An ENDOR and HYSCORE Investigation of a Reaction Intermediate in IspG (GcpE) Catalysis

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Supporting Information

ABSTRACT: IspG is a 4Fe–4S protein that carries out an essential reduction step in isoprenoid biosynthesis. Using electron–nuclear double resonance (ENDOR) and hyperfine sublevel correlation (HYSCORE) spectroscopies on labeled samples, we have specifically assigned the hyperfine interactions in a reaction intermediate. These results help clarify the nature of the reaction intermediate, supporting a direct interaction between the unique fourth Fe in the cluster and C2 and O3 of the ligand.

We report here spectroscopic results that help clarify the nature of a key reaction intermediate in isoprenoid biosynthesis. Isoprenoids are the most abundant small molecules on earth. They are typically made by condensing the C5 diphosphates dimethylallyl diphosphate (DMAPP, 1) and isopentenyl diphosphate (IPP, 2) to form C10, C15, and C20 diphosphates, the precursors of di-, tri-, and tetraterpenes. DMAPP and IPP are synthesized by two main pathways: the mevalonate pathway and the methylerythritol phosphate pathway. In the latter, the last two steps are catalyzed by the unusual 4Fe–4S cluster-containing proteins IspG (also called GcpE) and IspH (also called LytB). These catalyze the conversion of 2-C-methylerythritol-cyclo-2,4-diphosphate (MEcPP, 3) to (E)-1-hydroxy-2-methyl-2-enyl-4-diphosphate (HMBPP, 4) and thence to DMAPP and IPP (Scheme 1). The oxirane hypothesis is attractive because oxiranes (epoxides) are known to be converted to alkenes by reduced 4Fe–4S clusters in model systems. It is also known that the kinetics of the MEcPP → product and HMBPP epoxide → product reactions are quite similar. However, this might simply indicate that both MEcPP and HMBPP epoxide form the same reactive intermediate “X”, with the rate-determining step involving breakdown of “X”; consistent with the observation that the electron paramagnetic resonance (EPR) spectrum of the previously known reaction intermediate “X” formed upon addition of MEcPP to IspG is indistinguishable from that formed upon addition of HMBPP epoxide. However, the structure of “X” is not known. Here we discuss the likely structure of “X” on the basis of electron–nuclear double resonance (ENDOR) and hyperfine sublevel correlation (HYSCORE) spectroscopies with 2H- and 13C-labeled compounds.

Several possible structures for “X” have recently been proposed, including ferraoxetanes 5 and 6, protonated ferraoxetane 7, and carbanions 8 and 9 (Scheme 2).

The ENDOR spectrum of “X” exhibits a single large 1H hyperfine interaction with a coupling constant (\(A_{\ell}(1H) = [14,11,11]\) MHz and \(a_{\text{iso}} = 12\) MHz. This proton signal originates from the MEcPP/HMBPP epoxide substrates, since it is absent in the ENDOR spectrum of IspG + [U-2H]MEcPP, which exhibits the corresponding 2H signal with \(A = 1.7\) MHz (Figure 1a), but the origin of this peak has been unclear. To assign the proton/deuteron signals in “X”, we used four specifically deuterated HMBPP epoxides: 10, 11, 12, and 13 (Scheme 3).

The reaction intermediate “X” prepared using 10 showed the 1.7 MHz 2H resonance in its X-band Mims ENDOR spectrum.

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Figure 1. ENDOR spectra at $g_2$ ($g = 2.018$) of the reaction intermediate “X” prepared using *E. coli* IspG and deuterated MEcPP/HMBPP epoxides: (a) Mims ENDOR spectrum of “X” prepared using uniformly deuterated MEcPP; (b) Mims ENDOR spectrum of “X” prepared using 10; (c) Mims ENDOR spectrum of “X” prepared using 11; (d) Mims ENDOR spectrum of “X” prepared using 12; (e) Mims ENDOR spectrum of “X” prepared using 13; (f) sum of (b−e); (g) Davies $^1$H ENDOR spectrum of “X” prepared using 10 (solid line), showing the disappearance of the $a_{iso} = 12$ MHz $^1$H signal (dashed lines), indicated by arrows. The Mims ENDOR spectra shown in (a−e) are the sums of spectra taken at 30 different $\tau$ values (from 132 to 1060 ns in 32 ns steps) and are normalized according to their $^3$P signal intensities. The percentages of $^2$H enrichment were also taken into account when adding (b−e). Microwave frequency = 9.76 GHz; magnetic field = 345.4 mT; $T = 20.0$ K.

Figure 2. Q-band field-dependent Mims ENDOR spectra and simulations of “X” prepared using 10. Black lines represent experimental data, and red lines are simulations. Microwave frequency = 34.05 GHz; $T = 740$ ns; $T = 20$K. Simulation parameters: $A_{iso}(^1H) = [1.8, 1.6, 1.8]$ MHz; $A_{iso}(^2H) = [0.2, 0.0, 0.4]$ MHz; $A_{iso}(^3H) = [0.5, 0.1, 1.1]$ MHz; $\epsilon'Q/h = 168$ kHz ($^1H$) and 160 kHz ($^2H_a$ and $^2H_b$).

Scheme 3. Isotopically Labeled HMBPP Epoxides Used in This Study

(Figure 1b). This is consistent with the Davies ENDOR spectrum, which showed the disappearance of the $a_{iso} = 12$ MHz proton signal (Figure 1g). Clearly then, this $^1$H ENDOR signal arises from one or more protons in the C2’ methyl group. Interestingly, in addition to the 1.7 MHz $^1$H resonance, an $\lambda \approx 0.37$ MHz resonance is also apparent in the Mims ENDOR spectrum (Figure 1b), suggesting nonequivalence of the three methyl protons/deuterons. The three nonequivalent C2’ methyl deuterons in “X” prepared using 10 were better resolved in Q-band field-dependent ENDOR spectra (Figure 2), and these spectra could be simulated well using three sets of hyperfine couplings, in addition to an $\epsilon'^2Q/h$ value of $\sim 165$ kHz. These results indicate that the C2’ methyl group is essentially static at 20 K (as at 2 K,20 since the line shapes of the 12 MHz proton ENDOR signals are the same at these two temperatures.

The reaction intermediates “X” prepared using 11, 12, and 13 showed $^2$H resonances with small hyperfine couplings (<0.5 MHz) in their Mims ENDOR spectra (Figure 1c−e). These signals, together with those from 10, contributed to the broad $\lambda \approx 0.4$ MHz resonances seen with [U-$^2$H]MEcPP (Figure 1a), which were well-reproduced by adding the $^2$H Mims ENDOR spectra of “X” prepared using 10, 11, 12, and 13 (Figure 1f).

We next considered the $^{13}$C HYSCORE assignments of the carbons in the reaction intermediate “X” using $^{13}$C-labeled MEcPPs (Scheme 4). The HYSCORE spectrum of “X” prepared using *Escherichia coli* IspG and [U-$^{13}$C]MEcPP (14) exhibited three sets of $^{13}$C signals (Figure 3a), one with a relatively large hyperfine coupling ($\sim 17$ MHz), the second with a small coupling ($\sim 3$ MHz), and the third with a very small coupling ($\leq 1$ MHz), consistent with previous results obtained using *Thermus thermophilus* IspG.19 To begin to specifically assign these signals, we obtained HYSCORE spectra using [1,3,4-$^{13}$C$_3$]-labeled MEcPP (15) (Figure 3b) and [2,3-$^{13}$C$_2$]-labeled MEcPP (16) (Figure 3c). The $\sim 17$ MHz hyperfine coupling was absent in the [1,3,4-$^{13}$C$_3$]-labeled sample (Figure 3b) but present in the [2,3-$^{13}$C$_2$]-labeled sample (Figure 3c), indicating that this strongly coupled $^{13}$C signal arises from the quaternary carbon, C2. The results of simulations of HYSCORE spectra recorded at different magnetic field strengths (Figure S1 in the Supporting Information) and different $\tau$ values (Figure S2) indicated that the hyperfine tensor ($A_{iso}$) of C2 is [14.5, 12.0, 26.5] MHz with an isotropic hyperfine coupling constant $a_{iso}(^{13}$C2) of 17.7 MHz.

The $\sim 3$ MHz $^{13}$C signal arises from C3, since it was present in the [2,3-$^{13}$C$_2$]-labeled sample (16) (Figure 3c). We also conclude that C3 is the only carbon that contributes to this 3 MHz $^{13}$C signal on the basis of the following observations: First, 14, 15,
Figure 3. HYSCORE spectra at g1 (g = 2.018) of the reaction intermediate “X” prepared using E. coli IspG and 13C-labeled MEcPP: (a) [U-13C]MEcPP (14); (b) [1,3,4-13C3]MEcPP (15); (c) [2,3-13C2]MEcPP (16). The weaker 13C signals in (c) are due to low enrichment. In (a) and (b), the diagonal peak at \( \approx -3.6 \) MHz is the superposition of 13C signals having small (<1 MHz) hyperfine couplings from the labeled substrates and the double-quantum transitions from protein 14N, while in (c), this signal arises from double-quantum transitions from protein 14N. Microwave frequencies: (a) 9.684 GHz; (b) 9.684 GHz; (c) 9.674 GHz. (c) 342.5 mT. \( r = 136 \) ns; \( T = 20.0 \) K.

and 16 all had the same line shapes and peak positions in their 13C HYSCORE spectra for the \( \approx 3 \) MHz signals (Figures 3). Second, the \( \approx 3 \) MHz 13C HYSCORE signal from samples prepared using 14 and 15 taken at different magnetic field strengths were simulated well using just a single carbon having \( A_{ii}(^{13}\text{C}) = [1.8, 2.0, 5.1] \) MHz and \( a_{iso}(^{13}\text{C}) = 3.0 \) MHz (Figures S1 and S3). Third, the \( \approx 3 \) MHz 13C HYSCORE signals of samples prepared using 14 and 15 varied in the same manner with changes in the \( \tau \) value (Figure S4) and were simulated well using a single carbon with the hyperfine values given above (Figure S2).

These results suggest that all of the structures proposed to date, 6 and 7 are the most favored candidates for “X”, for the following reasons: First, the assignment of the \( a_{iso} = 12 \) MHz hyperfine coupling to a proton in the methyl group is consistent with these models, because \( A_{ii}(^{1}\text{H}) = [14,11,11] \) MHz is close to isotropic, indicating a long-range interaction. Second, the hyperfine coupling tensor of C2, \( A_{ii}(^{13}\text{C}) = [14.5, 12.0, 26.5] \) MHz, is highly anisotropic, which indicates a strong dipole–dipole interaction with the paramagnetic center, consistent with an Fe–C bond as in 6 or 7 (see below). The observed 13C2 hyperfine coupling in “X” is also close to that seen for 13CO directly bonded to one of the irons in the H cluster in the HoxA-CO state of an [FeFe] hydrogenase, for which \( A_{ii}(^{13}\text{CO}) = [19.2, 16.6, 15.6] \) MHz and \( a_{iso}(^{13}\text{CO}) = 17.1 \) MHz.21 In addition, the \( a_{iso}(^{13}\text{C}) \) value of 17.7 MHz in “X” is much smaller than the \( a_{iso}(^{13}\text{C}) \) value of 43.8 MHz found in a formaldehyde-inhibited xanthine oxidase in which the formaldehyde carbon is two bonds away from the Mo center.22 This 43.8 MHz hyperfine coupling arises from a “transannular hyperfine interaction” and is in good accord with the results of density functional theory (DFT) calculations \( \approx 47.9 \) MHz.22 However, in a structure containing a single Mo–C bond, the same DFT methods yielded \( A_{ii}(^{13}\text{C}) = [23.2, 13.4, 11.7] \) MHz and \( a_{iso}(^{13}\text{C}) = 16.1 \) MHz, very close to the 13C2 hyperfine coupling results found with the reaction intermediate “X” in IspG. These comparisons suggest a direct interaction of Fe with C2 in “X” (as in 6 or 7) rather than the large transannular hyperfine interaction (corresponding to 5) seen in the Mo-containing system, whose square-pyramidal geometry enables a large metal–carbon orbital overlap.

However, 6 and 7 cannot be easily distinguished. A 3.7 MHz 1H hyperfine coupling was seen upon \(^2\text{H}_{2} \)O exchange,20 but this 3.7 MHz 1H signal might be from either the protonated ferrooxetane (7) or a proton that is hydrogen-bonded to the iron–sulfur cluster. The former seems less likely, since there is no precedent for such a species and the observed coupling is rather small. As for the other possibilities for “X” that have recently been considered, 8 is unlikely because a carbanion would not be expected to be stable (since CH groups have pK\(_a\) values \( > 40 \), so the carbanion would be rapidly protonated). Structure 9 is likewise unlikely not only because it is not an oxazolyl (which might be stable), as a result of the protonation of O, but also because 13H3 is not exchanged during isopenroid biosynthesis.23

Overall, the results presented above are of general interest because they provide new insights into the mechanism of action of IspG, an unusual reductase containing two distinct structural domains.24,25 The results of \(^2\text{H} \) and 13C labeling together with spectroscopic/simulation studies of the reaction intermediate “X” have enabled the three largest hyperfine couplings seen previously to be assigned as one H2 (\( a_{iso} = 12 \) MHz), C3 (\( a_{iso} = 3.0 \) MHz), and C2 (\( a_{iso} = 17.7 \) MHz). The latter value is very similar to that found previously for Fe–C in a hydrogenase21 and that computed for a Mo–C bond in a xanthine oxidase model,22 both of which have \( a_{iso}(^{13}\text{C}) \) values of 16–17 MHz, supporting an assignment to a structure containing a metal–carbon bond (e.g., 6). This involvement of Fe–C bonding is very reminiscent of that found in IspH, in which the observed Fe–C distances are 2.6–2.7 Å,12 considerably shorter than the sum of the Fe and C van der Waals radii (\( \approx 3.6 \) Å).26 Taken together with the X-ray crystallographic and modeling results,24,25 these observations indicate the following mechanism: After initial docking to the triose phosphate cluster. The former seems less likely, since there is no precedent for such a species and the observed coupling is rather small. As for the other possibilities for “X” that have recently been considered, 8 is unlikely because a carbanion would not be expected to be stable (since CH groups have pK\(_a\) values \( > 40 \), so the carbanion would be rapidly protonated). Structure 9 is likewise unlikely not only because it is not an oxazolyl (which might be stable), as a result of the protonation of O, but also because 13H3 is not exchanged during isopenroid biosynthesis.23

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