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Published in:
European Journal of Biochemistry

DOI:
10.1111/j.1432-1033.1996.0584p.x

Citation for published version (APA):
Cloning of the maoA gene that encodes aromatic amine oxidase of Escherichia coli W3350 and characterization of the overexpressed enzyme

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(Received 22 November 1995/12 February 1996) — EJB 95 1936/3

The mao operon of Escherichia coli W3350, which comprises the genes maoC and maoA, was cloned and appeared to be similar to that of Klebsiella aerogenes [Sugino, H., Sasaki, M., Azakami, H., Yamashita, M. & Murooka, Y. (1992) J. Bacteriol. 174, 2485–2492]. The gene that encodes aromatic amine oxidase (maoA) was isolated, sequenced, and expressed in E. coli TG2.

The purified enzyme exhibited properties characteristic of a copper/tosapquinone(TPQ)-containing amine oxidase with respect to the optical absorption and EPR spectra, the size of the subunits, and the optical absorption spectra obtained upon derivatization with hydrazines. However, high-resolution anion-exchange chromatography revealed that the preparation was heterogeneous. The enzyme preparation appeared to consist of at least four enzyme species with different specific activities, $A_{opt}/A_{TPQ}$ ratios and TPQ/subunit ratios. Since the overall properties of the overexpressed enzyme and the authentic enzyme were similar and the separated enzyme species had identical N-terminal amino acid sequences, the heterogeneity does not seem to be caused by improper expression of the gene in the recombinant strain but by factors that interfere with the processing of the specific tyrosine in the precursor enzyme to functional TPQ. Although other causes cannot be excluded, the spectral data and TPQ/subunit ratios reported in the literature for other amine oxidases suggest that suboptimal synthesis of functional TPQ also occurs in other organisms.

Keywords: amine oxidase; overexpression; enzyme characterization; tosapquinone.

Copper/tosapquinone(TPQ)-containing amine oxidase has a wide distribution among eukaryotic and prokaryotic organisms. It converts primary amines into the corresponding aldehydes, ammonia and hydrogen peroxide. Similarity exists among the members of this enzyme group with respect to the size of the protein (approximately 180 kDa), the number of subunits (two), and the copper content (one/subunit) (reviewed by McIntire and Hartmann, 1993; Klinman and Mu, 1994). Unresolved questions concern the TPQ/enzyme ratio (one [Morgan et al., 1992] or two [Janes and Klinman, 1991]), the formation of TPQ [which probably proceeds autocatalytically when copper is inserted into the proenzyme (Matsuzaki et al., 1994, 1995), and the topology of the inorganic and organic cofactors (Greenaway et al., 1991; Turwos et al., 1993; Bossa et al., 1994). No three-dimensional structure of amine oxidase is available. Since microorganisms can be manipulated rather easily, their amine oxidases are useful for studies of these matters.

The first quinoprotein amine oxidase purified from a microorganism was that from Aspergillus niger (Yamada et al., 1965). The first bacterial one was methyamine oxidase from the gram-positive bacterium Arthrobacter P1 (van Iersel et al., 1986). Aromatic and aliphatic amine oxidases, probably of the quinoprotein type, have been detected in yeasts, and aromatic and aliphatic enzymes have been found in the same strains (Hawood and Large, 1981; Bruinenberg et al., 1989; Mu et al., 1992). Subsequently, amine oxidases have been isolated from the gram-negative bacterium Escherichia coli (Cooper et al., 1992) and the gram-positive bacterium Arthrobacter globiformis (Shimizu et al., 1990). Genes that encode amine oxidases of Klebsiella aerogenes (Sugino et al., 1992), Arthrobacter P1 (Zhang et al., 1993), A. globiformis (Tanizawa et al., 1994), E. coli (Azakami et al., 1994; Hanlon et al., 1995) and Hansenula polymorpha (Cai and Klinman, 1994) have been cloned, sequenced and expressed. However, in some studies (Roh et al., 1994; Hanlon et al., 1995) the purified overexpressed enzyme had lower specific activity than authentic enzyme, which suggests that the recombinant strains were less competent at expression of the structural gene or processing of the pro-enzyme.

To investigate an amine oxidase of which the synthesis could be manipulated during overexpression, we chose the enzyme from the genetically easily accessible organism E. coli. Short reports on the purification and partial characterization of this enzyme (Cooper et al., 1992) and on the cloning and expression of the structural gene (maoA) (Azakami et al., 1994; Roh et al., 1994; Hanlon et al., 1995) have been published. Here we report the cloning of the mao operon, the overexpression of the maoA gene, and the high-resolution purification and characterization of the overexpressed enzyme. Direct resonance Raman spectros-
copy of underivatized enzyme (Moenne-Loccoz et al., 1995), EPR spectroscopy of 6Cu-substituted and 6Cu-substituted enzyme, 7F-NMR spectroscopy of enzyme derivatized with F-substituted hydrazines, and identification of TPQ in the enzyme (Steinebach et al., 1995) will be described elsewhere.

E. coli copy of underivatized enzyme (Moenne-Loccoz et al., 1995), A small paper filter moistened with a drop of diethyl sulfate was placed in the middle of the plate. After several days of incubation in water. Media were solidified with 100 mM K2HPO4, 33 mM KH2PO4, 7.5 mM (NH4)2SO4, 250 mM MgSO4, pH 7.0. Media were prepared with demineralized water. Media were solidified with 1.5% Bactoagar.

E. coli TG2 supE hsdR5 thi Δ(lac-proAB) Δ(sbrecA)306::Tn10 F[trpD3 proA+ lacZΔM15] (Maniatis et al., 1989) was used as a host for cloning and expression. E. coli CAG12026 [trp-2::Tn10] and E. coli CAG12081 [trp-2::Tn10] were used for expression and were kindly provided by C. A. Gross. E. coli PPA207 [supE lac gal +] , a mutant that grows better on 2-phenylethylamine, was derived from E. coli W3350 [supE lac gal +] by random mutagenesis with diethyl sulfate, as follows. A fully grown culture of E. coli W3350 in Luria-Bertani medium was diluted 100-fold in medium A and 100 μl was spread on solidified medium A with 0.1% (mass/vol.) 2-phenylethylamine as a sole source of carbon and energy. A small paper filter moistened with a drop of diethyl sulfate was placed in the middle of the plate. After several days of incubation at 37°C, a few colonies appeared at some distance from the filter, one of which was designated as PPA207.

Vectors used were pUC18 and M13mp19 (Yannish-Perron et al., 1985), pFi19EH (Fürste et al., 1986) and pBlueScript II (Stratagene Inc.)

General materials. Restriction endonucleases, T4 polynucleotide kinase, T4 DNA ligase and E. coli DNA polymerase I (Klenow fragment) were from Pharmacia. The Sequenase version I1 sequence kit was obtained from USB. Calf intestinal phosphatase and blocking reagent were purchased according to the manufacturers' recommendations.

Mops, phenylhydrazine/HCl, 4-nitrophenylhydrazine/HCl, and 2-phenylethylamine/HCl were from Fluka. PD10, DEAE-Sepharose FastFlow, phenyl-Sepharose FastFlow, FPLC MonoQ HR 5/5 and FPLC Superose T2 HR 10/30 columns were from Pharmacia. All reagents were of the highest purity commercially available and were used without further purification. All solutions were prepared with demineralized water, further deionized by passage through a Waters Milli-Q system to a resistance greater than 17 mΩ/cm.

General methods. Amine oxidase from E. coli K12 (ECAO) was induced and purified according to Cooper et al. (1992). Protein sequence analysis was performed by Edman degradation with an automated sequencer (Model 477A, Applied Biosystems) equipped with an on-line phenylthiohydantoin analyzer (Model 120A, Applied Biosystems).

Methods for DNA manipulation were essentially as described by Maniatis et al. (1989). SDS/PAGE (12%) and native homogeneous PAGE (9%) were performed with a Bio Rad Mini-PROTEAN II. Native gradient (from 10% to 15%) PAGE was performed with the Pharmacia Phastsystem equipment. Pharmacia low-molecular-mass and high-molecular-mass markers were used for calibration in molecular-mass determinations. Gels were stained with Coomassie brilliant blue G-250.

Protein content was quantitated by the method of Bradford (1976) with desalted bovine serum as a standard. Amine oxidase solutions were concentrated with Filtron Microse (7000×g) or Macroset (at 5000×g) centrifugal concentrators equipped with 30-kDa cut-off membranes.

For semi-preparative HPLC a Hitachi L-6210 HPLC pump was used. The eluate was monitored with a Hewlett Packard HI1040 II photodiode array detector.

Cloning of the gene that encodes aromatic amine oxidase (maoA). Chromosomal DNA was isolated from E. coli PPA207 and digested with several restriction endonucleases. Digested DNA was separated on a 0.8% agarose gel in 0.04 M Tris/acetate, pH 8, 1 mM EDTA (buffer A) and transferred to a GeneScreen Plus membrane by means of vacuum blotting. The blot was prehybridized in 6XNaCl/Cit (0.9 M NaCl, 0.09 M sodium citrate, pH 7.0), 0.1% SDS and 1% blocking reagent at 65°C. A 23-nucleotide probe was used, whose sequence was based on the sequence of the N-terminus of the purified enzyme from E. coli K12 (amino acid sequence, Asp-Lys-Thr-Leu-Glu-Phe-Gly; nucleotide sequence, GA[AA][AC]T[IC][AT]TG[GC]). The probe was labelled with T4 polynucleotide kinase and [γ-32P]dATP. Hybridization was carried out at 65°C for 16 h. The filter was washed twice with 6XNaCl/Cit. 0.1% SDS at room temperature for 0.5 h. The autoradiograph showed signals at 6 kb after digestion with BglII and at 0.8 kb after digestion with HindIII (data not shown). Chromosomal DNA was digested with BglII. After separation of the fragments on a 0.8% agarose gel in buffer A, 5–7 kb fragments were excised from the gel and purified with GeneClean followed by ligation of the fragments into BamH1-digested pBT19EH. The resulting plasmids were used to transform E. coli TG2. Positive clones were identified by colony/filter hybridization with the labelled oligonucleotide as a probe. One such clone, pBCP468, was used for the isolation of DNA, which was digested with HindIII. After separation of the fragments by gel electrophoresis and transfer to a membrane followed by screening with the labelled oligonucleotide, plasmid pBCP468 was shown to contain the 0.8-kb positive fragment. The 0.8-kb HindIII fragment was isolated and ligated into the HindIII site of M13mp19 and sequenced from both directions by means of the Sequenase kit. In a similar way, a 7-kb EcoRI–PstI fragment was cloned into pUC18 digested with EcoRI/PstI and the 0.8-kb HindIII fragment (labelled by treatment of the recessed ends with Klenow polymerase, dTTP, dGTP, dCTP and [γ-32P]dATP) was used to identify positive clones, which yielded plasmid pBCP467. pBCP467 was purified and used for sequence determination of the maoA gene by the dideoxynucleotide chain-termination method (Sanger et al., 1977) with sequence-specific primers.

Expression of the maoA gene. In E. coli TG2 that harboured plasmid pBCP467, the maoA gene was expressed during growth in Luria-Bertani medium containing 100 μg/ml ampicillin or on medium A supplemented with 20 mg/l thiamin, 0.2% (mass/vol.) glucose, 0.4% (mass/vol.) amino acids (acid hydrolysate of casein), 50 μM CuCl2, 100 μg/ml ampicillin. 100 μM L-proline, 0.5% β-d-galactopyranose was included in the media. Routinely, E. coli TG2 cells were freshly transformed with plasmid pBCP467 to produce the amine oxidase. 10-ml cultures of supplemented medium A or Luria-Bertani medium containing 100 μg/ml ampicillin were inoculated with a transformant and allowed to grow at 37°C for 7 h. Cells were harvested by centrifugation, washed once to remove β-lactamase and used to inoculate 500 ml medium (Luria-Bertani or medium A) supple-
mented with 100 μM isopropyl-thio-β-D-galactopyranoside in 2-L flasks. Cultures were grown overnight at 37 °C with vigorous shaking.

**Enzyme assay.** Enzyme activity was routinely determined with a biological-oxygen monitor at 37 °C. The assay buffer (1.6 ml) contained 0.1 M potassium phosphate, pH 7.0, ECAO (greater than 1 μg/ml), catalase (2 μg/ml) and 2-phenylethylamine (10 mM). Specific activities were calculated based on an initial oxygen concentration of 0.199 mM.

**Enzyme purification.** All purification steps, except for MonoQ chromatography, were carried out at 4 °C. Cells were harvested, washed once with 10 mM Tris/HCl, pH 8.0, and disrupted by passage of the mixture twice through a cooled French pressure cell at 110 MPa. The suspension was centrifuged for 30 min at 28,000Xg to produce the cell-free extract.

The cell-free extract (100 ml) was applied to a DEAE-Sepharose FastFlow column (2.5 cm×25 cm) equilibrated with 5 mM potassium phosphate, pH 7.5 (buffer B). After washing the column with buffer B, proteins were eluted with a linear gradient from 0 to 1 M NaCl in buffer A over 60 min at a flow rate of 2.0 ml/min. The fractions that contained enzyme activity were pooled and concentrated.

The concentrate was adjusted to 1.5 M ammonium sulfate by addition of powdered ammonium sulfate and applied to a phenyl-Sepharose FastFlow column (2.5 cm×7 cm) equilibrated with 1.6 M ammonium sulfate, 15 mM potassium phosphate, pH 6.6 (buffer C). After washing the column with buffer C, proteins were eluted with a linear gradient from buffer C to buffer B over 60 min at a flow rate of 2.0 ml/min. The active fractions were pooled and concentrated. The buffer was exchanged by gel filtration on a PD10 column equilibrated with buffer B. The enzyme was further purified in six portions on a MonoQ 5/5 column equilibrated with buffer B. After application of the sample and washing of the column with buffer A, proteins were eluted with a linear gradient from buffer A to 0.15 M potassium phosphate, pH 7.0, over 20 min at a flow rate of 0.5 ml/min. Enzyme fractions 1, 2, 3 and 4 (Fig. 2A) were manually collected and stored at −20°C.

**Titration of ECAO with phenylhydrazines.** Phenylhydrazine/HCl and 4-nitrophenylhydrazine/HCl solutions (approximately 10 mM in methanol) were prepared daily and kept at −20 °C in the dark. The phenylhydrazine and 4-nitrophenylhydrazine solutions were transferred to quartz EPR tubes and the spectra were recorded with a HP8452A photodiode array spectrophotometer. Complete titration was determined independently by activity measurements. The molar absorption coefficients of the adducts in the enzyme were determined by application of a linear fitting routine (provided by the program Igor Pro) to the titration data obtained.

**EPR spectroscopy.** ECAO preparations (in 50 mM potassium phosphate, pH 7.0) were concentrated to approximately 60 mg/ml. Approximately 200 μl of these concentrated enzyme solutions were transferred to quartz EPR tubes and the spectra were recorded at 60 K on a Varian E9 EPR spectrometer at 9.23 GHz.

**RESULTS**

**Cloning and expression of maoA.** *E. coli* W3350 grows very poorly on 2-phenylethylamine. Therefore a faster-growing variant strain, PPA207, was selected to obtain a higher cell yield. The cells probably express the amine oxidase enzyme (or other enzymes in the degradation pathway) at an increased level due to a promoter mutation. maoA was cloned from *E. coli* PPA207. As a probe we used an oligonucleotide based on the N-terminal amino acid sequence of the aromatic amine oxidase purified from an *E. coli* K12 strain. A Southern blot of several digests of PPA207 chromosomal DNA revealed that hybridisation occurred either with large fragments (greater than 10 kb; EcoR1, PstI, BamH1, AccI) or small fragments (less than 1 kb; HinClII, HindIII). Digestion with BglII and KpnI yielded fragments of 6 kb and 8 kb, respectively. Cloning the KpnI fragment was unsuccessful but we cloned the BglII fragment, which yielded plasmid pBCP468 (Fig. 1A).

A 0.8-kb HindIII fragment was subcloned from plasmid pBCP468 in phage M13mp19 and sequenced. Comparison of its translated sequence with the amino acid sequence of the N-terminus of the purified enzyme and the published sequence of the *mao* operon from *K. aerogenes* (Sugino et al., 1992) showed that the cloned HindIII fragment coded for the last 20 amino acids of the C-terminal part of *maoC* (whose function is unknown), the intergenic region between *maoC* and *maoA*, and the N-terminal part of *maoA*. Further restriction-enzyme analysis revealed that the 6-kb BglII fragment of pBCP468 contained the upstream region of the *mao* operon, the complete *maoC* gene, but only 0.4 kb of the *maoA* gene.

Screening of blots of doubly digested *E. coli* PPA207 chromosomal DNA with the 0.8-kb HindIII fragment from plasmid pBCP468 as a probe identified a 7-kb EcoR1–PstI fragment that could contain the complete *maoA* gene. Four identical clones were obtained with the desired insert, which yielded plasmid pBCP467 (Fig. 1B). The inserts contained part of the *maoC* gene, the entire *maoA* gene and 4 kb of downstream sequence. Sequencing of the HindIII fragment, isolated from plasmid pBCP467, demonstrated that the plasmid contained the *maoA* gene.

**Table 1. Purification of *E. coli* amine oxidase.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purification step</th>
<th>Specific activity</th>
<th>Total protein</th>
<th>Total activity</th>
<th>Yield</th>
<th>Purification factor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>U/mg</td>
<td>mg</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Fold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cell-free extract</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>663</td>
<td>391</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEAE-Sepharose</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>371</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phenyl-Sepharose</td>
<td>4.84</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>339</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MonoQ 5/5</td>
<td>6.98*</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Species B.
Fig. 2. High-resolution anion-exchange chromatography of ECAO. (A), MonoQ S5/S separation of the phenyl-Sepharose fraction. The absorbance at 474 nm (continuous line) is shown expanded 104-fold such that the maximum is at the same height as the absorbance maximum at 280 nm (dotted line). The ranges in which the fractions were collected are indicated by the vertical bars. (B), rechromatography of fractions 1, 2, 3 and 4. The absorbance at 474 nm (continuous lines) is shown expanded 77-fold compared with the absorbance at 280 nm chromatograms (dotted lines). The range in which the fractions were collected are indicated by the vertical bars. (C), ultraviolet/visible spectra (measured with the photodiode array detector at the maximum of the peaks in the 474 nm chromatograms) of ECAO species A, B and C.
gene. Based on restriction-enzyme analysis, a map was constructed which indicated that the complete \textit{maoA} gene should be located on three \textit{HindIII} fragments. Subcloning of these fragments into M13mp19 and partial sequencing of the inserts from both orientations demonstrated this. The complete \textit{maoA} sequence was determined by means of pBCP467 and specific oligonucleotide sequence primers designed on the basis of sequence data already obtained. Comparison of the nucleotide-sequence-derived amino acid sequence published by Azakami et al. (1994) revealed amino acid substitutions at six positions (the histidine residue of the mature enzyme was regarded as position 1): Glu218\rightarrow Lys; Val228\rightarrow Gly; Ile229\rightarrow Tyr; Ile260\rightarrow Pro; Pro426\rightarrow Ala; and Asp629\rightarrow His. The isoleucine residue at position 246 was absent and an alanine residue was found at residue 258 (between tryptophan and histidine residues).

When \textit{E. coli} TG2 (pBCP467) was grown in Luria-Bertani medium, expression of \textit{maoA} was constitutive and high (590 \text{mU/mg} protein in cells that harboured pBCP467 versus 0 \text{mU/mg} protein in cells that harboured pUC18). SDS/PAGE confirmed this (data not shown) because protein staining revealed a band at 80 \text{kDa} (which migrated with the purified amine oxidase) only in cells that harboured pBCP467. The expression of \textit{maoA} by \textit{E. coli} TG2 (pBCP467) is approximately 29-fold higher than in the wild-type strain (Cooper et al., 1992).

Inspection of the sequence of the \textit{K. aerogenes} \textit{mao} operon (Sugino et al., 1992) and our sequence data of the \textit{maoA} operon did not reveal the presence of a promoter. Expression of the \textit{E. coli maoA} gene must, therefore, depend on the promoter of the plasmid, i.e., the \textit{lac} promoter of pUC18. This was confirmed by the finding that when the insert was cloned in the opposite direction in pUC19, the \textit{maoA} gene was not expressed, either in a constitutive way or after addition of isopropyl-thio-\textit{D}-galactopyranoside. The finding that the expression was constitutive is probably due to leakiness of the \textit{lac} promoter in \textit{E. coli} TG2. To ensure high expression of the \textit{maoA} gene, 100 \text{mM} isopropyl-thio-\textit{D}-galactopyranoside was included in the growth media.

\textbf{Enzyme purification and characterization.} ECAO was purified from cell-free extracts of strain TG2 (pBCP467), grown in Luria-Bertani medium, with a yield of 42\% (Table 1). The enzyme appeared (data not shown) to prefer aromatic amines (2-phenylethylamine, tyramine, tryptamine) to aliphatic amines (methylamine, putrescine), as has been found by others (Roh et al., 1994). Therefore, the enzyme is an aromatic amine oxidase.

The preparation after the phenyl-Sepharose purification step was homogeneous, as judged by SDS/PAGE and native gradient PAGE, which showed one protein band on each gel with relative molecular masses of 77 \text{kDa} and 174 \text{kDa}, respectively. Anion-exchange chromatography (MonoQ 5/5 column) of this preparation revealed, however, that it was not homogeneous (Fig. 2A, and (overlapping) peaks with different \textit{A}_{280}/\textit{A}_{180} ratios were obtained. Fractions 1-4, which corresponded to the main peaks, were collected as indicated. To verify whether the collected fractions contained stable entities, rechromatography was carried out. This showed that chromatographic (Fig. 2B) and spectral (Fig. 2C) behaviour was rather constant, which suggests that the chromatographic fractions contain distinct enzyme species. For this reason, and to distinguish them from fractions 1-4, the fractions collected after rechromatography (Fig. 2B) were named ECAO species A-D (the latter fraction was not collected because the amount of TPQ was too low). The enzyme species differ in chromatographic, enzymatic and spectral properties (Table 2; Fig. 2C). High activity appears to correspond to high \textit{A}_{280}/\textit{A}_{180} and TPQ/\textit{subunit} ratios. Since species B (termed ECAO-B hereafter) was optimal in these respects, it was used for further investigations. Its \textit{A}_{280} value was determined (van Iersel et al., 1985) to be 1.67. Based on this value and an estimated molecular mass of 160 \text{kDa}, the molar absorption coefficient of this enzyme species at 474 nm was calculated as 3100 \text{M}^{-1} \cdot \text{cm}^{-1}.

\textit{N}-terminal amino acid sequencing (five amino acids) of species A, B, and C revealed identical sequences that lacked the leader sequence. Therefore, the steps of protein synthesis and transport to the periplasm seem not to be responisible for the heterogeneity observed.

The absorption spectrum of ECAO-B is similar in shape to that of \textit{E. coli} K12 amine oxidase (Cooper et al., 1992) but has a higher \textit{A}_{280} value (Figs 2C and 3). The specific activity of our enzyme, determined under similar conditions as those for the \textit{E. coli} K12 enzyme (Cooper et al., 1992), was higher [8 \text{U/mg} protein versus 5.8 \text{U/mg} protein (at 5 mM 2-phenylethylamine)]. Substrate inhibition occurred, such that the optimal 2-phenylethylamine concentration for the assay was approximately 200 \text{\mu M}, which yielded a specific activity of 17.6 \text{U/mg ECAO-B}. Due to the sensitivity limit of the biological-oxygen monitor and the high affinity of the enzyme for 2-phenylethylamine, no reliable \textit{K}_{m} value could be determined for this substrate (the value should be below 100 \text{\mu M}).

\textbf{Titration of amine oxidase with phenylhydrazines.} The addition of phenylhydrazine and 4-nitrophenylhydrazine to ECAO-B induced a new absorbance maxima at 436 nm and 466 nm, respectively (Fig. 3), with a concomitant disappearance of the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ECAO species</th>
<th>Specific activity</th>
<th>TPQ/subunit</th>
<th>\textit{A}<em>{280}/\textit{A}</em>{180}</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>6.98</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
EPR spectroscopy. The EPR spectrum of ECAO-B showed the characteristic spectrum of Cu(II) in a tetragonal structure, with $g_x$, $g_y$, and $g_z$ values of 2.027, 2.094 and 2.299, respectively (Fig. 5). The Cu site seems to be homogeneous since the EPR spectrum could be interpreted if the presence of one Cu(II) species was assumed (data not shown).

**DISCUSSION**

To obtain large amounts of ECAO, we set out to clone and overexpress the gene that encoded this enzyme. The amino-acid-sequence-derived DNA probe, though degenerate, yielded unique signals that, after cloning of the corresponding fragments and verification by sequence analysis, appeared to contain the maoA gene, as judged from the following results. The deduced N-terminal amino acid sequence of the gene was identical to the N-terminal amino acid sequence of the enzyme. A database search with the complete DNA sequence revealed similarity with the *K. aerogenes* (Sugino et al., 1992) and the *E. coli* maoA genes (Azakami et al., 1994). However, as mentioned in Results, six amino acid substitutions, one deletion and one insertion were found with respect to the published *E. coli* maoA sequence. Whether these changes are relevant to the overall structure or catalytic function of the enzyme is doubtful since the enzyme is very well expressed and not truncated, and has a specific activity that is equal to, or even higher than, those reported previously (Cooper et al., 1992; Roh et al., 1994). It is also unlikely that a second maoA gene with sufficient sequence similarity to the one described in this report exists in *E. coli* since Southern blot analysis with the 0.8-kb HindIII fragment revealed only one copy of the gene (data not shown). SDS/PAGE of cell-free extract from *E. coli* (pBCP467) showed a band that migrated with the purified authentic enzyme. After purification, the enzyme showed the typical physicochemical and enzymatic features of a copper-quinoprotein amine oxidase.

When the pUC18-based plasmid pBCP467, containing the maoA gene, was used to transform *E. coli* TG2 cells, expression of the gene appeared to be constitutive and high, even in the absence of isopropyl-thio-β-D-galactopyranoside. By reversal of the insert, it was shown that the expression was directed by the lac promoter. High expression of a cloned gene under the direction of the lac promoter in *E. coli* TG2 cells in the absence of isopropyl-thio-β-D-galactopyranoside has been reported before (Benen et al., 1989).

Our sequence data demonstrate that in *E. coli* W3350 there is a sequence, upstream of the maoA gene, with very high similarity to the reported maoC gene of *K. aerogenes* (Sugino et al., 1992). This is in contrast with results obtained by Azakami et al. (1994) who reported that there is no maoC gene present upstream of the maoA gene in the Kohara clone SF1 (Kohara et al., 1987), from which they obtained the maoA gene, but rather a gene that encodes another amine oxidase. The restriction map of the mao operon and its upstream and downstream regions, as obtained for our strain, is identical to the Kohara map at 31.1 min of the *E. coli* chromosome, as compiled by Rudd (1992) in the EcoSeq library. It is different from the one reported by Azakami et al. (1994). Therefore we conclude that we have cloned the maoA gene of *E. coli* and that it is preceded by the maoC gene, as in *K. aerogenes*. Despite the deviation from the published *E. coli* map and genetic organization, the sequence data of the maoA gene, as published by Azakami et al. (1994), are nearly identical to the sequence data of the *E. coli* maoA gene obtained here.

The isolated preparations (Fig. 2B, species B) appeared to consist of the expected ECAO for two reasons. Firstly, they showed the characteristics of copper-quinone amine oxidases with respect to the size of the subunits, the absorption spectra...
of underivatized and hydrazine-derivatized enzyme (Fig. 3), the EPR spectrum (Fig. 5), and the presence of TPQ and the consensus sequence that surrounds it (Gly-Asn-TPQ-Asp), as shown with electrospray mass spectrometry and $^1$H-NMR spectroscopy (Steinebach et al., 1995). Secondly, compared with authentic enzyme, they showed similar substrate specificities, chromatographic and electrophoretic behaviours, and N-terminal amino acid sequences.

The preparations were homogeneous with respect to their subunit composition (SDS/PAGE and native gradient PAGE showed only one band) and N-terminal amino acid sequence (only one dominant amino acid was observed in each of the six sequencing steps). Homogeneity also applied to the Cu(I) ions in the protein because the EPR spectrum (Fig. 5) could be fitted assuming the presence of one single type of Cu(I). However, slight heterogeneity was observed upon homogeneous PAGE of native enzyme, which revealed one diffuse band. High-resolution anion-exchange chromatography also indicated that the preparations were heterogeneous (Fig. 2 A).

Rechromatography of the separately collected fractions under the same conditions showed their persistent chromatographic behaviour and $A_{474}/A_{280}$ ratio (Fig. 2 B), which suggests that different enzyme species were present in the preparations. This proposal was confirmed when the properties of the nearly homogeneous fractions, as judged from their peak symmetry (Fig. 2 B), were compared (Table 2), which showed differences in specific activity, hydrazine-titratable TPQ (Fig. 4) and peak ratios in the absorption spectrum, as reflected by the $A_{474}/A_{280}$ value. Thus the preparation must consist of at least four distinct enzyme species, the TPQ content of which (as estimated from the $A_{474}/A_{280}$ ratio and the amount of hydrazine required for complete inhibition) correlates with the specific activity. The results suggest that proper expression of the gene (homogeneity in protein size and N-terminal amino acids) but improper processing of the precursor enzyme to holoenzyme occurred, as illustrated by the different TPQ contents of the ECAO species. Whether the organism, the overexpression system or the growth conditions used for the recombinant strain were responsible for the suboptimal synthesis of functional TPQ is unknown.

The specific activity of another overexpressed E. coli amine oxidase (Roh et al., 1994) was much lower than that of authentic enzyme. The specific activity of our preparation is the highest of the three investigated species deviate from 1, 0.5 indicate that the situation is more complex than supposed.

Since enzyme activity seems to correlate with the $A_{474}/A_{280}$ ratio, it could be reasoned that a precursor in the biosynthesis of TPQ or a non-reactive form of TPQ in the active site, has an absorption band at 340 nm. In the simplest situation, three enzyme species can be imagined: one that contains two TPQ/enzyme molecule; one that contains one TPQ and one product that absorbs at 340 nm; and one that contains no TPQ and two products that absorb at 340 nm. The finding that at least four enzyme species are present and that the TPQ/subunit ratios of the three investigated species deviate from 1, 0.5 and 0, indicate that the situation is more complex than supposed.

The imperfect conversion of a particular tyrosine in the precursor enzyme to Tyr, catalyzed by Fe(III), does not, since suboptimal values of the Tyr/subunit ratio (in the range 0.15–0.30) are found (Ehrenberg and Reichard, 1972).

The authors are grateful to Paola Loreti, who contributed to the isolation of authentic enzyme, and the Dutch Foundation for Scientific Research (NWO) for providing financial support (to J. B.) in the framework of NWO/stimulans.

### Table 3. TPQ/subunit ratios and molar absorption coefficients of TPQ-phenylhydrazine adducts in amine oxidases.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phenylnhydroazine adduct</th>
<th>$M^{-1} \cdot \text{cm}^{-1}$</th>
<th>TPQ/subunit ratio</th>
<th>References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BSAO</td>
<td>41 500</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>Morpurgo et al., 1992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSAO</td>
<td>32 400</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>Janes et al., 1991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAO</td>
<td>31 700</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>Steinebach et al., 1995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECAO species B</td>
<td>33 200</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>this work</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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REFERENCES