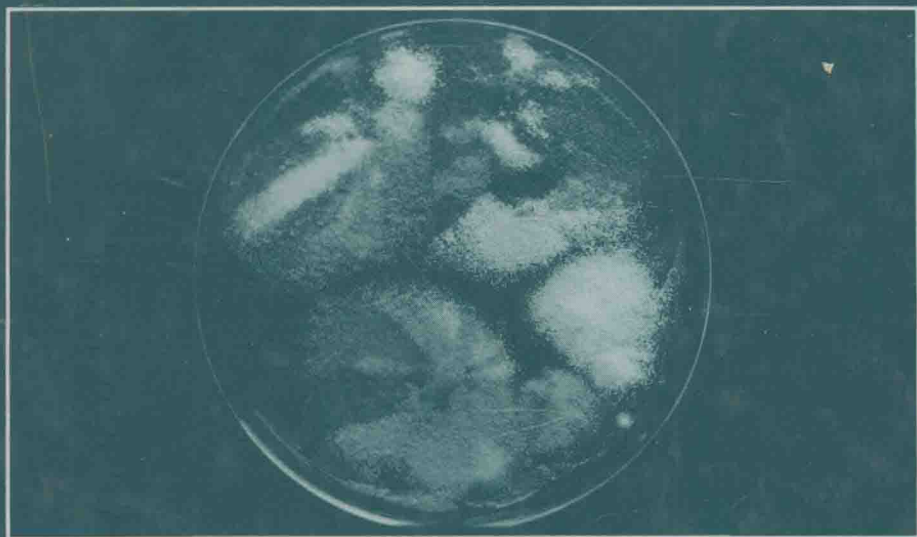

BIOTECHNOLOGY HANDBOOKS • 7

Series Editors: Tony Atkinson and Roger F. Sherwood



Aspergillus

Edited by J. E. Smith

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J. E. Smith

*University of Strathclyde
Glasgow, Scotland*

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Aspergillus

BIOTECHNOLOGY HANDBOOKS

Series Editors: Tony Atkinson and Roger F. Sherwood

*PHLS Centre for Applied Microbiology and Research
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Preface

The genus *Aspergillus* has a worldwide distribution and is one of the most common of all groups of fungi. They are possibly the greatest contaminants of natural and man-made organic products, and a few species can cause infections in man and animals. The aspergilli are also one of the most important mycotoxin-producing groups of fungi when growing as contaminants of cereals, oil seeds, and other foods. Not all aspergilli are viewed as troublesome contaminants, however, as several species have had their metabolic capabilities harnessed for commercial use.

The aspergilli have long been associated in the Far East with the koji stage of several food fermentations, particularly soy sauce and miso, and subsequently as a source of useful enzymes. The ability of these fungi to produce several organic acids, especially citric acid, has created major industrial complexes worldwide. Traditional methods of strain development have been extensively studied with the industrial strains, while more recently, recombinant DNA technology has been applied to the aspergilli with emphasis on heterologous protein production.

In compiling this book, I have been fortunate to have the full enthusiastic involvement of the authors, and to them I extend my very grateful thanks for mostly being on time and for producing such readable and authoritative chapters.

Collectively, we hope that our efforts will strengthen the scientific understanding of this intriguing group of filamentous fungi and further their use in the field of biotechnology.

John Smith

Glasgow, Scotland

Contents

Chapter 1

Taxonomy—Current Concepts of *Aspergillus* Systematics 1

Robert A. Samson

1. Introduction	1
2. Criteria for Classification and Identification	2
2.1. Morphology	2
2.2. Other Methods for Classification and Identification	3
3. Nomenclature	5
3.1. Anamorph–Teleomorph Names	5
3.2. Conservation and Protection of Names	6
4. Current Taxonomic Scheme	7
4.1. Subgenus <i>Aspergillus</i>	7
4.2. Subgenus <i>Fumigati</i> Gams <i>et al.</i>	8
4.3. Subgenus <i>Ornati</i> Gams <i>et al.</i> (= <i>A. ornatus</i> group Raper & Fennell)	9
4.4. Subgenus <i>Clavati</i> Gams <i>et al.</i>	10
4.5. Subgenus <i>Nidulantes</i>	10
4.6. Subgenus <i>Circumdati</i> Gams <i>et al.</i>	13
4.7. Subgenus <i>Stilbothamnium</i> (Hennings) Samson & Seifert	18
References	18

Chapter 2

Physiology of *Aspergillus* 23

Z. Kozakiewicz and D. Smith

1. Introduction	23
2. Water Availability (a_w)	23

2.1. Effect of a_w on Germination and Sporulation	25
3. Temperature	26
3.1. Low Temperature	27
3.2. Freezing Injury	27
3.3. Tolerance to Freezing	29
4. pH	33
5. Gas Composition	34
6. Mycotoxin Production	34
6.1. Fungal Factors	35
6.2. Environmental Factors	35
7. Summary	37
References	38

Chapter 3

Improvement of Industrial *Aspergillus* Fungi 41

Shigeomi Ushijima

1. Breeding by Protoplast Fusion of Koji Mold, <i>Aspergillus sojae</i>	41
1.1. Formation of Protoplasts	42
1.2. Protoplast Fusion	44
1.3. Isolation of Heterozygous Diploids	44
1.4. Properties of the Fused Green Strain	45
2. Improvement of Enzyme Productivities through Mutation or Haploidization of Heterozygous Diploids Obtained by Protoplast Fusion of <i>Aspergillus sojae</i>	46
2.1. Mutation of Heterozygous Diploids	47
2.2. Haploidization of Heterozygous Diploids	47
2.3. Enzyme Productivities of Haploidized Strains	49
2.4. Estimation of DNA Content	51
3. Interspecific Protoplast Fusion between <i>Aspergillus oryzae</i> and <i>Aspergillus sojae</i>	53
3.1. Protoplast Fusion	54
3.2. Isolation of Heterozygous Diploids	54
3.3. Phenotypes of Heterozygous Diploids	54
3.4. Haploidization of Fusants	54
3.5. Conidia DNA Content	55
3.6. Electrophoretic Discrimination of Alkaline Proteinase	55
3.7. Phenotypes of Haploidized Strains	57

3.8. Hydrolyzing-Enzyme Productivities of the Fusants and the Haploidized Segregants	58
4. Interspecific Electrofusion between Protoplasts of <i>Aspergillus oryzae</i> and <i>Aspergillus sojae</i>	59
4.1. Phenotypic Characters of Fusants and Haploidized Segregants	60
5. Interspecific Hybridization of <i>Aspergillus awamori</i> and <i>Aspergillus oryzae</i> by Protoplast Fusion	62
6. Intrasppecific Protoplast Fusion of <i>Aspergillus niger</i>	62
References	62

Chapter 4

Molecular Genetics and Expression of Foreign Proteins in the Genus <i>Aspergillus</i>	65
--	-----------

J. R. Kinghorn and S. E. Unkles

1. Introduction	65
2. Methodology	66
2.1. Isolation of <i>Aspergillus</i> Genes	66
2.2. Transformation of the Model Fungus <i>Aspergillus nidulans</i>	68
2.3. Transformation of Other Aspergilli	74
2.4. Development of Systems to Analyze Gene Expression ..	76
2.5. Electrophoretic Karyotypes of Aspergilli	77
2.6. Classification and Differentiation of Species and Strains	79
3. Expression of Foreign Proteins	80
3.1. Calf Chymosin	82
3.2. Human Interferon α -2	86
3.3. Human Tissue Plasminogen Activator	86
3.4. Hen Egg White Lysozyme	87
3.5. Porcine Pancreatic Phospholipase A ₂	88
3.6. Cattle Tick Cell-Surface Glycoprotein	89
3.7. Human Interleukin-6	89
3.8. Human Lactoferrin	90
3.9. Factors That Affect Heterologous Expression	91
References	93

Chapter 5

Solid-State Fermentations of the Genus *Aspergillus* 101

P. Gervais and M. Bensoussan

1. Introduction	101
2. Fungal Growth Characteristics in a Solid-State Medium	103
2.1. Radial Extension Rate and Hyphal Growth Rate	104
2.2. Branching	104
2.3. Biomass	105
2.4. Differentiation and Metabolite Production	105
3. Dynamic and Thermodynamic Properties of a Solid-State Medium	106
3.1. Water Properties	106
3.2. Heat and Mass Transfer Properties in a Solid-State Medium	112
4. Influence of Physicochemical Parameters of the Medium in Solid-State Fermentation	114
4.1. Influence of Water Properties of Solid Culture Medium on Microbial Physiology	114
4.2. Other Physicochemical Parameters	121
5. <i>Aspergillus</i> Products	124
5.1. Fermented Foods and Feeds	124
5.2. Metabolites	128
5.3. Enzymes	130
5.4. Perspectives	134
References	134

Chapter 6

Liquid Fermentation Systems and Product Recovery of *Aspergillus* 141

L. M. Harvey and B. McNeil

1. Introduction	141
2. Submerged Cultivation	142
2.1. Morphology	142
2.2. Shear Effects	144
3. Current Technology	144
3.1. Stirred Tank Reactors	144

3.2. Airlift Bioreactors	146
3.3. Modes of Operation of Fermentation Processes	146
4. Citric Acid Production	150
4.1. Introduction	150
4.2. Organisms	150
4.3. Production Processes	150
4.4. Conclusions	154
5. Enzyme Production	154
5.1. Introduction	154
5.2. Production Processes	156
5.3. Glucoamylase	157
5.4. Conclusions	158
6. Heterologous Protein Production	158
6.1. Introduction	158
6.2. Production of Calf Chymosin in <i>Aspergillus</i>	161
6.3. Possible Limitations to Heterologous Protein Production	161
6.4. Physiological Control	163
6.5. Conclusions	166
7. Downstream Processing	166
7.1. Citric Acid	167
7.2. Enzymes	169
7.3. Integrated Fermentation and Recovery	172
8. Overall Conclusions	172
References	173

Chapter 7

Enzymes of the Genus <i>Aspergillus</i>	177
--	------------

W. M. Fogarty

1. Introduction	177
2. Production and Recovery of Enzymes	178
3. Downstream Processing and Recovery	180
4. Amylolytic Enzymes of <i>Aspergillus</i> Species	181
4.1. α -Amylases (Endo-amylases)	182
4.2. Amyloglucosidase	183
4.3. Transglucosidase	185
4.4. Pullulan 4-glucanohydrolase	186

4.5. Enzymes of <i>Aspergilli</i> and Degradation of Raw Starch	186
5. Pectinolytic Enzymes	187
5.1. Production of Pectinolytic Enzymes	187
5.2. Applications	189
6. Cellulases	189
7. Xylanases	192
7.1. Endo-xylanases	192
7.2. β -Xylosidases	194
7.3. Exo-xylanase	194
8. Lipases	194
9. Glucose-Transforming Enzymes	196
9.1. Glucose Oxidase	196
9.2. Glucose Dehydrogenases	197
10. Proteinases	198
10.1. Classification	198
10.2. Applications	200
11. Miscellaneous Enzymes	201
11.1. Catalase	201
11.2. Glycerol Oxidase	202
11.3. Keratinase	202
11.4. Acylase	202
11.5. β -Galactosidase	203
11.6. Endo- β -glucanase	203
11.7. Pterin Deaminase	203
11.8. Uricase	203
11.9. Naringinase	204
11.10. Tannase	204
12. Conclusions	204
References	205

Chapter 8

Health-Related Aspects of the Genus *Aspergillus* 219

C. W. Lewis, J. G. Anderson, and J. E. Smith

1. Introduction	219
2. Aspergillosis	221
2.1. Clinical Conditions	221

3. Mycotoxicosis	227
3.1. Overview	227
3.2. Aflatoxins	230
3.3. Other Mycotoxins	235
3.4. Mycotoxicosis and Animal Health	237
4. Epidemiology, Host Susceptibility, and High-Risk Groups ...	240
4.1. Compromised Host	240
4.2. Drug Treatment	242
4.3. Hospital Infection Complications	242
4.4. Dietary and Geographic Factors	244
4.5. Occupational Disease	247
4.6. Indoor Environment	251
5. Other Medical Aspects	253
5.1. Sick Building Syndrome	253
5.2. Fungal Volatiles	254
6. Conclusions	255
References	256
Index	263

Taxonomy—Current Concepts of *Aspergillus* Systematics

1

ROBERT A. SAMSON

1. INTRODUCTION

Species of *Aspergillus* belong to the first fungal organisms that were cultivated on artificial media and studied for their biochemical properties, and they are one of the most common fungi in man's environment. Since ancient times, *Aspergillus* species have been used in fermentation of food in Japan and other Asian countries, and the early discovery of their ability to produce organic acids was made at the turn of the century. It is therefore not surprising that the aspergilli used or encountered in biotechnology play a significant role.

The first description of *Aspergillus* dates from 1727, when P. A. Micheli provided a meager diagnosis and simple illustrations, but a clear depiction of the characteristics of the genus. After this first description, many taxa were described, and Thom and Church (1926) were the first to revise the genus *Aspergillus* with the acceptance of 69 species divided into 11 groups based on colony morphology and characteristics of the aspergillum. Later, Thom and Raper (1945) comprised 77 species with 10 varieties placed in 14 groups. In their monographic treatment, Raper and Fennell (1965) accepted 132 species subdivided into 18 groups. The generic and species concept was well circumscribed, and this monograph is still accepted. Since 1965, many new taxa have been described, and the validity of these species has been reviewed by Samson (1979; 1992). The genus now contains more than 200 species.

Two International Workshops on *Penicillium* and *Aspergillus* (Samson and Pitt, 1985, 1990) had a great impact on the current taxonomic

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schemes of *Aspergillus*. The contributions have also revealed the significance for the systematics of this important genus of a multidisciplinary approach including biochemistry, molecular biology, and serology. Recently, several molecular studies on problematic but important aspergilli have been performed, and the potential taxonomic value is apparent. An accurate, fast detection of species and isolates might be possible in the near future. This will be particularly required for *Aspergillus* strains that have undergone various modifications for specific biotechnological applications. Often, these strains will not produce typical morphological structures any more, and recognition will be possible only at the molecular level. At this time, however, the results of molecular studies need careful evaluation with a good comparison of morphological characters.

2. CRITERIA FOR CLASSIFICATION AND IDENTIFICATION

2.1. Morphology

Morphological structures are still important characters for classification. *Aspergillus* species typically produce the aspergillum, a conidiophore with an aseptate stipe terminating in a vesicle, on which the conidiogenous cells (phialides and metulae) are borne. These phialides produce conidia in long, dry chains with different pigmentation and ornamentation. These structures can be readily seen with a light microscope equipped with an oil immersion lens. In addition to the typical structure of the aspergillum, sclerotia and fruiting bodies with Hülle cells that can be typical for the species can also be produced. Also used for species delimitation, however, are colony color and diameter, characteristics of the vegetative mycelium, exudate (droplets on colony surface), reverse, and soluble pigment (colors in the agar around the colony).

Scanning electron microscopy (SEM) has been applied in the systematics of *Aspergillus*; in particular, the ornamentation of thick-walled ascospores allows examination by SEM in the unfixed, air-dried state. Conidia and other structures are less resistant to shrinkage, and artifacts may develop during fixation and examination of conidia by SEM.

Most aspergilli can be readily identified when cultivated on Czapek and malt extract agars. Samson and Pitt (1985) recommended Czapek yeast agar (CYA) and malt extract agar (MEA) for most anamorphic species. For teleomorphic species, cornmeal agar, oatmeal agar, and CBS malt agar were recommended. For xerophilic species, Czapek agar or CYA with 20% sucrose or malt yeast extract 40% sucrose agar should be used. Cultures should be incubated for 5–7 days at 25°C for anamorphic species and 10–14 days for teleomorphic species.

Some specialized media are used for the isolation and identification of potentially aflatoxigenic aspergilli. Bothast and Fennell (1974) and Pitt *et al.* (1983) proposed *Aspergillus* Differential medium and *Aspergillus* Flavus and Parasiticus Agar, respectively, which make detection of *A. flavus* and *A. parasiticus* possible within 3 days. Another medium containing the antibiotic bleomycin distinguishes *A. parasiticus* from *A. sojae* (Klich and Mullaney, 1989). On this medium, growth of both species is somewhat reduced, but *A. sojae* produced very restricted colonies, while *A. parasiticus* colonies were at least 3 mm in diameter within 6 days. These selective media are especially appropriate for fast detection of mycotoxinogenic isolates in food commodities.

Practical laboratory guides for identification of common aspergilli that are based primarily on morphology and colony characters were published by Pitt and Hocking (1985), Samson and Van Reenen-Hoekstra (1988), Klich and Pitt (1988a), and Tzean *et al.* (1990).

2.2. Other Methods for Classification and Identification

Besides the conventional characters of the colony and morphological structure, several new approaches have been investigated (Samson and Frisvad, 1991a,b; Samson, 1992).

The use of enzyme profiles has been studied for a limited number of *Aspergillus* isolates by a number of investigators (Nealson and Garber, 1967; Nasuno, 1971, 1972a,b, 1974; Kurzeja and Garber, 1973; Cruickshank and Pitt, 1990; Sugiyama and Yamatoya, 1990; Yamatoya *et al.*, 1990). In some cases, taxonomic relationships could be elucidated, but as yet this technique has not provided a reliable system for identification. However, profiles of secondary metabolites including mycotoxins have been shown to be useful in *Aspergillus* systematics. Samson *et al.* (1990) clearly distinguished nine taxa within the genus *Neosartorya* by ascospore morphology and the profile of secondary metabolites. Frisvad and Samson (1990) compared the morphological characteristics of many isolates of *A. fumigatus* and related taxa with their secondary metabolite profiles and were able to confirm the existing species delimitation. Klich and Pitt (1988b) investigated the relationship between species and secondary metabolite production in Section *Flavi* and found a good correlation between the production of aflatoxins B₁ + B₂, G₁ + G₂, and cyclopiazonic acid and the morphological characteristics of the species.

The distribution of ubiquinone systems, often in combination with electrophoretic comparison of enzymes, has been used by several Japanese researchers (Kuraishi *et al.*, 1990; Matsuda *et al.*, 1992). These chemotaxonomic approaches indicate relationships between groups, but