

Advances in

MICROBIAL PHYSIOLOGY

Edited by
A. H. ROSE
and
J. F. WILKINSON

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Edited by

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Contents

Contributors to Volume 2	v
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The Bacterial Photosynthetic Apparatus. JUNE LASCELLES

I. An Introduction to the Photosynthetic Bacteria and their Pigments	1
A. The Photosynthetic Pigments	3
B. Environmental Effects on Pigment Synthesis	6
II. The Structure and Location of Chromatophore Material	8
A. Discovery and Definition of Chromatophores	8
B. Electron Microscopy of Cells	8
C. Chromatophore Material and Cell Membrane	12
D. Chlorophyll and Membrane Content	14
E. Peripheral and Internal Membrane as Sites for Pigments	16
F. The Vesicles of the Green Bacteria	18
G. Conclusions	19
III. Isolation and Composition of Purified Chromatophores	19
A. Isolation Procedures	19
B. Composition	21
C. Fractionation of Chromatophores	24
D. Immunological Reactivity	26
IV. Formation of the Photosynthetic Apparatus	27
A. Differences between Members of the Athiorhodaceae Grown Photosynthetically and Aerobically	27
B. Adaptive Synthesis of the Photosynthetic Apparatus	29
C. Chlorophyll Synthesis	31
D. Regulation of Chlorophyll Synthesis	34
References	39

The Plasmids of *Staphylococcus aureus* and their Relation to Other Extrachromosomal Elements in Bacteria. M. H. RICHMOND

I. Introduction	43
A. Historical	43
B. Curing	44
C. Stability	45
D. The Plasmid Location of Penicillinase Genes	48

II. Types of Staphylococcal Plasmid	51
A. Plasmid-Borne Markers	51
B. Classification of Plasmids	55
C. Distribution and Abundance of Plasmid Types	58
D. Plasmid Nomenclature	59
III. Transduction of Plasmids	60
A. Preparation of Transducing Phage	60
B. Transductants Formed in Negative Recipients	60
C. Transductants Formed in Plasmid-Carrying Recipients	61
D. Compatibility	71
E. The Role of Attachment in Recombination and Diploid Formation	75
F. Chromosomal Attachment of Plasmid Markers	78
G. The Plasmid Map	80
H. Size of the Penicillinase Plasmids	83
IV. A Comparison of Penicillinase Plasmids with Other Extra-chromosomal Elements in Bacteria	84
V. Acknowledgements	86
References	87

The "Life Cycle" of Bacterial Ribosomes. WILLIAM S. KELLEY and MOSELIO SCHAECHTER

I. Introduction	89
A. Problems Particular to the Study of a Ribosomal "Life Cycle"	90
B. Scope of the Review	91
C. Studies of Ribosome Structure and Composition	91
D. Cellular Localization of Bacterial Ribosomes	97
II. The Role of Ribosomes in the Control of RNA Synthesis	99
III. The Production of Ribosomal RNA	101
IV. The Production of Ribosomal Proteins	107
V. The Assembly of Ribosomal Subunits	112
A. Studies on Cells in Balanced Growth	112
B. Studies of Metabolically Inhibited Cells	115
C. <i>In Vitro</i> Experiments on Ribosome Assembly	124
D. Conclusions	126
VI. The Formation of Functional Ribosomes	126
VII. The Participation of Ribosomes in Protein Synthesis	131
VIII. The Release of Ribosomes from Messenger RNA	133
IX. Conclusions	136
X. Acknowledgements	137
References	137

Budding of Yeast Cells, Their Scars and Ageing. K. BERAN

I. Introduction	143
II. Composition and Structure of the Cell Wall of Yeast	145
A. Macromolecular Wall Components	145
B. Structure of the Wall	147
III. Mechanism of the Primulin-Induced Fluorescence	148
IV. Budding of Yeast Cells and its Mechanism	148
A. Budding of Yeast Cells as Observed in the Optical and Electron Microscopes	148
B. Examination of Buds and Scars Using the Fluorescence Microscope	149
C. Mechanism of Budding	154
D. Some Further Perspectives	161
V. Ageing of Cells and Age Distribution in a Population	162
A. Maximum Reproductive Capacity of an Individual Cell	162
B. Age Distribution in a Population	164
References	169

The Repair of Damaged DNA in Irradiated Bacteria.**B. E. B. MOSELEY**

I. Introduction	173
II. Evidence that DNA is an Important Target in Radiation Inactivation	174
III. Radiation-Induced Chemical and Physical Changes in DNA	176
A. Changes in DNA Caused by Ultraviolet Irradiation	176
B. Changes in DNA Caused by Ionizing Irradiation	181
IV. The Repair of Damaged DNA	183
A. Photoreactivation	183
B. Dark Repair	187
V. Summary	191
References	192

Author Index	195
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Subject Index	203
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The Bacterial Photosynthetic Apparatus

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I. An Introduction to the Photosynthetic Bacteria and their Pigments .	1
A. The Photosynthetic Pigments	3
B. Environmental Effects on Pigment Synthesis	6
II. The Structure and Location of Chromatophore Material	8
A. Discovery and Definition of Chromatophores	8
B. Electron Microscopy of Cells	8
C. Chromatophore Material and Cell Membrane	12
D. Chlorophyll and Membrane Content	14
E. Peripheral and Internal Membrane as Sites for Pigments	16
F. The Vesicles of the Green Bacteria	18
G. Conclusions	19
III. Isolation and Composition of Purified Chromatophores	19
A. Isolation Procedures	19
B. Composition	21
C. Fractionation of Chromatophores	24
D. Immunological Reactivity	26
IV. Formation of the Photosynthetic Apparatus	27
A. Differences between Members of the Athiorhodaceae Grown Photosynthetically and Aerobically	27
B. Adaptive Synthesis of the Photosynthetic Apparatus	29
C. Chlorophyll Synthesis	31
D. Regulation of Chlorophyll Synthesis	34
References	39

1. An Introduction to the Photosynthetic Bacteria and their Pigments

The unique physiological characteristic of the photosynthetic bacteria is their ability to grow anaerobically in the light, a property conferred upon them by their photosynthetic pigment system. Unlike green plant photosynthesis oxygen is not evolved in the bacterial process, and, connected with this, they require an exogenous reductant (Stanier, 1961; van Niel, 1962; Vernon, 1964; Gest, 1966). The different genera of photosynthetic bacteria characteristically use either reduced inorganic sulphur compounds, hydrogen, or organic substrates as reductant; they

TABLE 1. Some Characteristics of Photosynthetic Bacteria

Group	Representative members	Photosynthetic growth supported by		Ability to grow aerobically (dark)	Major form of chlorophyll
		Sulphur compounds + CO ₂	Organic acids alone		
Green sulphur-bacteria	<i>Chlorobium</i> spp.	Yes	No	No	Chlorobium chlorophyll 660 or 650
	<i>Chloropseudomonas ethylicum</i>				
Thiorhodaceae Athiorhodaceae	<i>Chromatium</i> spp.	Yes	Yes	No	Bacteriochlorophyll <i>a</i>
	<i>Rhodopseudomonas</i> spp.	No	Yes	Yes	Bacteriochlorophyll <i>a</i> or <i>b</i> ^a
	<i>Rhodospirillum</i> spp.			(some species)	

^a Bacteriochlorophyll *b* is found in a new species, *Rps. viridis* (Eimhjellen *et al.*, 1963; Drews and Giesbrecht, 1965, 1966).

also vary with respect to their ability to use carbon dioxide as sole carbon source (Table 1).

The overall process of bacterial photosynthesis may be represented by Fig. 1. There is strong experimental evidence for this scheme as a general outline though the precise sequence of events is yet to be established (Vernon and Ke, 1966; Gest, 1966). The scheme in Fig. 1 fits observations made largely with *Rhodospirillum rubrum*, and variations in detail are likely in other organisms.

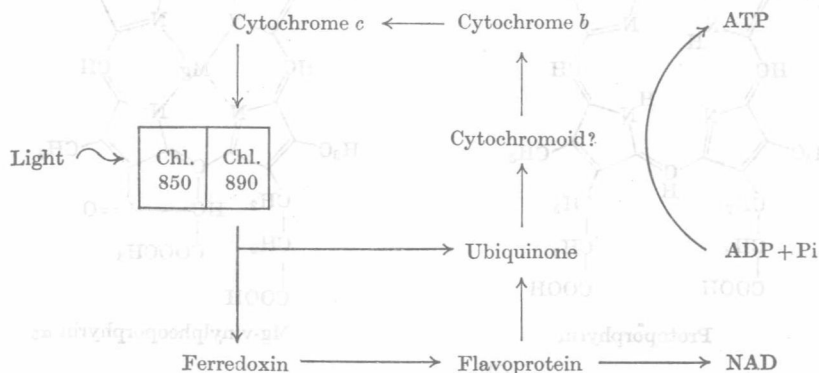


FIG. 1. Possible pathway of light-induced electron flow in *Rhodospirillum rubrum*.

It has been well established that particulate preparations from the photosynthetic bacteria catalyse anaerobically: (1) light-dependent synthesis of ATP in the absence of an external reducing agent (photophosphorylation), and (2) light-dependent formation of reduced nicotinamide nucleotides in the presence of weak reductants such as succinate or certain reduced dyes (photoreduction). By analogy with the photosynthetic apparatus of the plant chloroplast the bacterial system might be expected to be associated with some type of organized structure and these structures are the concern of this review.*

A. THE PHOTOSYNTHETIC PIGMENTS

1. Chemistry

In common with other photosynthetic forms of life the bacteria have both carotenoids and chlorophylls. The variety of carotenoids among the

* The term chromatophore will be used for the pigmented particles isolated from cell-free extracts. When referring to the putative photosynthetic structure in intact cells the less precise terms "chromatophore material" or "photosynthetic apparatus" will be used.

different species is great (Jensen, 1963; Schmidt *et al.*, 1965). Their probable function is to harvest light at wavelengths which are not absorbed by chlorophyll and also to protect cells from photodynamic oxidation reactions (Stanier, 1960; Dworkin, 1958).

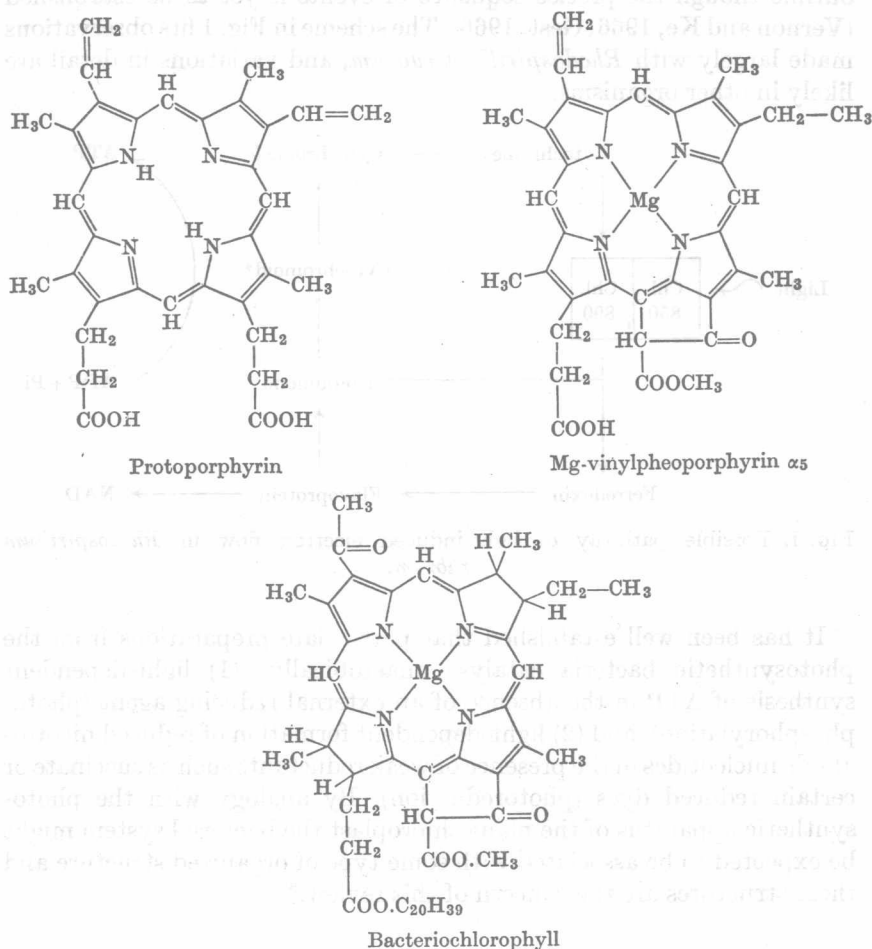


FIG. 2. Structures of protoporphyrin, Mg-vinylpheoporphyrin a_5 (protochlorophyllide a) and bacteriochlorophyll.

So far, three types of chlorophyll have been recognized in photosynthetic bacteria (Fig. 2) of which bacteriochlorophyll a is the most widely distributed (Jensen *et al.*, 1964; Allen, 1966). Chlorobium chlorophylls 650 and 660, a nomenclature based on their red absorption maxima in ether, are unique to the green sulphur-bacteria (Holt, 1966). Significant

differences in their structure from that of bacteriochlorophyll *a* are: (a) the Chlorobium pigments have a dihydro- rather than a tetrahydroporphyrin ring structure; consequently, the red maxima are shifted towards the blue; (b) they lack the $-\text{COOCH}_3$ grouping on the cyclopentanone ring; (c) they are esterified with farnesol rather than with phytol; (d) the 660 pigment has an alkyl substituent on the δ -methene carbon atom of the porphyrin ring.

A recent development is the recognition of bacteriochlorophyll *b* in a new species, *Rhodospseudomonas viridis* (Eimhjellen *et al.*, 1963; Drews and Giesbrecht, 1965, 1966). This pigment is characterized by a red maximum in acetone at 795 m μ , but its structure is yet to be determined. Its discovery should alert workers to careful scrutiny of new isolates for yet more forms of chlorophyll.

2. Spectrum of Chlorophylls *in vivo*: Reaction-Centre Chlorophyll

The early spectroscopic observations of Wassink and of French (see Rabinowitch, 1951) indicated that the bacterial chlorophylls were bound

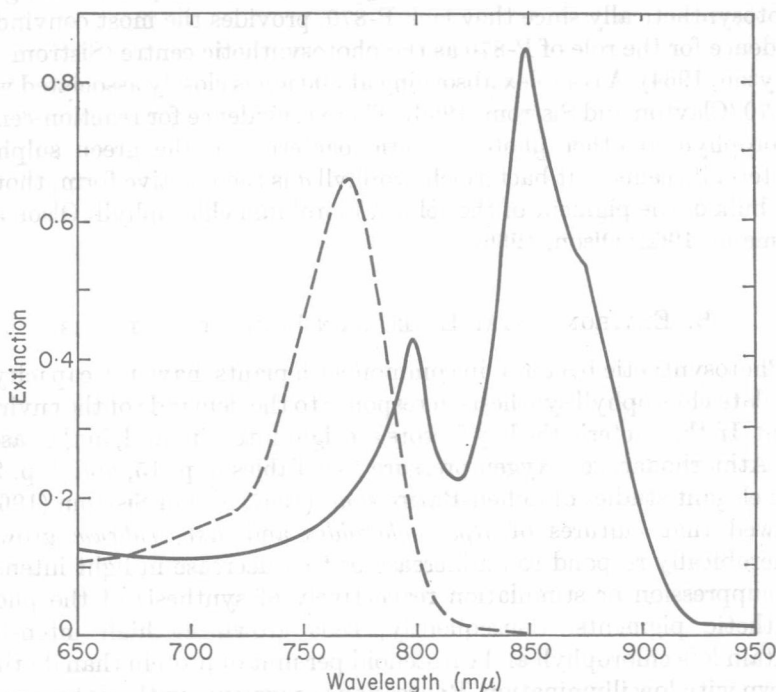


FIG. 3. Spectrum of bacteriochlorophyll from *Rhodospseudomonas spheroides* *in vivo* (—) and in methanol (---).

in vivo in the form of macromolecular complexes. The red absorption maxima of all forms of chlorophyll found so far in bacteria exhibit a marked shift of at least 100 $m\mu$ towards the blue when extracted into organic solvents. Such a change can be reasonably attributed to a release of the pigment from a bound form. The *in vivo* spectra also show several maxima in the red whereas the extracted pigment shows only one red peak (Olson and Stanton, 1966; Fig. 3). The multiple peaks in the *in vivo* spectra suggest that chlorophyll molecules are in association with different complexes, and the physiological significance of these is now being clarified (Clayton, 1966). The work with preparations from *Rhodospseudomonas spheroides* suggests that the bulk of the chlorophyll, associated with a complex absorbing at 850 $m\mu$ (P-850), functions merely to harvest light. The complex absorbing at 870 $m\mu$ (P-870) accounts for only about 5% of the total pigment but appears to represent the photosynthetic reaction centre. This pigment, but not P-850, is bleached (i.e. oxidized) reversibly upon illumination; this phenomenon is shown most clearly in preparations which have been treated by methods which preferentially destroy P-850 (Clayton, 1963, 1966). The isolation of mutant strains, which have the normal complement of P-850 yet cannot grow photosynthetically since they lack P-870, provides the most convincing evidence for the role of P-870 as the photosynthetic centre (Sistrom and Clayton, 1964). A complex absorbing at 800 $m\mu$ is closely associated with P-870 (Clayton and Sistrom, 1966). There is evidence for reaction-centre chlorophyll in other photosynthetic bacteria. In the green sulphur-bacteria it seems that bacteriochlorophyll *a* is the reactive form, though the bulk of the pigment of the cell is Chlorobium chlorophyll (Olson and Romano, 1962; Olson, 1966).

B. ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS ON PIGMENT SYNTHESIS

Photosynthetic bacteria, in common with plants, have the capacity to regulate chlorophyll synthesis in response to the demands of the environment. In the bacteria the key factors are light intensity and, in the case of the Athiorhodaceae, oxygen pressure (see Tables 3, p. 15, and 6, p. 28). The elegant studies of Cohen-Bazire *et al.* (1957) and of Sistrom (1962b) showed that cultures of *Rps. spheroides* and *Rsp. rubrum* growing anaerobically respond to an increase or to a decrease in light intensity by suppression or stimulation respectively of synthesis of the photosynthetic pigments. Consequently, cells grown at high intensities contain less chlorophyll and carotenoid per unit of protein than do those grown with low illumination. Repression of pigment synthesis by oxygen was also observed when this gas was introduced into cultures growing under continuous illumination. Oxygen repression is critically dependent

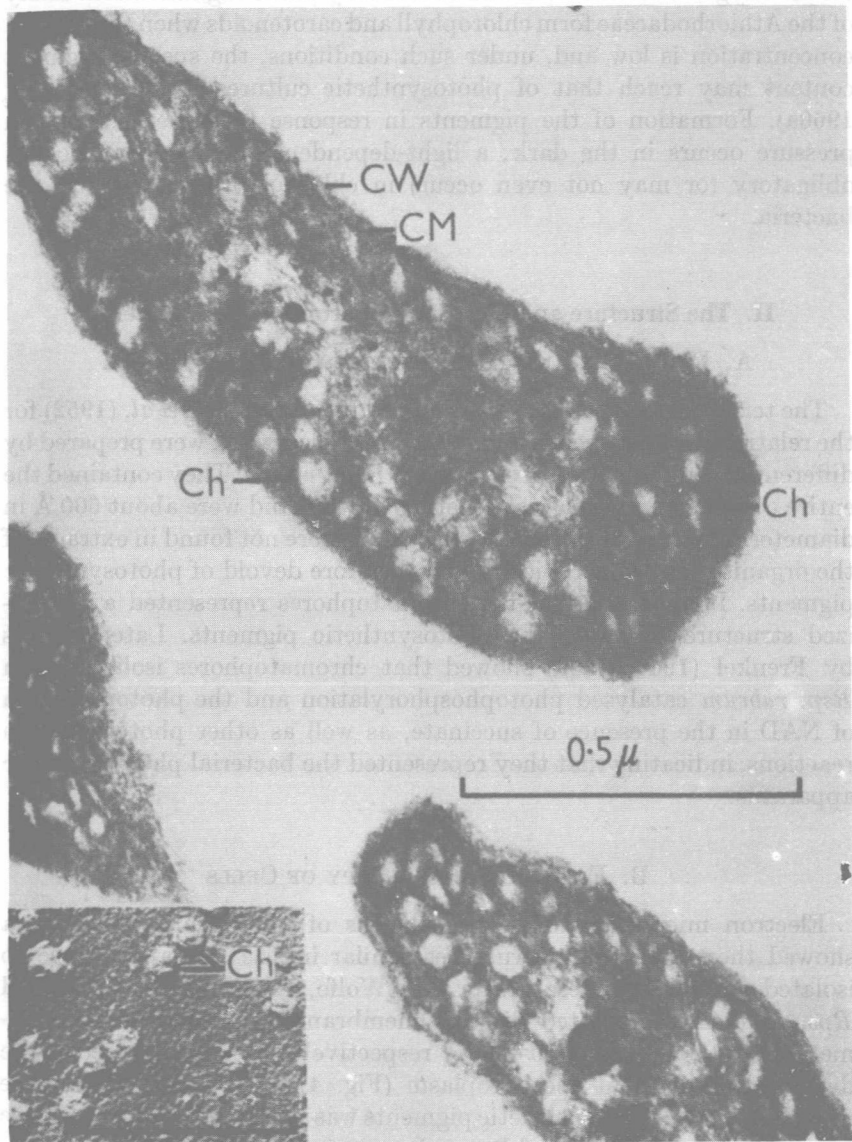


FIG. 4. Electron micrograph of section of photosynthetically grown *Rhodospirillum rubrum* (Vatter and Wolfe, 1958). CW = cell wall; CM = cytoplasmic membrane; Ch = chromatophore. Inset: isolated chromatophores; the line indicates 1 μ. Reproduced by kind permission of the authors and the editors of the *Journal of Bacteriology*.

on the oxygen concentration and occurs only under high aeration. Many of the Athiorhodaceae form chlorophyll and carotenoids when the oxygen concentration is low and, under such conditions, the specific pigment content may reach that of photosynthetic cultures (Lascelles, 1959; 1960a). Formation of the pigments in response to decreased oxygen pressure occurs in the dark; a light-dependent step is therefore not obligatory (or may not even occur) in chlorophyll synthesis by the bacteria.

II. The Structure and Location of Chromatophore Material

A. DISCOVERY AND DEFINITION OF CHROMATOPHORES

The term "chromatophore" was coined by Schachman *et al.* (1952) for the relatively homogeneous, pigmented particles which were prepared by differential centrifugation of extracts of *Rsp. rubrum*. They contained the entire complement of photosynthetic pigments and were about 600 Å in diameter. Particles of this size (about 190S) were not found in extracts of the organism grown aerobically and therefore devoid of photosynthetic pigments. It appeared that the chromatophores represented a specialized structure to house the photosynthetic pigments. Later studies by Frenkel (1956, 1958) showed that chromatophores isolated from *Rsp. rubrum* catalysed photophosphorylation and the photoreduction of NAD in the presence of succinate, as well as other photoreduction reactions, indicating that they represented the bacterial photosynthetic apparatus.

B. ELECTRON MICROSCOPY OF CELLS

Electron microscopy of sectioned cells of photosynthetic bacteria showed them to contain structures similar in size and appearance to isolated chromatophores (Vatter and Wolfe, 1958). *Rsp. rubrum* and *Rps. spheroides* exhibited discrete membrane-bound vesicles (in diameter 500–1000 Å and 400–800 Å respectively) which appeared to be dispersed throughout the cytoplasm (Fig. 4). The association of the vesicles with the photosynthetic pigments was suggested by their absence from non-pigmented cells of *Rsp. rubrum* grown aerobically. It has since been firmly established with many organisms that the number and extent of the vesicular structures is directly related to the pigment content of the cells (Cohen-Bazire and Kunisawa, 1963; Drews and Giesbrecht, 1965; Gibbs *et al.*, 1965; Holt and Marr, 1965c; Holt *et al.*, 1966b).

The vesicular structures found in *Rsp. rubrum* are not typical of all photosynthetic bacteria (Table 2). Some exhibit stacks of paired

TABLE 2. Appearance of Chromatophore Material in Electron Micrographs of Cell Sections

Organism	Appearance of structure	Reference
<i>Chlorobium thiosulphatophilum</i>	Oblong vesicles arranged around	1
<i>Chlorobium limicola</i>	periphery, immediately under the	1
<i>Chloropseudomonas ethylicum</i>	cytoplasmic membrane; 1000–1500 Å long, 300–400 Å wide	2
<i>Chromatium</i> strain D	Membrane-bound vesicles throughout	3
<i>Chromatium okenii</i>	cytoplasm	3
<i>Thiospirillum jensenii</i>		3
<i>Thiopedia</i> sp.		3
<i>Thiocapsa</i> sp.	Vesicles and large lamellar structure	3
<i>Rhodospirillum rubrum</i>	Membrane-bound vesicles throughout	3, 4, 5
<i>Rhodopseudomonas spheroides</i>	the cytoplasm, 400–1000 Å diameter	4, 6
<i>Rhodospirillum molischianum</i>	Discrete lamellar structures at periphery	7, 8, 9
<i>Rhodospirillum fulvum</i>		10
<i>Rhodospirillum photometricum</i>		10
<i>Rhodopseudomonas palustris</i>	Extensive lamellar structure disposed	10
<i>Rhodopseudomonas viridis</i>	around periphery	11
<i>Rhodomicrobium vannielii</i>		12

References: (1) Cohen-Bazire *et al.* (1964); (2) Holt *et al.* (1966a); (3) Cohen-Bazire (1963); (4) Vatter and Wolfe (1958); (5) Hickman and Frenkel (1959, 1965b); (6) Drews and Giesbrecht (1963); (7) Giesbrecht and Drews (1962); (8) Gibbs *et al.* (1965); (9) Hickman and Frenkel (1965a); (10) Cohen-Bazire and Sistrom (1966); (11) Drews and Giesbrecht, 1965; Giesbrecht and Drews, 1966; (12) Vatter *et al.* (1959).

lamellae, similar to the structures found in blue-green algae, and arranged variously according to the organism. In *Rhodomicrobium vannielii*, for instance, the lamellae are arranged concentrically around the periphery of the cell (Vatter *et al.*, 1959) whereas in *Rhodospirillum molischianum* (Fig. 5) the lamellae appear as discrete discs at intervals around the periphery (Drews, 1960). Perhaps the most remarkable structures are the large oblong vesicles found in the green sulphur-bacteria (Fig. 6; Cohen Bazire *et al.*, 1964; Holt *et al.*, 1966a). These lie immediately under the peripheral membrane.

Conclusive proof that these various structures are the site of the photosynthetic pigments is difficult to obtain in the absence of techniques for locating the pigments in cell sections. Indirect evidence has been provided in many cases by observing a correlation between the number and extent of the structures with the pigment content of the cells. Also, the appearance of pigmented fractions isolated from disrupted cells has been shown with some organisms to resemble the structures found in cell sections

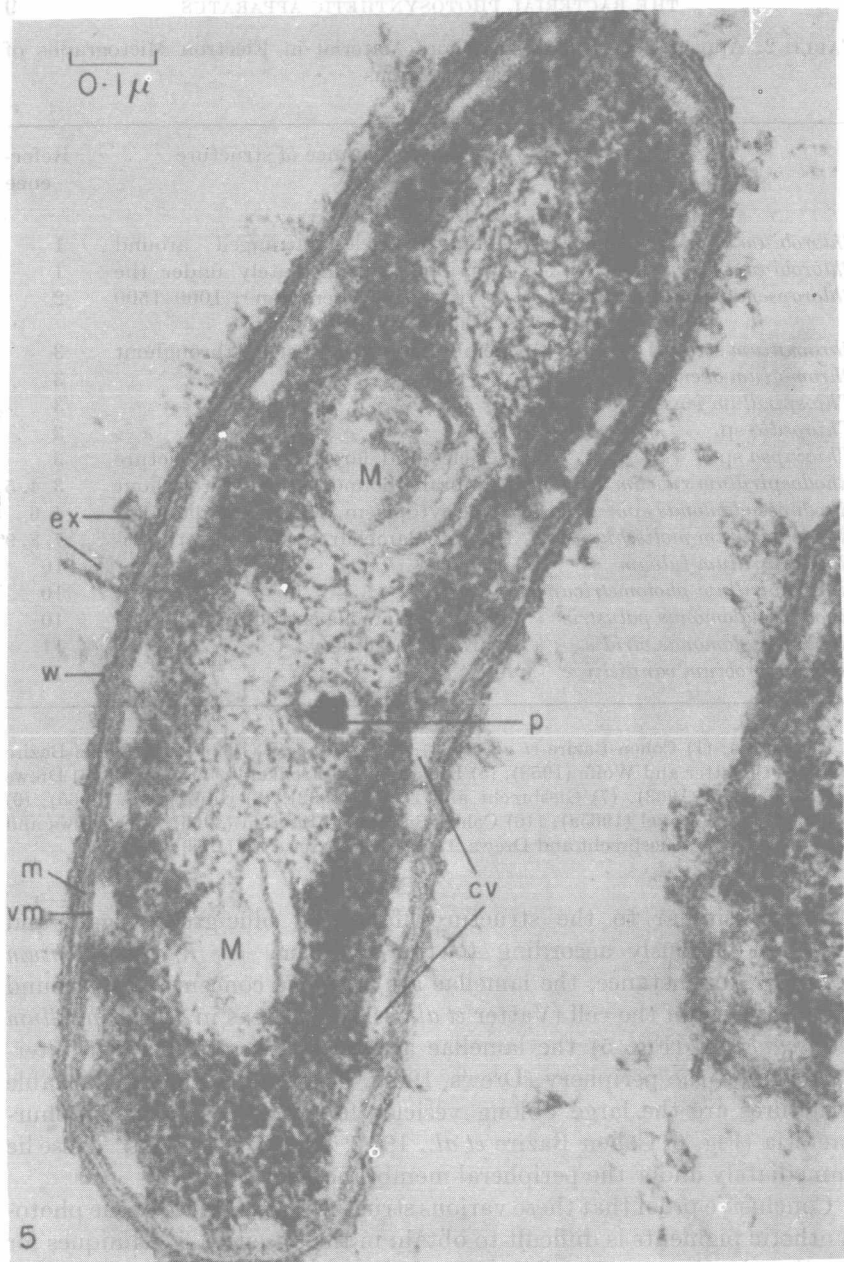


FIG. 5. Electron micrograph of a section of *Chlorobium thiosulphatophilum* showing the complex cell wall (w) with its rod-shaped extensions (ex), the cell membrane (m) and ellipsoidal vesicles (cv) adjacent to but distinct from the peripheral membrane (vm). Two large mesosomal elements (M) and a granule of polymetaphosphate (p) are also visible. From Cohen-Bazire *et al.* (1964). Reproduced by kind permission of the authors, and the editors of the *Journal of Cell Biology*.