

Plant Molecular Biology

Edited by

**Diter von Wettstein and
Nam-Hai Chua**

NATO ASI Series

Series A: Life Sciences Vol. 140

Plant Molecular Biology

Edited by

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Laboratory of Plant Molecular Biology
Rockefeller University
New York, New York

Plenum Press

New York and London

Published in cooperation with NATO Scientific Affairs Division

Proceedings of a NATO Advanced Study Institute on
Plant Molecular Biology,
held June 10-19, 1987,
at the Carlsberg Laboratory, Copenhagen, Denmark

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

NATO Advanced Study Institute on Plant Molecular Biology (1987: Carlsberg
Laboratory)

Plant molecular biology / edited by Diter von Wettstein and Nam-Hai Chua.

p. cm.—(NATO ASI series. Series A, Life sciences; vol. 140)

“Published in cooperation with NATO Scientific Affairs Division.”

Includes bibliographies.

ISBN 0-306-42696-X

1. Plant molecular genetics—Congresses. 2. Plant molecular biology—
Congresses. I. Wettstein, Diter von. II. Chua, N.-H. (Nam—Hai) III. North Atlan-
tic Treaty Organization. Scientific Affairs Division. IV. Title. V. Series: NATO
ASI series. Series A, Life sciences; v. 140.

QK981.N367 1987

581.8'8—dc19

87-24389

© 1987 Plenum Press, New York
A Division of Plenum Publishing Corporation
233 Spring Street, New York, N.Y. 10013

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Plant Molecular Biology

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PREFACE

The present volume contains the invited lectures and abstracts of the posters presented at the NATO Advanced Study Institute on Plant Molecular Biology held at the Carlsberg Laboratory in Copenhagen, June 10 to 19.

The Directors of the Advanced Study Institute would like to express their most sincere gratitude for financial support to the following:

NATO
Danish Natural Science Research Council
Danish Agricultural and Veterinary Science Research Council
Carlsbergs Mindedelegat for Brygger J.C. Jacobsen
Carlsberg and Tuborg Breweries
International Society for Plant Molecular Biology
Bayer AG, Leverkusen
Hoechst AG, Frankfurt-Main
Biotechnology, Ciba-Geigy, Research Triangle Park, North Carolina
Calgene, Davis, California
Danisco Biotechnology, Copenhagen
E.I. DuPont de Nemours & Co., Wilmington, Delaware
Plant Science Foundation
Holmegaards Glasværker, Fensmark
Imperial Chemical Industries, Bracknell
Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, Dordrecht
Monsanto & Co., St. Louis, Missouri
Novo, Copenhagen
Rhône-Poulenc Agrochimie, Lyon
Schering AG, Berlin
Shell Research Ltd., London
Unilever PLC, London
Zoecon Research Institute, Sandoz, Palo Alto, California

Without this generous support it would not have been possible to bring together so many outstanding plant molecular biologists for exchange of experience and knowledge and for animated as well as fruitful discussions on future experiments which can advance the understanding of plant biology. Also discussed were the possibilities to apply this knowledge to crop improvement.

Diter von Wettstein

Nam-Hai Chua

CONTENTS

RIBULOSE-BISPHOSPHATE CARBOXYLASE

Three-dimensional structure of ribulose-1,5-bisphosphate carboxylase/ oxygenase from <i>Rhodospirillum rubrum</i>	1
G. Schneider, Y. Lindqvist, C.-I. Bränden and G. Lorimer	
Function of active-site residues of ribulose bisphosphate carboxylase/oxygenase	9
F.C. Hartman, R.S. Foote, F.W. Larimer, E.H. Lee, R. Machanoff, S. Milanez, S. Mitra, R.J. Mural, S.K. Niyogi, H.B. Smith, T.S. Soper and C.D. Stringer	
Partial reactions of ribulose bisphosphate carboxylase: Their utility in the study of mutant enzymes	21
G.H. Lorimer, S. Gutteridge and M.W. Madden	
The Rubisco large subunit binding protein - a molecular chaperone? ...	33
R.J. Ellis, S.M. van der Vies and S.M. Hemmingsen	

PHYTOCHROME AND PHYTOCHROME REGULATED TRANSCRIPTION

The molecular photophysiology of greening in etiolated pea seedlings..	41
W.R. Briggs	
Light-dependent regulation of gene expression in barley.....	53
K. Apel, E. Mössinger, K. Kreuz, K. Dehesh, A. Batschauer and E. Schäfer	

CHLOROPLAST GENES AND POLYPEPTIDES

Split genes and <u>cis/trans</u> splicing in tobacco chloroplasts	65
M. Sugiura, K. Shinozaki, M. Tanaka, N. Hayashida, T. Wakasugi, T. Matsubayashi, C. Ohto, K. Torazawa, B.Y. Meng, T. Hidaka and N. Zaita	
Chloroplast-specific import and routing of proteins	77
P. Weisbeek, J. Hageman, S. Smeekens, D. de Boer and F. Cremers	
Cell-specific expression of LHCII and the organisation of the photosynthetic reaction centers in chloroplast thylakoids	93
D.J. Simpson, R. Bassi and U.G. Hinz	
Synthesis of electron transfer components of the photosynthetic apparatus	105
J.C. Gray, P.P.J. Dunn, C.J. Eccles, S.M. Hird, D.I. Last, B.J. Newman and D.L. Willey	

MITOCHONDRIAL GENES

- Structure and transcription of the Oenothera mitochondrial genome 115
 W. Schuster, R. Hiesel, B. Wissinger, W. Schobel and A. Brennicke
- The beta subunit of a plant mitochondrial ATP synthase has a
 presequence involved in mitochondrial targeting 127
 M. Boutry, F. Nagy and N.-H. Chua

tRNA AND TRANSCRIPTION OF ORGANELLE DNA

- Transcriptional and post-transcriptional regulation of chloroplast
 gene expression 135
 W. Gruissem, X.-W. Deng, H. Jones, D. Stern, J. Tonkyn and
 G. Zurawski
- Localization of tRNA genes on maize and wheat mitochondrial genomes... 149
 J.-M. Grienenberger, H. Wintz, P. Runeberg-Roos, L. Marechal,
 G. Jeannin and J.H. Weil

TRANSPOSONS

- Transposable elements and their role in plant evolution 163
 H. Saedler and Zs. Schwarz-Sommer
- Effects of transposable elements on spatial patterns of gene
 expression in Antirrhinum majus 167
 E.S. Coen, T.P. Robbins, A. Hudson, J. Almeida, C. Martin
 and R. Carpenter
- Molecular genetic analysis of sequences homologous to mutator
 transposable elements in non-mutator maize stocks 181
 L.E. Talbert, D. Turks, C. Faber, L. Mann, K. Sylvester,
 F. Raymond and V.L. Chandler
- Cin4, a retrotransposon-like element in Zea mays 191
 Zs. Schwarz-Sommer, L. Leclercq and H. Saedler

BREEDING BY SOMATIC HYBRIDIZATION

- Cybrids in Nicotiana, Solanum and Citrus: Isolation and character-
 ization of plastome mutants: Pre-fusion treatments, selection and
 analysis of cybrids 199
 E. Galun, D. Aviv, A. Breiman, H. Fromm, A. Perl and A. Vardi
- Interspecific somatic fusions between Solanum brevidens and S.
tuberosum 209
 S. Austin and J.P. Helgeson
- Brassica cybrids and their utility in plant breeding 223
 T.L. Barsby, R.J. Kemble and S.A. Yarrow
- Selection and characterization of carrot somatic hybrids 235
 J.M. Widholm

INTERESTING PATHWAYS I

Candidate for a sexual reproduction specific pathway in plants: Putrescine to GABA via hydroxycinnamic amide intermediates	243
P. Filner	
Hydroxycinnamic acid amides, hypersensitivity, flowering and sexual organogenesis in plants	253
J. Martin Tanguy, J. Negrel, M. Paynot and C. Martin	
Molecular structure of plant fatty acid synthesis enzymes	265
A.R. Slabas, A. Hellyer, C. Sidebottom, H. Bambridge, I.R. Cottingham, R. Kessell, C.G. Smith, P. Sheldon, R.G.O. Kekwick, J. de Silva, C. Lucas, J. Windust, C.M. James, S.G. Hughes and R. Safford	
Aspects of glutathione function and metabolism in plants	279
H. Rennenberg	

INTERESTING PATHWAYS II

Relationship between anaerobic inducibility and tissue-specific expression for the maize anaerobic genes	293
B. Kloeckener-Gruissem and M. Freeling	
Barley raincoats: biosynthesis and genetics	305
P. von Wettstein-Knowles	
Stimulation of phenylpropanoid pathways by environmental factors	315
D. Scheel, J.L. Dangel, C. Douglas, K.D. Hauffe, A. Herrmann, H. Hoffmann, E. Lozoya, W. Schulz and K. Hahlbrock	
A phospho-oligosaccharide synthase in developing maize endosperms	327
D. Pan and O.E. Nelson	

HERBICIDE RESISTANCE

Acetolactate synthase, the target enzyme of the sulfonylurea herbicides	339
B.J. Mazur, S.C. Falco, S. Knowlton and J.K. Smith	
Expression of coat protein genes in transgenic plants confers protection against alfalfa mosaic virus, cucumber mosaic virus and potato virus X	351
N. Tumer, C. Hemenway, K. O'Connell, M. Cuzzo, R.-X. Fang, W. Kaniewski and N.-H. Chua	
Mutations resistant to photosystem II herbicides	357
J. Hirschberg, A.B. Yehuda, I. Pecker and N. Ohad	
Diuron resistance in the <u>psbA</u> multigene family of <u>Synechococcus</u> PCC7942	367
J. Brusslan and R. Haselkorn	

STRESS REACTIONS

A possible role for 3' sequences of the wound-inducible potato proteinase inhibitor IIK gene in regulating gene expression	377
G. An, R.W. Thornburg, R. Johnson, G. Hall and C.A. Ryan	

Heat stress: expression and structure of heat shock protein genes	385
J.L. Key, R.T. Nagao, E. Czarnecka and W.B. Gurley	
Tissue specificity and dynamics of disease resistance responses in plants	399
K. Hahlbrock, C. Cretin, B. Cuypers, K.-H. Fritzeimer, K.-D. Hauffe, W. Jahnen, E. Kombrink, F. Rohwer, D. Scheel, E. Schmelzer, M. Schröder and J. Taylor	
The response to anaerobic stress: transcriptional regulation of genes for anaerobically induced proteins	407
E.S. Dennis, J.C. Walker, D.J. Llewellyn, J.G. Ellis, K. Singh, J.G. Tokuhisa, D.R. Wolstenholme and W.J. Peacock	

VIRUS

Molecular biology and molecular genetics of plant bromoviruses	419
P. Ahlquist	
The use of full-length DNA copies in the study of the expression and replication of the RNA genome of cowpea mosaic virus	433
A. van Kammen, J. Wellink, R. Goldbach, R. Eggen and P. Vos	
The life cycle of cauliflower mosaic virus	443
P. Pfeiffer, K. Gordon, J. Fütterer and T. Hohn	
Agroinfection of <u>Zea mays</u> with maize streak virus DNA	459
B. Hohn, T. Hohn, M.I. Boulton, J.W. Davies and N. Grimsley	

VIROIDS

Structural properties of viroid replicative intermediates and of satellite RNAs of CMV	469
G. Steger	
Mutational analysis of potato spindle tuber viroid	483
R.A. Owens, R.W. Hammond and T.O. Diener	
Non-enzymatic cleavage and ligation of a plant satellite RNA	495
G. Bruening, J. Buzayan, W. Gerlach and A. Hampel	

NITROGEN FIXATION

Evolution of the leghemoglobins	503
K.A. Marcker and N.N. Sandal	
Towards nodulin function and nodulin gene regulation	509
J.-P. Nap, A. van Kammen and T. Bisseling	
Analysis of the mechanism of <u>nod</u> gene regulation in <u>Rhizobium leguminosarum</u>	523
G.-F. Hong, J.L. Burn and A.W.B. Johnston	
Plant-bacterial signalling in the <u>Rhizobium</u> -legume symbiosis	531
F.M. Ausubel, M.A. Honma, R. Dickstein, W.W. Szeto, B.T. Nixon and C.W. Ronson	

AGROBACTERIUM

The agrobacterium system and its applications	541
M.J.J. van Haaren, P.J.J. Hooykaas and R.A. Schilperoort	
Ri T-DNA from <u>Agrobacterium rhizogenes</u> , a semiochemical that alters morphological plasticity	565
D. Tepfer	
The role of virulence regulatory loci in determining <u>Agrobacterium</u> host range	573
S.C. Winans, S. Jin, T. Komari, K.M. Johnson and E.W. Nester	

TRANSGENIC PLANTS

Multiple positive and negative sequence elements mediate the light-induced expression of a plant gene	583
R. Fluhr, C. Kuhlemeier, P.J. Green, S.A. Kay, G. Strittmatter, M. Cuozzo, F. Nagy and N.-H. Chua	

FROM MOLECULAR BIOLOGY TO USEFUL PLANTS

Structure and regulation of the maize suppressor-mutator transposable element	589
P. Masson, J. Banks, R. Surosky, J. Kingsbury and N. Fedoroff	
The photosynthetic reaction center from the purple bacterium <u>Rhodospseudomonas viridis</u> and its relevance to photosystem II	597
H. Michel and J. Deisenhofer	
Missing links from molecular biology to useful plants	609
D. von Wettstein	

ABSTRACTS OF POSTERS	621
----------------------------	-----

Phytochrome regulation of mRNA levels of ribulose-1,5-bisphosphate carboxylase and light-harvesting chlorophyll a/b protein in etiolated rye seedlings (<u>Secale cereale</u>).....	679
Dietrich Ernst, Friedhelm Pfeiffer, Petra Eilfeld, Peter Eilfeld, Wolfhart Rüdiger and Dieter Oesterhelt	

AUTHOR INDEX	689
--------------------	-----

SUBJECT INDEX	693
---------------------	-----

THREE-DIMENSIONAL STRUCTURE OF RIBULOSE-1,5-BISPHOSPHATE CARBOXYLASE/
OXYGENASE FROM RHODOSPIRILLUM RUBRUM

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INTRODUCTION

Ribulose-1,5-bisphosphate carboxylase/oxygenase (Rubisco) is the key enzyme in photosynthetic carbon dioxide fixation. Due to its central role in the carbon metabolism of plants, Rubisco has been intensively studied (for a review see (1)). The enzyme catalyses the initial step in photosynthetic carbon dioxide fixation, the carboxylation of ribulose-1,5-bisphosphate, yielding two molecules of phosphoglycerate. This reaction of the enzyme results in the annual fixation of 10^{11} tons CO_2 . The same enzyme also catalyses the oxygenation of ribulose-1,5-bisphosphate, the first step in photorespiration. This reaction substantially reduces the overall rate of photosynthesis and consequently plant productivity. The dual function of Rubisco makes it a challenging target in attempts to improve the efficiency of photosynthesis and thus increase crop productivity with the help of modern DNA-techniques.

Rubisco from higher plants, algae and most photosynthetic micro-organisms is a complex multisubunit protein. The enzyme consists of eight large (MW 56000 d) and eight small (MW 15000 d) subunits, building up a L₈S₈ type enzyme. The catalytic function resides on the large subunit; the function of the small subunits is still unknown. The primary structures for the large subunits of higher plant and algal carboxylases are very similar. The amino acid sequence homology amongst the carboxylases of L₈S₈ type is in the range of 70 - 80 % (1).

In contrast to these L₈S₈ type carboxylases, the enzyme from the photosynthetic bacterium *Rhodospirillum rubrum* differs considerably in amino acid and subunit composition. This carboxylase is only a dimer of large subunits and lacks the small subunits. The overall amino acid homology to higher plant type large subunits is 25 % (2,3). However,

despite this low overall sequence homology, some peptide regions are highly conserved amongst all the carboxylases. Three of these peptide regions have been identified as parts of the active site (4,5,6). This indicates, that the topology of the active site and the overall tertiary structure for the large subunit are very similar in the *Rh. rubrum* and the higher plant enzymes.

The gene for the *Rh. rubrum* Rubisco has been cloned and expressed in *E. coli*. The gene product, obtained by Somerville and Somerville (7), is a fusion peptide containing an additional 24 amino acid peptide from β -galactosidase as the N-terminus. The kinetic parameters of the wild-type enzyme and this recombinant Rubisco are however indistinguishable. Recently, Larimer et al. (8) obtained an authentic, wild-type Rubisco without the 24 additional amino acids from β -galactosidase at the N-terminus.

A number of site-directed mutagenesis experiments have been carried out without the knowledge of the three-dimensional structure of the enzyme, probing the active site (9 - 13). The crystal structure of Rubisco from *Rh. rubrum* has recently been determined to 2.9 Å resolution (14). In the following, we summarize the structure determination of Rubisco and describe its three-dimensional structure.

CRYSTALLISATION

Rubisco from *Rh. rubrum*, both the authentic wild-type and the recombinant enzyme, has been crystallized under a number of different conditions (15 - 18). Four different crystal forms have been obtained so far (Table I). Under identical conditions, both the wild-type and the recombinant Rubisco, containing the 24 additional amino acid peptide, crystallize in the same spacegroup with identical cell dimensions (17).

Table 1. Crystal forms of Rubisco from *Rhodospirillum rubrum*

Source of Rubisco	pH	Spacegroup	Cellparameters (Å)	Reference
native	8.0	P4 ₁ 2 ₁ 2	82. 82. 290.9	(16)
native and recombinant	7.8-8.2	P4 ₁ 2 ₁ 2	82. 82. 290	(17)
recombinant	6.5-6.8	P4 ₁ 2 ₁ 2	82.4 82.4 324.	(15)
recombinant	5.6	P2 ₁	65.5 70.6 104.1 $\beta = 92.1^\circ$	(18)
recombinant	5.6	P2 ₁ 2 ₁ 2 ₁	70.9 100.1 131.	(18)

Structure Determination

The monoclinic crystal form (spacegroup P2₁) was used for the structure determination. Recombinant Rubisco from *Rh. rubrum*, containing the 24 additional amino acid peptide as the N-terminus, was used for all X-ray work. The monoclinic crystal form contains the whole dimer in

the crystal asymmetric unit and has a local, non-crystallographic twofold rotation axis, relating the two subunits of the of the molecule. Intensity data for the native enzyme and two heavy metal derivatives were collected to 2.9 Å resolution. X-ray data for four additional heavy metal derivatives were collected to lower resolution. The local non-crystallographic axis was used to refine the initial MIR-phases, calculated from the heavy metal positions. An initial model was built from the averaged electron density map. A more detailed account of the structure determination can be found in reference (14).

The crystallographic refinement of our model of Rubisco from *Rh. rubrum* is in progress. At present, the crystallographic R-factor is 26.5 % at 2.9 Å resolution.

The enzyme subunit

The enzyme subunit consists of two domains. The N-terminal domain comprises amino acid residues 1 - 137. The larger C-terminal domain consists of residues 138 - 466. Figure 1 shows a schematic view of the subunit.

The N-terminal domain is built up of a central, mixed five-stranded β -sheet. Two α -helices are found on one side and one α -helix on the other side of the β -sheet. The connection to the C-terminal domain is a short α -helix, followed by a piece of extended chain.



Figure 1: Schematic view of the subunit of Rubisco from *Rhodospirillum rubrum*. Cylinders represent α -helices and arrows represent β -strands.

The C-terminal domain has an α/β barrel structure, as found in triose phosphate isomerase (19) and other functionally non-related proteins. This fold consists of eight α/β units, which are joined adjacent to each other sequentially along the polypeptide chain. The eight parallel β -strands form the core of the barrel, with the eight helices on the outside.

This domain starts with an α -helix, which does not belong to the α/β barrel motif. This helix is located at the bottom of the α/β barrel and closes off the barrel from this side. After this helix, the chain enters strand no 1 of the α/β barrel. Additional secondary structural elements are found in this domain. After helix no 6., the polypeptide chain forms two additional antiparallel β -strands, before the chain enters strand no 7 of the barrel (figure 1). These two antiparallel β -strands are involved in domain-domain interactions. A small additional α -helix is found in the loop between strand no 8 and helix no 8 of the α/β barrel. At the C-terminal end of the polypeptide chain, we find three consecutive α -helices.

At the present state of resolution and refinement, two loop regions of the subunit are not defined in our electron density maps. One such loop region is found in the N-terminal domain and comprises amino acid residues 54 - 63. The second loop region is found in the C-terminal domain and comprises residues 325 - 333. These residues are located in loop no 6 of the α/β barrel. We do not observe electron density for the additional 24 amino acid residues from β -galactosidase at the N-terminus. These residues are probably disordered in this crystal form.

The dimeric molecule

Figure 2 shows a picture of the C α backbone atoms for the Rubisco dimer from *Rh. rubrum*. The molecule has approximate dimensions 50 x 72 x 105 Å.

It can be seen from figure 2, that the subunit-subunit interactions are tight and extensive. Two main interface areas are found. One such area is between the C-terminal domains of the two subunits, which built up the core of the molecule. The second contact area is between the C-terminal domain of one subunit and the N-terminal domain of the second subunit. Loop regions between the β -strands and the α -helices of the α/β barrel from the C-terminal domain are involved in subunit-subunit interactions at both interface regions. Amino acid residues from the loops no 1,2 and 3 interact with the N-terminal domain of the second subunit. These loop regions are at the carboxy end of the β -strands, which built up the α/β barrel. Loop no 1 and 2 exhibit extensive amino acid sequence homology between the bacterial and higher plant enzymes. Parts of these conserved peptide regions are involved in subunit-subunit interactions. This is strong evidence that some of these interactions, observed in the *Rh. rubrum* enzyme, are preserved in the higher plant enzymes.

Subunit contacts are also formed through homologous interactions of residues from loops no 3, 4 and 5 across the local twofold axis with corresponding residues of the C-terminal domain of the second subunit. No obvious amino acid sequence homology is found for these regions. As a consequence, the dimer interactions in the *Rh. rubrum* enzyme might not be identical with those in the plant enzymes.

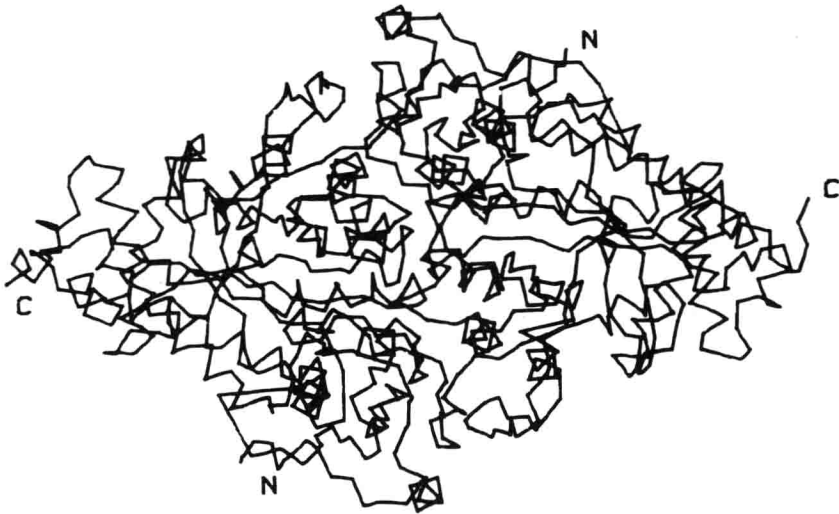


Figure 2: View of the C α backbone of the dimer of Rubisco from *Rhodospirillum rubrum*. The N- and C-termini of the two subunits are indicated.

The active site

The active site of Rubisco is found at the carboxy end of the eight parallel β -strands of the C-terminal domain, at one end of the barrel. Active site residues are located at the carboxy end of the β -strands or in the loops between the strands and the helices of the barrel.

This side of the barrel is partly covered by the N-terminal domain of the second subunit. Amongst those residues of this domain which are close to the active site, is glu 48, which is part of a highly conserved region in the amino acid sequence. In our model, which represents the decarbamylated enzyme, these residues are too far away to participate directly in catalysis. However it is conceivable, that a conformational change upon activation or substrate binding might decrease the distance for some of these residues to the active site.

Three conserved lysine residues, 166, 191 and 329 have been suggested to be involved in either catalysis or the activation process (4,5,20). It has been shown (4), that lys 191 is the site of carbamylation. Recently, it has been suggested, that lys 166 is the base, which initiates catalysis by abstracting the C-3 proton from ribulose-1,5-bisphosphate (13,21): lys 329 has been identified as an active site residue by chemical modification. All three lysine residues are found at the carboxy end of β -strands or in loops between the carboxy end of β -strands and α -helices of the α/β barrel. Lys 166 is located in the loop after strand no 1, lys 191 is the last residue in strand no 2 and lys 329 is found in loop no 6.

The function of lys 191 is best understood. This residue is involved in the activation process of the enzyme, a process common to all carboxylases. During activation, a carbamate is formed between the ϵ -NH₂ group of lys 191 and an activator CO₂ molecule. This carbamate is

then stabilized by an Mg ion. Figure 3 shows the surroundings of lys 191 in the deactivated enzyme. Two acidic residues, asp 193 and glu 194, are found in close proximity of lys 191. These two residues are conserved in all the carboxylases. It is very likely, that these two residues are part of the Mg^{2+} binding site in the activated ternary complex. In close proximity of this site is the sidechain of his 287. From our present model, it is possible that this sidechain is also involved in the binding of the metal ion in the ternary complex. This would be in agreement with EPR-measurements of the activated ternary complex, where Mg^{2+} had been replaced by Cu^{2+} (22,23). From these studies, a nitrogen ligand has been proposed to be part of the coordinationssphere of the metal ion. Upon formation of the quaternary complex, this nitrogen ligand is displaced, presumably by oxygen atoms from the substrate (22,23,24).

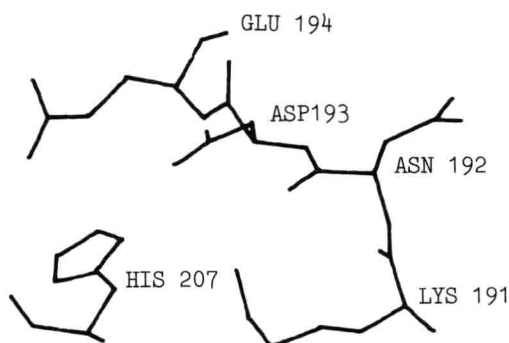


Figure 3: Picture of the Mg^{2+} binding site in Rubisco. Amino acid residues in the immediate surrounding of the activator lysine (lys 191) are shown.

Site-directed mutagenesis

Site-directed mutagenesis experiments have been carried out to probe the function of certain conserved amino acid residues (9 - 13). Two such mutagenesis experiments have focussed on residues, involved in activation and assumed to participate in metal binding (9,10).

The activator lysine 191 has been replaced by a glutamic acid, such preserving the negative charge at this residue as in the carbamylated enzyme. The obtained mutant is inactive, probably due to the fact that the mutant enzyme is unable to bind Mg^{2+} (10). Modelbuilding experiments of the ternary complex, assuming coordination of the metal ion to asp 193, glu 194 and the carbamate show, that the replacement of the carbamylated lysine sidechain by the shorter glu sidechain destroys the metal binding site. The oxygen atoms of the carboxyl group of glu 191 are too far away from the metal for direct coordination. Consequently, the proper surrounding of the Mg binding site is not maintained and the ability of the enzyme can no longer bind Mg in its proper place.