> - CH ₃
L-cysteine	δ 2.89 - 2.75 (m, 2H)	δ 4.21 (m, 1H)	δ 3.20 - 2.88 (m, 2H)	-	δ 1.26 (d, 3H)	δ 4.06 (m, 1H)
L-cysteine methyl ester	δ 2.89 - 2.75 (m, 2H)	δ 4.21 (m, 1H)	δ 3.20 - 2.88 (m, 2H)	-	δ 1.26 (d, 3H)	δ 4.06 (m, 1H)
<i>N</i> -acetyl L-cysteine	δ 2.89 - 2.75 (m, 2H)	δ 4.21 (m, 1H)	δ 3.20 - 2.88 (m, 2H)	-	δ 1.26 (d, 3H)	δ 4.06 (m, 1H)
<i>N</i> -acetyl L-cysteine methyl ester	δ 2.89 - 2.75 (m, 2H)	δ 4.21 (m, 1H)	δ 3.20 - 2.88 (m, 2H)	-	δ 1.26 (d, 3H)	δ 4.06 (m, 1H)
L-Glutathione	δ 2.93 - 2.80 (m, 2H)	δ 4.43 (m, 1H)	δ 3.26 - 2.90 (m, 2H)	-	δ 1.33 (d, 3H)	δ 4.29 (q, 1H)

Table S4. Chemical shift (ppm) data collected from ¹H-NMR spectra of protected and unprotected L-cysteine and L-glutathione solutions exposed to UV irradiation at 254 nm.

Table S5.

Table S5. Absorbance maxima for Fe ³⁺ mononuclear complex, [2Fe-2S] and [4Fe-4S] clusters with
different tripeptides synthesized by photolysis-photooxidation and by the addition of Na ₂ S.*

Ligand		iron-sulfur system	Absorbance	Absorbance
	GCA	Fe ³⁺ mononuclear complex	490	-
		[2Fe-2S] cluster	413	459
		[4Fe-4S] cluster	415	-
		Fe ³⁺ mononuclear complex	474	-
	GCE	[2Fe-2S] cluster	415	456
		[4Fe-4S] cluster	409	-
		Fe ³⁺ mononuclear complex	480	-
	GCK	[2Fe-2S] cluster	422	447
GCX		[4Fe-4S] cluster	420	-
	GCQ	Fe ³⁺ mononuclear complex	495	-
		[2Fe-2S] cluster	430	455
		[4Fe-4S] cluster	421	-
	GCS GCT	Fe ³⁺ mononuclear complex	501	-
		[2Fe-2S] cluster	420	454
		[4Fe-4S] cluster	417	-
		Fe ³⁺ mononuclear complex	497	-
		[2Fe-2S] cluster	419	453
		[4Fe-4S] cluster	419	-
		Fe ³⁺ mononuclear complex	499	-
	GCV	[2Fe-2S] cluster	418	457
		[4Fe-4S] cluster	420	-
		Fe ³⁺ mononuclear complex	496	-
XCG	ACG	[2Fe-2S] cluster	421	457
		[4Fe-4S] cluster	414	-

	DCG	Fe ³⁺ mononuclear complex	491	-
		[2Fe-2S] cluster	415	451
		[4Fe-4S] cluster	415	-
	βDCG	Fe ³⁺ mononuclear complex	503	-
		[2Fe-2S] cluster	417	459
		[4Fe-4S] cluster	415	-
		Fe ³⁺ mononuclear complex	482	-
	ECG	[2Fe-2S] cluster	425	455
		[4Fe-4S] cluster	409	-
		Fe ³⁺ mononuclear complex	495	-
	γECG	[2Fe-2S] cluster	423	457
		[4Fe-4S] cluster	411	-
	FCG	Fe ³⁺ mononuclear complex	499	-
		[2Fe-2S] cluster	422	456
		[4Fe-4S] cluster	415	-
	KCG	Fe ³⁺ mononuclear complex	498	-
		[2Fe-2S] cluster	424	451
		[4Fe-4S] cluster	407	-
		Fe ³⁺ mononuclear complex	470	-
	NCG	[2Fe-2S] cluster	423	451
		[4Fe-4S] cluster	415	-
	QCG	Fe ³⁺ mononuclear complex	470	-
		[2Fe-2S] cluster	418	454
		[4Fe-4S] cluster	418	-
	SCG	Fe ³⁺ mononuclear complex	475	-
		[2Fe-2S] cluster	420	447
		[4Fe-4S] cluster	411	-
	TCG	Fe ³⁺ mononuclear complex	470	-

	1			
		[2Fe-2S] cluster	419	447
		[4Fe-4S] cluster	418	-
	VCG	Fe ³⁺ mononuclear complex	487	-
		[2Fe-2S] cluster	422	456
		[4Fe-4S] cluster	406	-
	WCG	-	-	-
		Fe ³⁺ mononuclear complex	486	-
	ACA	[2Fe-2S] cluster	417	449
		[4Fe-4S] cluster	417	-
		Fe ³⁺ mononuclear complex	476	-
	ECE	[2Fe-2S] cluster	423	459
		[4Fe-4S] cluster	414	-
		Fe ³⁺ mononuclear complex	460	-
	GCG	[2Fe-2S] cluster	421	455
		[4Fe-4S] cluster	415	-
	КСК	Fe ³⁺ mononuclear complex	484	-
XCX		[2Fe-2S] cluster	425	451
		[4Fe-4S] cluster	416	-
	SCS	Fe ³⁺ mononuclear complex	479	-
		[2Fe-2S] cluster	418	447
		[4Fe-4S] cluster	416	-
		Fe ³⁺ mononuclear complex	473	-
	TCT	[2Fe-2S] cluster	421	455
		[4Fe-4S] cluster	419	-
		Fe ³⁺ mononuclear complex	496	-
	VCV	[2Fe-2S] cluster	418	457
		[4Fe-4S] cluster	412	-
ХСҮ	ACT	Fe ³⁺ mononuclear complex	472	-
		[2Fe-2S] cluster	425	453

		[4Fe-4S] cluster	411	-
	SCA	Fe ³⁺ mononuclear complex	488	-
		[2Fe-2S] cluster	422	452
		[4Fe-4S] cluster	422	-
	CGG	-	-	-
		Fe ³⁺ mononuclear complex	484	-
	AcCGG	[2Fe-2S] cluster	413	456
Protected and		[4Fe-4S] cluster	413	-
unprotected CXG	CγEG	-	-	-
		Fe ³⁺ mononuclear complex	496	-
	AcCyEG	[2Fe-2S] cluster	415	462
		[4Fe-4S] cluster	415	-
	GGC	Fe ³⁺ mononuclear complex	496	-
		[2Fe-2S] cluster	415	455
NGC		[4Fe-4S] cluster	411	-
XGC type	γEGC	Fe ³⁺ mononuclear complex	506	-
		[2Fe-2S] cluster	416	453
		[4Fe-4S] cluster	411	-
	CG	-	-	-
	AcCG	Fe ³⁺ mononuclear complex	496	-
		[2Fe-2S] cluster	418	452
Dipeptides		[4Fe-4S] cluster	417	-
		Fe ³⁺ mononuclear complex	500	-
	GC	[2Fe-2S] cluster	419	453
		[4Fe-4S] cluster	419	-
Negative control	GMG	-	-	-

* Iron-sulfur cluster synthesis was first carried out with the addition of Na₂S and FeCl₃, as described under "[2Fe-2S] cluster synthesis" above. For every single peptide that successfully coordinated a [2Fe-2S] cluster, the synthesis of the cluster was repeated by photolysis in the absence of Na₂S. Both iron-sulfur cluster synthesis methods gave identical results.

Table S6.

Peptide	pH - first inflection point	pH - second inflection point	Thiol pK _a
GGC	5.02	10.88	8.01
GCG	6.25	11.06	8.04
CGG	5.52	10.61	6.91
AcCGG	6.12	10.47	8.06
ECG	5.83	11.03	7.74
SCG	5.20	10.99	7.28
VCG	5.32	10.70	7.68
VCV	5.74	10.44	7.61

Table S6. Inflection points and pK_a values for model Cys-containing tripeptides.

Table S7.

Table S7. Absorbance maxima for [2Fe-2S] clusters coordinated to protected and unprotected L-cysteine and small molecule thiols.

	Ligand	Absorbance maximum (nm)	Absorbance maximum (nm)
	L-cysteine	-	-
Protected and unprotected Cys	L-cysteine methyl ester	-	-
	N-acetyl L-cysteine	420	454
	N-acetyl L-cysteine methyl ester	420	451
Small thiolates	DL-dithiothreitol	419	457
	2-mercaptoethanol	420	455
	3-mercaptopropionic acid	419	451

Table S8.

Table S8. Mössbauer data obtained on irradiated and non-irradiated oleate vesicles containing Fe^{3+} - L-glutathione (mms⁻¹, errors $\leq \pm 0.01$ mms⁻¹ unless shown otherwise in parenthesis, at 80 K).

Irradiation time	IS*	QS*	h.w.h.m.*	Molar contribution (%)	Identity	Geometry
	0.72	3.50(3)	0.16(2)	23	Fe ²⁺	4-coord., distorted T _d
0 s	0.70	3.11(3)	0.20	37	Fe ²⁺	4-coord., T _d
	0.38	0.70	0.29	40	Fe ³⁺	4-coord., distorted T _d
180 s	0.72	3.49(2)	0.18	32	Fe ²⁺	4-coord., distorted T _d
	0.69	3.13(2)	0.21	54	Fe ²⁺	4-coord., T _d
	0.28	0.53	0.21	14	Fe ³⁺	[2Fe-2S], T _d

*IS, isomeric shift; QS, quadrupole splitting; h.w.h.m., half of the line width at half maximum.

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