

# Molecular Biology of B Cells

Second Edition

Edited By

Frederick W. Alt

Tasuku Honjo

Andreas Radbruch

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# Molecular Biology of B Cells

## To Michael Neuberger (1953–2013)

We wish to dedicate this volume to the memory of Michael Neuberger, who was a coauthor of the prior volume, wonderful colleague, and truly outstanding B-cell biologist. In his lab at the MRC laboratory of Molecular Biology in Cambridge England he made groundbreaking contributions to elucidate the mechanisms of antibody gene regulation and antibody repertoire diversification. His work was characterized by his careful but very innovative approaches and his remarkable scientific insight.

Neuberger's earlier studies led to his discovery of major enhancer elements downstream of the IgH and Igk loci, which have been shown to play critical roles in the secondary diversification of antibody genes. The enhancers that Neuberger first found downstream of IgH are now known to be important both for regulation of IgH class switch recombination (CSR), which generates different antibody classes through a DNA breakage and joining mechanism, as well as for IgH variable region somatic hypermutation (SHM) which provides the basis for antibody affinity maturation. In another line of research, Neuberger, together with Greg Winter, was the first to use recombinant DNA techniques to generate human antibodies with desired antigen binding specificities. He also collaborated with Marianne Bruggemann to pioneer the development of human antibody production in transgenic mice. His work in these areas helped lay a foundation for the development therapeutic human antibodies, which now have proven so successful in the clinic.

Neuberger's more recent work on how antibody genes are further diversified by a DNA deamination mechanism

has been among his most important and influential. One of the coauthors of this volume, namely Tasuku Honjo discovered the activation-induced cytidine deaminase (AID) and showed that it is required for CSR as well as for SHM. A mystery at the time of the discovery was how the small AID protein could initiate DNA breaks during CSR and mutations during SHM. Neuberger, along with Mathew Scharf and others, proposed that AID could serve this dual role by deaminating deoxycytidines in Ig loci to trigger a cascade of events that lead to DNA double-strand breaks during CSR and mutations during SHM. Neuberger's model was based on his careful, several decade-long studies of the SHM process of antibody genes. Following up on his model, Neuberger performed a beautiful series of genetic studies that provided compelling evidence for his DNA deamination model of AID function in SHM and IgH class switching, a model, which is now widely accepted by nearly all workers in the field and that has formed the basis for their ongoing studies.

Beyond science, Michael was a warm and enthusiastic individual with quite diverse set of interests in history and literature, as well as in various sports. Interacting with him both scientifically and personally was always a great pleasure. It was a privilege to have him as a friend. Michael also was well known as a great mentor and leader. His outstanding scientific contributions and leadership have been acknowledged by many prestigious awards including his recent election as a Foreign Associate of the US National Academy of Sciences which acknowledged both his leadership and discoveries outlined above on antibody diversification.

B lymphocytes are an essential part of the humoral immune system and produce the specific antibodies generated during infection or vaccination. Soon after their discovery as antitoxins more than a hundred years ago by Emil Behring and Shibasaburo Kitasato it became clear that antibodies are enormously diverse and can be generated against many different structures. The elucidation of the mechanism underlying the generation of diversity (GOD) of the antibody system kept immunologists busy over the last hundred years. With the discovery of the V(D)J recombination mechanism of the immunoglobulin (Ig) genes and the somatic hypermutation (SHM) processes many aspects of this problem were solved. The discovery of the V(D)J recombinase machinery consisting of the lymphocyte lineage-specific proteins recombination activating gene (RAG) 1 and RAG2 which provide the specific endonuclease function and the generally expressed nonhomologous DNA end joining factors that join RAG-generated DNA breaks was a fascinating development as was the discovery of AID and its associated protein machinery mediating class switch recombination (CSR) as well as SHM and gene conversion. The progress in the B-cell field in this area is well documented by the different editions of this book series which started in 1989 under the title “Immunoglobulin genes” and in 2004 became “Molecular Biology of B cells.”

This new edition of the “Molecular Biology of B cells” brings the reader up to date with these Ig diversifying processes. However, this book has now a much broader scope as it covers many different aspects of B cell Biology. B cells are a well-characterized and easily assessable cellular system that can be used to answer many issues of general cell biology. Furthermore due to the availability of several different B cell-specific Cre deleter mice the B cell system is also useful for general gene function studies. These are reasons why many scientists worldwide start to work on B cells although they are not regarded as classical ‘B cell immunologists’ and for these this book is particularly useful. In fact B cells have served as excellent model systems to study many common biological questions including transcriptional regulation of differentiation, signal transduction, and tumorigenesis. Furthermore, the mechanism of GOD has been considered to be unique to lymphocytes especially B cells as the expression of AID is specific to B cells. Subsequently, however, the DNA repair phases of GOD are

shown to be common between B cells and other types of cells, indicating that GOD employs factors that normally are entrusted with preserving genome stability. More recently, IgA synthesis has been shown to influence the whole body metabolic regulation through symbiotic interaction with the gut microbiota. These striking developments convince us that molecular biology of B cells does not only mean molecular biology ‘for’ B cells but also molecular biology ‘through’ B cells to understand the whole biology.

The chapters of this new edition of “Molecular Biology of the B cells” have been written by an international faculty of experts in their fields and the readers can expect to get a comprehensive overview about the current status and the future development of the B-cell field. In particular the reader will learn how a B-cell-specific transcriptional network drives differentiation of hematopoietic stem cells (HSC) through B lymphopoiesis and how during their development B cells repeatedly switch between molecular programs promoting proliferation and those involved in differentiation. B-cell research in the age of genomics also means that we now know many more details about the gene expression program of different B-cell developmental stages. This is due to the joint efforts of many scientists, for example those working in the ImmGen Consortium. We also learned much more about the signaling mechanisms controlling the development and activation of B cells. For example, it was found that tumor necrosis factor (TNF) superfamily members such as lymphotoxin and BAFF play an important role in the homeostasis and survival of B cells in the periphery.

New topics that were not at all covered in the last edition of this book are, for example, the role of evolutionarily conserved microRNAs during B-cell development, function, and transformation and the role of IL-10- and IL-35-producing regulatory B cells. Furthermore, jawless vertebrates (lampreys and hagfish) were recently shown to have B cells employing the leucine-rich repeat (LRR)-based variable lymphocyte receptors (VLR), a type of antigen receptor completely different from their mammalian counterpart.

Apart from being a useful tool for basic cell biological and signaling studies B cells are also playing an increasingly important role in the clinic. Genetic defects of the B-cell system are the cause of important human immunodeficiency

diseases. A dysregulation of this system causes autoimmunity or tumor diseases, topics which are both well covered in this new edition. Furthermore, not only the B cells but also their product, namely antibodies made a remarkable career in the recent years. As the reader will learn by reading this book, antibodies are highly versatile tools that are not only used in clinical diagnostics but also play an important role as therapeutic agents. Thus most drug companies have antibody departments and factories that produce antibodies and bring them into the clinic for the treatment of various diseases.

In spite of the importance of B cells in basic research and the clinic, there are still many questions that B biology needs to address in the future. We still have to learn more

about how the B cell system distinguishes between self and foreign antigens, in particular after the finding that many newly generated B cells have a certain level of autoreactivity. What is the role of B cells in specialized compartments such as mucosal tissues? The maintenance of B-cell memory and antibody production over a long period of time is also a topic of active research where major breakthroughs are to be expected.

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Preface	xvii		
Contributors	xix		
<b>1. The Structure and Regulation of the Immunoglobulin Loci</b>			
<i>Joseph S. Lucas, Cornelis Murre, Ann J. Feeney and Roy Riblet</i>			
1. Introduction	1	7. Recombination Complexes: Analysis of Stoichiometry and Organization	19
2. Genomic Organization of the Mouse Immunoglobulin Heavy Chain Locus	1	8. V(D)J Recombination Is Tightly Regulated during Lymphocyte Development	20
3. Genomic Organization of the Mouse Immunoglobulin Kappa Light Chain Locus	3	9. Accessibility Model of Regulation	21
4. Genomic Organization of the Mouse Immunoglobulin Lambda Light Chain Locus	3	10. Overview of Chromatin Structure	21
5. B Cell Development and Regulation of V(D)J Recombination	3	11. Regulation by Nucleosome Structure and Histone Acetylation	21
6. Junctional Diversity	5	12. Regulation by Histone Methylation	22
7. Combinatorial Diversity	5	13. How Is the Chromatin Structure of Antigen Receptor Loci Developmentally Regulated?	22
8. Noncoding Transcription and Immunoglobulin Locus Rearrangement	6	14. Additional Layers of Regulation	23
9. The Process of Dh–Jh Recombination	6	15. Regulation of V(D)J Recombination: Summary	23
10. Epigenetics and Immunoglobulin Locus Rearrangement	6	16. Oncogenic Lesions in Lymphoid Neoplasms: The Price of a Diverse Antigen Receptor Repertoire	24
11. Insulators and Immunoglobulin Locus Rearrangement	7	17. Proposed Mechanisms Underlying RAG-Mediated Genomic Lesions	24
12. 3D Structure and Compaction of the Immunoglobulin Heavy Chain Locus	7	17.1 Recognition Errors: Ectopic Recombination between cRSS	24
13. Conclusion	7	17.2 Recognition Errors: RAG-Mediated Cleavage at Non-B-Form DNA Structures	25
References	8	17.3 Joining Errors: End Donation	26
		17.4 Joining Errors: Transposition	26
<b>2. The Mechanism of V(D)J Recombination</b>		18. Regulatory Controls Proposed to Suppress RAG-Mediated Genomic Instability	26
<i>Alicia J. Little, Adam Matthews, Marjorie Oettinger, David B. Roth and David G. Schatz</i>			
1. Overview	13	18.1 Control Cell Type and Developmental-Stage-Specific Expression of Recombination Activity	26
2. Antigen Receptor Gene Assembly	13	18.2 Restrict RAG Activity to an Appropriate Stage of the Cell Cycle	26
3. Recombination Signal Sequences	15	18.3 Suppress Recognition of Inappropriate, Ectopic Target Sequences	27
4. Biochemistry of V(D)J Cleavage	16	18.4 Downregulate RAG's Inherent Transposition Activity	27
5. RAG1 and RAG2	17	18.5 Suppress Interchromosomal V(D)J Recombination	27
6. A Role for HMGB1 in V(D)J Recombination	18	18.6 Regulate Joining: Ensure High-Fidelity cNHEJ Machinery Is Used and Discourage End Donation	27
		19. V(D)J Recombination Errors as Pathogenic Lesions in Lymphoid Neoplasms: Summary	28
		References	28

### 3. Transcriptional Regulation of Early B Cell Development

*James Hagman*

1. PU.1 Sets the Stage for Lymphoid and Myeloid Development	35
2. Lineage Priming in Lymphoid Progenitors by Ikaros	38
3. E2A Regulates the Chromatin Landscape to Promote Gene Expression in B Cell Development	39
4. E2A Is Inhibited by Id Proteins	41
5. Interleukin-7/Stat5 Signaling Provides an Early Signal for B Cell Lineage Specification	41
6. Early B Cell Factor: Central Coordinator of B Cell Development	42
7. Collaboration between EBF1 and Foxo1	43
8. Regulation of the B Cell-Specific Program by Pax5	44
9. Regulation of B Lineage Commitment	46
10. Conclusion	47
Acknowledgment	47
References	47

### 4. Relationships among B Cell Populations Revealed by Global Gene Analysis

*Yan Zhou, Byoung-Gon Moon, Susan A. Shinton, Kyoko Hayakawa and Richard R. Hardy*

1. Introduction	55
2. Gene Profile Changes with B Cell Maturation Suggest an Ordering of Transitional Stages	55
3. Distinctions in Gene Networks Activated in Mature B Cell Populations	58
4. Fo/B2 B Cells in Different Tissues are Similar, but Specialization with Location Emerges	60
5. Conclusions	61
Acknowledgment	63
References	63

### 5. Roles of MicroRNAs in B Lymphocyte Physiology and Oncogenesis

*Stefan A. Muljo and Klaus Rajewsky*

1. Introduction	65
2. Control of Cell Survival and Proliferation by miR-17~92 in B Cell Development and Lymphomagenesis	66
3. The Problem of miRNA Target Identification and Validation	68

4. miR-155 in Germinal Center B Cells and Lymphomagenesis	68
5. Discovery of an Elusive Tumor Suppressor: miR-15a~16-1 Cluster	69
6. Lin28b Regulates the Fetal-Adult B Cell Development Switch	69
7. To Be Further Determined	70
8. Concluding Remarks	71
Acknowledgments	71
References	71

### 6. Proliferation and Differentiation Programs of Developing B Cells

*Markus Werner and Hassan Jumaa*

1. Proliferation and Differentiation Programs at the Pro-B Cell Stage	76
1.1 The IL-7R	76
1.2 SOCS are Negative Regulators of IL-7R Signaling	77
1.3 Human B Cells Develop Independently of the IL-7R	77
1.4 IL-7R Signaling and the Proliferation of Pro-B Cells	78
1.5 IL-7R Signaling and the Survival of Pro-B Cells	78
1.6 The Role of IL-7R in Inducing Differentiation Programs	79
2. Proliferation and Differentiation Programs at the Pre-B Cell Stage	80
2.1 Signal Induction from the Pre-BCR	80
2.2 Signals from the Pre-BCR Induce Both Proliferation and Differentiation of Pre-B Cells	80
2.3 Role of Class IA PI3K in Pre-BCR-Induced Proliferation	81
2.4 Regulation of Survival and Cell Cycle by the Class IA PI3K Downstream Target AKT	82
2.5 The Family of FoxO Transcription Factors is a Highly Conserved Downstream Target of PI3K Signaling	83
2.6 Differentiation of Pre-B Cells Involves Allelic Exclusion of the IgH Gene Locus	83
2.7 Pre-BCR Signals Induce Differentiation by Activating SLP-65-Dependent Signaling Pathways	84
2.8 SLP-65-Dependent Signaling Promotes IgL Gene Recombination and Differentiation	86
2.9 Interplay of the Proliferation and Differentiation Programs at the Pre-B Cell Stage	86

2.10 The Conventional BCR Replaces the Pre-BCR in Providing Survival Signals	87	3. <b>VLR Gene Assembly Mechanism and Sequence Diversity</b>	121
3. <b>Selection Mechanisms at the Immature B Cell Stage</b>	88	4. Lamprey CDA1 and CDA2	124
3.1 Role of Self-Reactivity in Early B Cell Development	88	5. VLRA, VLRB, and VLRC Are Expressed by Different Lymphocyte Populations	124
3.2 The Role of BCR Signaling in the Differentiation of Peripheral B Cells	90	6. Characterization of B-Like and Two T-Like Lymphocyte Populations in Cyclostomes	124
3.3 The Role of BCR Signaling in Malignant Transformation of B Cells	90	7. VLRA <sup>+</sup> , VLRB <sup>+</sup> , and VLRC <sup>+</sup> Cells Have Distinct Gene Expression Profiles	125
References	91	8. Generation of the T-Like and B-Like Cells in Lampreys	126
<b>7. Development and Function of B Cell Subsets</b>		9. The Unique Structure of VLRB Antibodies	127
<i>Andre M. Vale, John F. Kearney, Alberto Nobrega and Harry W. Schroeder</i>		10. VLRB Monoclonal Antibodies	127
1. Introduction	99	11. Structure of VLR Antigen-Binding Domains	128
2. B-1, Marginal Zone and Follicular B Cells	99	12. Structures of VLRB Antibody–Antigen Complexes	129
2.1 Introduction to the Three Subsets	99	13. Conclusion	130
3. Mechanisms for the Compartmentalization of B-Cell Subsets	103	References	131
3.1 Ontogeny	103	<b>9. The Origin of V(D)J Diversification</b>	
3.2 B-1 Cells	104	<i>Ellen Hsu and Susanna M. Lewis</i>	
3.3 The Spleen	105	1. The Alien Seed	133
3.4 FO B Cells	106	1.1 Transposons and Transposition	133
3.5 MZ B Cells	106	1.2 Horizontal Transfer	134
3.6 Chemokines	107	1.3 Exaptation	136
3.7 B-Cell Growth and Survival Factors	108	1.4 Modus Operandi	136
4. Selection and Differential Survival Mechanisms: BCR Signaling, Composition, and Specificity	109	1.5 Structure and Linkage of RAG1 and RAG2 Genes	137
4.1 BCR Signaling	109	1.6 Fossil Transposons	137
4.2 BCR Composition	110	1.7 RAG2-like Gene in Sea Urchin	137
4.3 BCR Specificity	111	1.8 Current Questions: Transposon Origins, Horizontal Transfer, and Exaptation	139
4.4 Microbial Exposure	111	2. The Evolution of BCR and TCR Loci	139
4.5 T-Independent Signals	111	2.1 Germline Coding Joint Formation: V(D)J Gene Segment Fusions	139
5. Other Factors Involved in the Formation of B-Cell Subsets	112	2.2 Germ Line Signal Joint Formation: the Creation of D Segments	141
5.1 Role of CD5	112	2.3 Germ Line Hybrid Joint Formation: RSS Swaps and Locus “Speciation”	142
5.2 Apoptosis	112	3. Considerations on the ur-V Gene	142
6. Homeostasis of B-Cell Subsets and Repertoires	112	3.1 Rearrangement Generates Sequence Length Diversity	142
7. Conclusion	113	3.2 Considering Jawless Fishes	144
Acknowledgment	113	3.3 Hypermutation in Evolution	145
References	113	3.4 An Innate Defense V Gene	145
<b>8. B Cells and Antibodies in Jawless Vertebrates</b>		4. Concluding Remarks	146
<i>Brantley R. Herrin, Masayuki Hirano, Jianxu Li, Sabyasachi Das, Yoichi Sutoh and Max D. Cooper</i>		Acknowledgments	146
1. Introduction	121	References	146
2. Lampreys and Hagfish Have Three Types of VLR Genes	121		

## 10. Structure and Signaling Function of the B-Cell Antigen Receptor and Its Coreceptors

*Michael Reth, Lars Nitschke, Masaki Hikida and Tomohiro Kurosaki*

1. Introduction	151
2. Basic Structure of the BCR Complex	151
3. BCR Activation Models	153
4. The Resting State of the BCR	154
5. Interaction of the BCR with Signal-Transducing Kinases and Adaptors	155
6. BCR Coreceptors CD19 and CD22	156
7. CD19 Functions in a Complex with CD21 and CD81	156
8. Signaling by the CD19 Tail	157
9. Human Mutations in the CD19/CD21/CD81 Complex	158
10. CD22: An Inhibitory Receptor	158
11. Regulation of CD22 Signaling by Ligand Interactions	160
12. The Role of CD22 in Preventing Autoimmunity	161
13. BCR-Controlled Signaling Processes	161
14. BCR-Mediated Adaptor and PLC $\gamma$ 2 Activation	161
15. IP $_3$ Promotes Calcium Release and Activation of Nuclear Factor of Activated T Cells	162
16. DAG and Nuclear Factor- $\kappa$ B Activation	163
17. Activation of the PI3K Pathway	163
18. Akt and Foxo Regulation	164
Acknowledgment	164
References	164

## 11. Fc and Complement Receptors

*Jeffrey V. Ravetch, Falk Nimmerjahn and Michael C. Carroll*

1. Consequences of Fc $\gamma$ RIIB Deficiency	171
2. Consequences of Complement and Complement Receptor Deficiencies	173
3. Fc Receptors	173
3.1 Expression Pattern and Signaling Properties of Fc $\gamma$ RIIB	173
3.2 ITIM Pathways	174
3.3 Affinity Maturation	176
3.4 Ig Enhancement and Suppression	177
3.5 Memory Response	177
3.6 Plasma Cell Homeostasis	177
3.7 CD23	178
3.8 FCR-Like Proteins	178
3.9 Fc $\mu$ -Receptor	178

4. Complement Receptors	179
4.1 Early Components of Complement Influence the Humoral Response	179
4.2 Regulation of Complement Receptors	179
4.3 CD21 Forms a Co-receptor on B Cells	179
4.4 CD21/CD35 Regulate B-Cell Responses	180
5. Coreceptor Signaling versus Antigen Localization to FDCs	180
5.1 B Cells Require Complement Receptors at Five Different Stages	181
6. Frontiers: Complement versus Fc Receptors	183
References	184

## 12. B Cell Localization and Migration in Health and Disease

*Anja E. Hauser and Uta E. Höpken*

1. Introduction	187
2. Migration of B Cells in the Bone Marrow	188
2.1 Migration and Interactions of Developing B Cells	188
2.2 Mature B Cells and Immune Responses in the Bone Marrow	189
3. Migration of B Cells into and within SLOs	189
3.1 Microanatomical Structure of SLOs and Mechanisms of B Cell Entry	189
3.2 Migration of B Cells within SLOs	193
4. Location and Migration of Antibody-Secreting Cells	197
5. Body Cavity B-1 B Cell Trafficking	199
6. Mucosal B Cell Migration	200
7. Homing of B Cells during Chronic Inflammation and Tertiary Lymphoid Organ Formation	202
8. Migration of Neoplastic B Cells	203
9. Conclusion	206
References	206

## 13. B Cells as Regulators

*Ping Shen, Ellen Hilgenberg, Andreia C. Lino, Van Duc Dang, Stefanie Ries, Imme Sakwa and Simon Fillatreau*

1. Introduction	215
2. Regulatory Role of B Cells in UC	215
3. Protective Function of B Cells in EAE	217
4. Regulatory Roles of B Cells in Systemic Lupus Erythematosus	219
5. Regulatory Role of B Cells in Bacterial Infections	220
6. Characterization and Function of IL-10-Producing B Cells in Humans	221

7. Concluding Remarks	222	14c. Memory Plasma Cells	
Conflict of Interest	222	<i>Falk Hiepe and Radbruch Andreas</i>	
Acknowledgments	222	1. How Does the Pathogenic Plasma Cell Memory Arise?	244
References	222	2. Plasma Cell Niches	245
<b>14. B Cell Memory and Plasma Cell Development</b>		3. How to Target Memory Plasma Cells	246
<b>14a. Generation of Memory B Cells</b>		4. Direct Plasma Cell Targeting	246
<i>Toshitada Takemori</i>		References	248
1. Memory B Cell Markers	227	<b>15. The Role of the BAFF and Lymphotoxin Pathways in B Cell Biology</b>	
2. Properties of Memory B Cells	227	<i>Fabienne Mackay and Jennifer L. Gommerman</i>	
3. Diversity within the Memory Compartment	227	1. BAFF/APRIL: Important Regulators of B Cell Survival, Homeostasis, and Function	251
4. Dynamics in B Cell Response toward Memory Formation	228	1.1 Introduction	251
5. Selection of High-Affinity Memory B Cells in GCs	228	1.2 The BAFF–APRIL System	251
6. How Memory B Cells Develop in the GC Reaction	229	1.3 The Role of the BAFF–APRIL System in B Cells in Health	255
7. GC-Independent Memory B Cells	229	1.4 The Role of the BAFF–APRIL System on B Cells in Disease	257
8. GC-Independent and -Dependent Memory B Cells Develop with the Help of Different T-Cell Subsets	229	2. The Lymphotoxin Pathway: Shaping B Cell Environments	261
9. GC-Independent and -Dependent Memory B Cells Are Involved in the Secondary Response	230	2.1 Introduction	261
References	230	2.2 Receptors and Ligands of the LT Pathway	261
<b>14b. Plasma Cell Biology</b>		2.3 The Role of B Cell-Associated LT $\alpha_1\beta_2$ in Immune Cell Homeostasis	263
<i>David Tarlinton</i>		2.4 The Role of B Cell-Associated LT $\alpha_1\beta_2$ and the GC Reaction	264
1. Introduction	232	2.5 LT and Mucosal B Cell Biology	265
2. Plasma Cell Subsets	233	2.6 LT and Tertiary Lymphoid Structures	267
2.1 Plasmablasts	233	2.7 LT—Therapeutic Perspectives that Pertain to B Cells	268
2.2 Plasma Cells	233	3. Conclusions and Perspectives	269
3. Cellular Aspects of Plasma Cell Differentiation	234	References	269
3.1 B1 Cells, Natural Antibody, and Plasma Cell Differentiation	234	<b>16. The Mucosal Immune System: Host–Bacteria Interaction and Regulation of Immunoglobulin A Synthesis</b>	
3.2 TI Immune Responses	235	<i>Sidonia Fagarasan, Giuliana Magri and Andrea Cerutti</i>	
3.3 $\alpha$ -GalCer	236	1. Introduction	277
3.4 TD Immune Responses and Extrafollicular Foci	236	2. Geography, Regulation, and Properties of Gut Immunoglobulin A	277
3.5 TD Immune Responses and GCs	237	3. Synthesis of Gut Immunoglobulin A	278
4. Molecular Biology of Plasma Cell Differentiation	239	4. T Cell-Dependent Immunoglobulin A Induction	278
5. Plasma Cell Survival	240	4.1 Germinal Center Reaction	279
6. Plasma Cell Survival Molecules	241		
References	241		

4.2	Regulation of Germinal Centers	281	4.2	The DNA Deamination Model Requires AID-Targeting Cofactors	322
4.3	Specific Characteristics of Gut Germinal Centers	281	4.3	Target Chromatin: Accessibility and Specificity	323
5.	<b>T Cell-Independent Immunoglobulin A Induction</b>	282	4.4	Chromatin Regulators for AID-Induced Cleavage and Repair	325
5.1	Immunoglobulin A Generation in Isolated Lymphoid Follicles	282	5.	<b>Regulation of AID Expression</b>	328
5.2	Immunoglobulin A Generation in Mesenteric Lymph Nodes and Peyer's Patches	283	5.1	AID's Expression Profile	328
5.3	Immunoglobulin A Generation in the Intestinal Lamina Propria	283	5.2	<i>Aicda</i> Regulation	329
6.	<b>Function of Immunoglobulin A</b>	285	5.3	Post-Transcriptional and Post-Translational AID Regulation	331
7.	<b>Clinical Relevance</b>	285	6.	<b>Concluding Remarks</b>	331
8.	<b>Conclusions</b>	286		<b>References</b>	332
	<b>References</b>	286	19.	<b>The Mechanism of IgH Class Switch Recombination</b>	
17.	<b>Gut Microbiota and Their Regulation</b>			<i>Fei-Long Meng, Frederick W. Alt and Ming Tian</i>	
	<i>Frederick W. Alt and Duane R. Wesemann</i>		1.	<b>Antibody Class</b>	345
1.	<b>Microbiota</b>	293	2.	<b>Organization of Mouse IgH Locus</b>	345
2.	<b>Microbes, Primary Ig Diversification, and Early Life B Cell Selection</b>	294	2.1	Activation-Induced Cytidine Deaminase, SHM, and IgH CSR	345
3.	<b>Microbial Influence on IgA Production</b>	297	3.	<b>A Two-Step Model of CSR</b>	347
4.	<b>Microbial Influence on IgE Production</b>	299	4.	<b>Mechanisms by Which AID Initiates CSR and SHM</b>	347
5.	<b>B-Lineage Cell Influence on Commensal Microbes</b>	300	5.	<b>Germline S Region Transcription Targets AID Activity during CSR</b>	348
6.	<b>Conclusion</b>	302	6.	<b>Role of Transcription Stalling in AID Targeting</b>	349
	<b>References</b>	302	6.1	S Region Functions in CSR	349
18.	<b>Molecular Mechanisms of AID Function</b>		7.	<b>AID Cofactors Facilitate AID Access to Its ssDNA Substrates</b>	350
	<i>Nasim A. Begum, Hitoshi Nagaoka, Maki Kobayashi and Tasuku Honjo</i>		8.	<b>Differential AID Targeting and Outcomes during CSR and SHM</b>	350
1.	<b>Introduction</b>	305	9.	<b>Long-Range Joining of S Region Breaks</b>	351
2.	<b>AID Structure and Function</b>	306	10.	<b>Classical Nonhomologous End Joining</b>	352
2.1	General Structural Features and Functional Associations of AID	306	11.	<b>Alternative End Joining</b>	353
2.2	Proteins That Interact with AID	308	11.1	ATM-Dependent DNA Repair Response	354
3.	<b>AID's Molecular Mechanism of DNA Cleavage and Recombination</b>	312	12.	<b>Chromosomal Translocation in Lymphomas Caused by Aberrant CSR</b>	354
3.1	Properties of AID-Induced DNA Cleavage	312	13.	<b>Evolution of the IgH CSR Mechanism</b>	355
3.2	Evidence for AID's Cytidine Deamination Activity on DNA or RNA	317		<b>Acknowledgments</b>	356
3.3	Two Separate AID Functions	317		<b>References</b>	356
3.4	DNA Deamination Hypothesis	317	20.	<b>Somatic Hypermutation: The Molecular Mechanisms Underlying the Production of Effective High-Affinity Antibodies</b>	
3.5	RNA Editing Hypothesis	318		<i>Alberto Martin, Richard Chahwan, Jahan Yar Parsa and Matthew D. Scharff</i>	
4.	<b>The Mechanism of AID's Specificity Determination for DNA Cleavage</b>	320	1.	<b>Introduction</b>	363
4.1	Cleavage Target Sequence: <i>cis</i> -Recognition and Transcription	320			