Eucaryotic Microbes as Model Developmental Systems

edited by Danton H. O'Day and Paul A. Horgen

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DANTON H. O'DAY

Department of Zoology and Erindale College
University of Toronto
Mississauga, Ontario, Canada

PAUL A. HORGEN

Department of Botany and Erindale College
University of Toronto
Mississauga, Ontario, Canada

PREFACE

When we compiled this volume we were motivated by several sti-
muli. We felt that previous volumes on microbial development were
often preoccupied with procaryotic cells and were of limited value
to those interested in aspects of development, its control, and its
maladies in eucaryotic cells. Not taking away from the inherent
beauty of the organisms themselves, we also felt, in these times of
relevance, that it was essential to reveal the merits of studying
lower nucleated cells. The cellular systems discussed in this vol-
ume offer numerous advantages not afforded by higher plant and ani-
mal cellular systems, especially for approaching complex develop-
mental questions. This volume focuses on many of the major prob-
lems of developmental biology and shows how the study of eucaryotic
microbes is helping to elucidate these problems.

The book is divided into three major parts: Growth and Cellu-
lar Differentiation, Cell Communication and Morphogenesis, and
Dormancy and Germination. Each part begins with an Editors'
Introduction, which puts the contained articles into a general per-
spective but which is not intended as a comprehensive review. The
volume will appeal mainly to senior undergraduates, graduate stu-
dents, and scientists already working on the development of eucary-
otic microbes. However, since each article begins with an intro-
duction to the respective experimental organism, its morphology,
and its life cycle, the book should have wider appeal to a more
general readership.

The authors are indebted to Elinor Foden for her assistance in
all phases of compilation of this volume and for her unending
patience.

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Danton H. O'Day
Paul A. Horgen
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CONTRIBUTORS

G. B. Calleja,[*] Natural Science Research Center, University of the Philippines, Diliman, Quezon City, The Philippines

Linda E. Cameron, Department of Microbiology, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada

Randall L. Dimond, Department of Biology, University of California, San Diego, La Jolla, California

Allan Dingle, Department of Biology, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada

Larry D. Dunkle, Department of Plant Pathology, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, Nebraska

Antony J. Durston, Hubrecht Laboratory, International Embryological Institute, Universiteitscentrum "De Uithof," Utrecht, The Netherlands

Robert M. Eisenberg, Department of Biological Sciences, University of Delaware, Newark, Delaware

David W. Francis, Department of Biological Sciences, University of Delaware, Newark, Delaware

Stephen J. Free, Department of Biology, University of California, San Diego, La Jolla, California

Shelby N. Freer, Department of Plant Pathology, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, Nebraska

Swee H. Goh, Department of Microbiology, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada

Cheng-Shung Gong,[+] Department of Biological Sciences, Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana

James E. Haber, Department of Biology, Rosenstiel Basic Medical Sciences Research Center, Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts

[*] Current affiliation: Division of Biological Sciences, National Research Council of Canada, Ottawa, Ontario K1A OR6, Canada

[+] Current affiliation: School of Chemical Engineering, Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana

Paul A. Horgen, Department of Botany and Erindale College, University of Toronto, Mississauga, Ontario, Canada

Byron F. Johnson, Division of Biological Sciences, National Research Council of Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

Steven A. Johnson, Department of Biological Sciences, Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana

Glen R. Klassen, Department of Microbiology, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada

Gary Kochert, Department of Botany, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia

Elaine Y. Lai, Department of Biology, Rosenstiel Basic Medical Sciences Research Center, Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts

Herb B. LéJohn, Department of Microbiology, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada

Wallace M. LeStourgeon, Department of Molecular Biology, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee

William F. Loomis, Department of Biology, University of California, San Diego, La Jolla, California

James S. Lovett, Department of Biological Sciences, Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana

Mark MacInnes, Department of Biological Sciences, University of Delaware, Newark, Delaware

David R. McNaughton, Department of Microbiology, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada

Renate U. Meuser, Department of Microbiology, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada

Danton H. O'Day, Department of Zoology and Erindale College, University of Toronto, Mississauga, Ontario, Canada

Richard P. Sutter, Department of Biology, West Virginia University, Morgantown, West Virginia

David A. Thomas, Department of Developmental Biology, Boston Biomedical Research Institute, Boston, Massachusetts

John E. Thompson, Department of Biology, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada

James L. Van Etten, Department of Plant Pathology, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, Nebraska

Peter J. Wejksnora, Department of Biology, Rosenstiel Basic Medical Sciences Research Center, Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts

Sally S. White, Department of Biology, University of California, San Diego, La Jolla, California

Barbara E. Wright, Department of Microbiology and Molecular Genetics, Harvard Medical School, Boston Biomedical Research Institute, Boston, Massachusetts

Deborah D. Wygal, Department of Biology, Rosenstiel Basic Medical Sciences Research Center, Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts

Bong Y. Yoo, Department of Biology, University of New Brunswick, Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada

Shuhei Yuyama, Department of Zoology, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

CONTENTS

PART I

Growth and Cellular Differentiation

EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

The majority of the current scientific investigations into the mechanisms that determine how a cell is transformed from one state into another have focused on the regulation of genomic expression and on the accumulation and function of specific gene products. Eucaryotic microbes lend themselves admirably to such studies because it is often possible to obtain large amounts of genetically identical cells which, by simple manipulation of environmental parameters, can be induced to grow and divide or to follow alternative pathways of development. For example: plasmodia of *Physarum* can either develop into sporangia or into thick-walled cysts; amoebas of *Naegleria* can differentiate into flagellates or into cysts; and cellular slime mold amoebas may embark on either a multicellular developmental pathway to form fruiting bodies or macrocysts or undergo unicellular differentiation to form microcysts. Thus, like the fertilized egg of animals or plants which develop into the multifarious cells of the mature organism, the cells of lower eucaryotes may undergo diverse kinds of differentiation. The advantage these microbes provide, however, is that each differentiation may be studied alone or, at most, in the presence of but a few other simultaneous events rather than in the complex, heterogeneous cellular environment that characterizes the multi-

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cellular embryo. The contributors to this part reveal how
eucaryotic microbes are being used to solve some of the most per-
plexing problems of cellular differentiation.

GENETIC ANALYSIS OF DEVELOPMENTAL EVENTS

The discovery of the sexual cycle (macrocyst formation) of
cellular slime molds [1] allows for the possibility of precise
genetic mapping in this important group of eucaryotic microbes.
David W. Francis and Robert M. Eisenberg review the history behind
this discovery and show how developmental genetics, using both the
parasexual and sexual cycle, is beginning to yield important infor-
mation on the program of development in cellular slime molds.

In the yeasts, genetic analysis has been realized for many
years. Since the mating-type locus has been shown to play a
critical role in controlling sporulation, it has been the subject
of much investigation. James E. Haber's group is pursuing the
problem by employing conditional mutants which affect the mating-
type locus. Their work with temperature-sensitive mutants suggests
that an amber mutation in one (α) allele converts one mating type
(α) to the other mating phenotype (a).

THE GENOME AND TRANSCRIPTION

If we are to understand the way the information that is stored
in the genome is retrieved and utilized during the differentiation
process, we must understand the organization of the eucaryotic
chromosome. In the eucaryotic chromosome, the histone proteins are
implicated as general repressors of gene function while certain
nonhistone (acidic) proteins have been suggested as specific gene
regulators [2,3]. Wallace M. LeStourgeon's early work with
Physarum provided the first correlation between changes in the
complement of nonhistone chromosomal proteins and altered patterns

of genetic activity during cellular differentiation [4]. In this part, LeStourgeon reviews the current model for the organiza- tion of the basic chromatin fiber of the chromosome [5] and shows why *Physarum* is an excellent system for characterizing the residual nonhistone proteins of chromatin. His work demonstrates a remark- able correlation between the developmental changes in the non- histone proteins of *Physarum* and mammalian cells.

In addition to regulatory proteins, the complex group of non- histone proteins also includes enzymes such as DNA and RNA poly- merases. There are three major species of RNA polymerase in eucaryotic cells, and these may contain a couple of subspecies [6]. How so few enzymes can selectively produce the specific RNA transcripts that characterize a specific kind of cellular differen- tiation is a perplexing problem. In procaryotes it is suggested that highly phosphorylated nucleotides may regulate RNA polymerase function [7]. Herb B. LéJohn and his co-workers demonstrate the appearance of polyphosphate compounds during the development of *Achlya*. The three polyphosphates of *Achlya* show complex acti- vating and inhibiting effects on the various RNA polymerase spe- cies isolated from this organism, suggesting a role for these compounds in eucaryotic development.

Since the first products of gene action are various classes of RNA, the developmental appearance of these molecules has received much attention. Shuhei Yuyama has examined the patterns of RNA synthesis during heat-synchronized cell division in *Tetrahymena*. By starving synchronized cells, he was able to dramatically reduce RNA synthesis to one-fiftieth of that of control cells without significantly altering the time of the first synchronous cell divi- sion. Characterizing the species of RNA synthesized, he revealed that the synthesis of rRNA is not essential for cell division while the synthesis of certain species of mRNA is essential.

During sporulation in *Saccharomyces*, which occurs under condi- tions of pseudostarvation, rRNA synthesis appears to be significant and important. Using temperature-sensitive mutants for rRNA

synthesis, James E. Haber's group provides data that suggest that different controls regulate rRNA synthesis during vegetative growth and sporulation. They also provide evidence indicating that the length of the poly(A) moiety of mRNA is shorter in sporulating cells as compared to vegetatively growing cells.

ENZYME ACCUMULATION AND FUNCTION

A cell is transformed from one state to another as a consequence of the accumulation of new, specific gene products. Generally, the intracellular accumulation of specific enzymes is accepted as the driving force of cellular differentiation. In this part, William F. Loomis and his co-workers show how the selection of enzyme-deficient mutants of *Dictyostelium* is providing information on the physiological roles of certain stage-specific enzymes. Through the accumulation of large amounts of information on developmental mutants, they are also able to show that certain biochemical events are independent of previous events while others are dependent on previous biochemical differentiations. This concept of sequence of events or timing sequences is also pursued by David W. Francis and Robert M. Eisenberg in this part.

The work of Byron F. Johnson, G. B. Calleja, and Bong Y. Yoo is concerned with the role enzymes play in the morphogenesis of fission yeasts. They propose a model of coordinated enzyme activities involving both autolytic and synthetic enzymes, which can explain the cell extension in yeast. With certain modifications, this model has also been used to explain cell division, conjugation, and spore liberation.

Barbara E. Wright and David A. Thomas acknowledge the importance of enzymes but indicate that the mechanism of enzyme accumulation is less important than the functional role of the enzyme in the differentiation process. The accumulation of activity of an enzyme is only important if that enzyme plays a key role in the developmental process and is rate-limiting. (Of five enzymes that

have been shown to accumulate during the development of *Dictyoste-lium*, only the accumulation of glycogen phosphorylase seems to be the product of differential gene activation.) Their data reveal the value of employing kinetic models which integrate many differ-ent kinds of information relevant to enzyme action and substrate availability.

THE PRIMARY CONTROL OF CELLULAR DIFFERENTIATION

One of the primary questions of developmental biology is exemplified by the following simple question: what is the initial stimulus that tells a cell how it should differentiate? Current models of cellular differentiation suggest pivotal roles for ions and cyclic AMP [8,9]. In this part, Allan Dingle shows how *Naegleria* is a useful organism for pursuing such problems. Of special interest is the synchrony of the developmental sequence and the precision with which the independent events of the amoeba-flagellate transformation can be timed.

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MACROMOLECULAR SYNTHESIS AND CELL DIVISION IN *TETRAHYMENA*

Shuhei Yuyama

Department of Zoology
University of Toronto
Toronto, Ontario

I. INTRODUCTION

In studying any cellular morphogenetic events, four categories
of problems may be discerned: (1) the problem of the triggering
(stimulation or activation) mechanism; (2) the problem of control
of macromolecular synthesis which is involved in that particular
developmental event; (3) the problem of structural changes (assem-
bly process) that are brought about by the products of macromolecu-
lar synthesis; and (4) the problem of relationships between cell
growth (cell cycle) and developmental events. The present paper
will deal mainly with the problem of the fourth category, i.e., the
relationships between growth and division in heat-synchronized
Tetrahymena, with emphasis on RNA synthesis. Other aspects of heat-
synchronized *Tetrahymena* have been comprehensively reviewed by
Zeuthen [1-3].

Tetrahymena pyriformis GL is a hymenostome ciliate protozoan
(70 × 40 μm) that is known only to grow and divide, although some
other species of *Tetrahymena* are known to be polymorphic or to

differentiate into cysts [4]. The GL strain lacks micronuclei and
does not undergo sexual differentiation [5]. The ciliates divide
transversely during cytokinesis, in spite of the fact that all
ciliates have a distinct polarity with quite different structures
associated with the posterior and anterior halves. Complex morpho-
genetic events take place during the cell cycle in order for a cell
to generate two essentially identical daughter cells with their
full complement of organelles. One marked feature of these morpho-
genetic events is the development of a new oral apparatus [6]. A
diagrammatic representation of morphogenetic changes in heat-
synchronized *Tetrahymena* is shown in Fig. 1.

   T. pyriformis possesses many advantages for studying the
relationships between macromolecular synthesis and morphogenetic
events, i.e., either cortical morphogenesis or cell division, or
both. The cells can be grown axenically in simple [5] or defined
[7] medium, have a short generation time (2.5 h), take up nutrients,
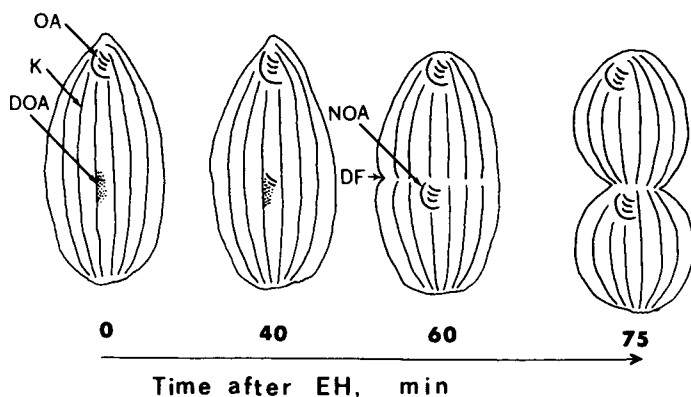labeled precursors, and metabolic inhibitors readily, and can be

FIG. 1. Diagrammatic representation of heat-synchronized *Tetra-
hymena pyriformis* GL cells after the end of the last heat shock
treatment. EH = end of the last heat shock; OA = oral apparatus;
DOA = developing oral apparatus; K = kinetics; DF = division
furrow; note that no detectable change in cell size occurs in the
starvation medium.

synchronized by a G_2-sensitive event [8]. They exhibit a complex
but clearly defined cortical pattern and are ideally suited for
studying pattern formation of the cell surface [6]. The surface
patterns can also be used as a marker to identify different re-
gions of the cell. In addition, we already possess diversified
and detailed information on the taxonomy, morphology, nutrient
requirements, metabolic pathways, and growth characteristics (for
reviews see Refs. 9 and 10), which enable us to continue investi-
gating important contemporary issues without being hampered by
numerous technical problems.

For studying biochemical aspects of developmental events,
synchronous cultures must be available. Synchrony in *Tetrahymena*
can be obtained by certain selection methods or by various induction
methods (see Ref. 11). For studying a normal growth process, the
use of a selection synchrony system is imperative, while various
induction synchrony systems have advantages for answering other
kinds of questions. The classic heat shock-induced synchrony [11]
is well suited for studying the relationships between macromolecu-
lar synthesis and cell division. In cell cycle studies, elucida-
tion of such relationships, in the simplest possible model system,
is the first step toward our understanding of normal developmental
processes occurring during the cell cycle. Such a model system has
been established recently in our laboratory [12].

Zeuthen and his associates first established that cell divi-
sion can be artificially synchronized [11,13]. Logarithmically
growing *T. pyriformis* GL cells were subjected to alternate tempera-
tures of 28° (optimal growth temperature) and 34° for 30-min
intervals. This was repeated five to ten times. The cells then
divided synchronously with a maximum division index of 70 to 80%
approximately 72 min after the last heat shock treatment (EH) was
completed. The 72-min interval between EH and division is shorter
than the normal G_2 period. The induction of division synchrony can
be explained by the fact that single cells isolated at different
stages of the cell cycle display an increasing duration of division

delay with increasing cell age (especially during the G_2 phase).
When treated by a single heat shock at 34° [14], the cells display
an age-dependent "excess delay" pattern. Since each heat shock
delays division longer at the late G_2 phase than at the early G_2
phase, a population of log cells can be induced to divide synchro-
nously by giving multiple heat shock treatments. The "excess delay"
phenomenon is compatible with the following concepts: (1) certain
temperature-sensitive events which are involved in division occur
during the G_2 phase; (2) the heat shock damages these events; and
(3) cells must reinitiate these events from the start during the
recovery after EH.

Pulse treatments of heat-synchronized cells at different times
after EH with para-fluorophenylalanine [15], an amino acid analog,
or with cycloheximide [16], an inhibitor of protein synthesis,
induce the age-dependent "excess delay" phenomenon similar to that
observed with heat shock treatments. Based on these observations,
a "division protein" model has been proposed by Zeuthen and his
associates [13,15,17,18]. The essence of this model assumes that
the substance of the temperature-sensitive events is a protein
(division protein). When a certain threshold level of the division
protein has been synthesized in the G_2 phase, cell division will be
triggered. The stage when this threshold level is reached is the
"transition point," after which time division is not inhibited
either by a heat shock or by protein synthesis inhibitors. The
division protein model assumes that a temporary inhibition of pro-
tein synthesis results in the functional disappearance of division
protein so that cells must begin resynthesizing the protein. This
assumption can also explain the "excess delay" phenomenon induced
by many different types of antimitotic agents, since these agents
conceivably affect protein synthesis (directly or indirectly). One
problem yet to be resolved in this model is the lack of a theore-
tical basis for linking the temporary inhibition of protein synthe-
sis to the hypothetical disappearance (inactivation or utilization