Studies on the Mechanism of Inhibition of *Salmonella typhimurium* by 1,2,4-Triazole*

(Received for publication, April 25, 1975)

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The inhibition of *Salmonella typhimurium* by 1,2,4-triazole appears to be mediated through an effect on L-cysteine biosynthesis. O-Acetylserine sulfhydrylase A, the final enzyme in the L-cysteine biosynthetic pathway, was found to catalyze a reaction (triazyloylase) between O-acetyl-L-serine and 1,2,4-triazole, giving 1,2,4-triazole-l-alanine as a product. In wild type *S. typhimurium* grown on 4 mM 1,2,4-triazole, 97% of the total O-acetyl-L-serine synthesized *in vivo* is incorporated into 1,2,4-triazole-1-alanine. 1,2,4-Triazole also significantly lowers the levels of several of the enzymes necessary for sulfate reduction. This effect is presumably due to the ability of the inhibitor to lower intracellular concentrations of O-acetyl-L-serine, an inducer of these enzymes. Inhibition of growth is probably caused by L-cysteine starvation, arising from the decreased availability of the L-cysteine precursors, sulfide and O-acetyl-L-serine.

Two 1,2,4-triazole-resistant strains bearing mutations in *cysK*, the structural gene for O-acetylserine sulfhydrylase A, incorporate only small quantities of O-acetyl-L-serine into 1,2,4-triazole-l-alanine *in vivo*. *In vitro* studies, using purified preparations of O-acetylserine sulfhydrylase A, revealed greater losses of triaazyloylase activity than sulfhydrylase activity in the enzymes from both *cysK* mutants. Resistance to 1,2,4-triazole apparently can arise from mutations leading to a preferential loss of triaazyloylase activity or from mutations which diminish both activities to the extent that high concentrations of O-acetyl-l-serine and sulfide accumulate behind the sulfhydrylase reaction.

* This investigation was supported by Public Health Service Grant AM-12828 from the National Institute of Arthritis and Metabolic Diseases.
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The growth of *Salmonella typhimurium* is inhibited by 1,2,4-triazole (1). Although the exact mechanism by which this inhibition occurs has not been established, previous studies have shown that the effect of 1,2,4-triazole can be overcome by the single addition of L-cysteine, sulfite, sulfide, L-serine, L-methionine, or O-acetyl-L-serine to the growth medium (1, 2). One obvious, common denominator to all of these compounds is L-cysteine itself, for sulfite and sulfide are readily utilized precursors of the sulfur moiety of this amino acid (3), L-serine contributes its carbon skeleton to that of L-cysteine (4), and L-methionine spares the L-cysteine requirements of cysteine auxotrophs by about 50% (5). O-Acetyl-L-serine is not only a direct precursor of L-cysteine in *S. typhimurium* (4, 6, 7), but also acts as an inducer of the enzymes responsible for the synthesis of sulfide from inorganic sulfate (8-10).

Evidence suggesting that 1,2,4-triazole may interfere with one or both of these functions of O-acetyl-L-serine originates from the observation that mutants partially defective in their ability to synthesize the latter are unusually sensitive to the action of 1,2,4-triazole (2). Furthermore, in cells grown on sulfate as the sole sulfur source, 1,2,4-triazole prevents the induction of sulfate permease, ATP sulfurylase, and adenine 5'-phosphosulfate kinase by O-acetyl-L-serine (2). 1,2,4-Triazole-resistant, mutant strains of the types *trzA* and *trzB* have been shown to be insensitive to this anti-inducer property of 1,2,4-triazole, and when grown on sulfate in the absence of this inhibitor, such strains are slightly more depressed than wild type for certain of the cysteine biosynthetic enzymes (11).

We have recently demonstrated that *trzA* strains bear mutations in the structural gene for O-acetylserine sulfhydrylase A, and have proposed that this gene locus be designated *cysK* (12). The prototrophic phenotype of *cysK* strains is thought to be due to the presence in *S. typhimurium* of a second sulfhydrylase, O-acetylserine sulfhydrylase B (13). *TrzB* strains also have very low levels of O-acetylserine sulfhydrylase A and have genetic characteristics which suggest that they bear the *cysK* locus on a plasmid (11, 12, 14). The fact that resistance to 1,2,4-triazole results from a loss of O-acetylserine sulfhydrylase A activity lends additional support to the notion that 1,2,4-triazole inhibits growth either by interfering with the production or utilization of O-acetyl-l-serine or by otherwise preventing the induction of the enzymes of the cysteine biosynthetic pathway by O-acetyl-l-serine.

In this report, we present our finding that in the presence of O-acetylserine sulfhydrylase A, 1,2,4-triazole reacts with O-
acetyl-L-serine to form a 1,2,4-triazole-substituted derivative of alanine. Evidence is presented which indicates that this reaction occurs to a significant extent in vivo, and is probably responsible for the ability of 1,2,4-triazole to inhibit the growth of wild type S. typhimurium.

EXPERIMENTAL procedure

Materials—O-Acetyl-L-serine was synthesized by the method of Sakami and Toennis (15). 1,2,4-Triazole and adenosine 5'-phosphosulfate were purchased from Sigma, and 1,2,4-triazole-3-alanine from Fox Chemical Co. was a gift from Dr. P. E. Ams. 1-[14C]Serine and 1-[35S]Serine, and N-acetyl-L-serine, were purchased from New England Nuclear. Purified serine transacetylase (as cysteine synthetase) and O-acetylsereine sulfhydrylase A from wild type and mutant strains were prepared as previously described (6, 7, 12). For all enzymes described in this communication, 1 unit of activity is defined as that amount catalyzing the reaction of 1 μmol/min of substrate under the stated assay conditions.

Bacterial Methods—Wild-type Salmonella typhimurium 172 and the previously described cykK mutant strains DW130 (cykK1751) and DW132 (trpA160, pyrF146, cyk1752) (12) were grown in a modified minimal salt medium (10) containing 0.6 mM sulfate as the sole sulfur source and 5 g of glucose/liter. Uracil, 10 mg/liter, and l-tryptophan, 50 mg/liter, were added for growth of strain DW132, and solid medium was prepared by the addition of 1.5 g of agar/liter. The minimal salts medium was adjusted to pH 7.2 and used as the growth medium. Resistance to 1,2,4-triazole was determined by scoring for growth of bacteria on plates of minimal salts medium containing 50 mg/liter. For all enzymes described in this communication, 1 unit of activity is defined as that amount catalyzing the reaction of 1 μmol/min of substrate under the stated assay conditions.

Assay for O-Acetyl L-serine—O-Acetyl-L-serine was determined by incubating samples with an excess of sulfide in the presence of a large amount of O-acetylsereine sulfhydrylase A, and measuring the amount of cysteine formed. A solution containing 10 to 100 μmol of O-acetyl-L-serine was added to a 13 x 100 mm test tube containing 2 units of highly purified O-acetylsereine sulfhydrylase A, and the volume was adjusted to 0.1 ml with water. Following the addition of 0.10 ml of 0.2 M Tris-HCl, pH 7.2, containing 1 mM Na2EDTA and 6 mM Na2S, the tube was cooled and incubated at 25° for 15 min. The reaction was terminated by the addition of the reagents used to assay for aliphatic thiols in the routine assay for O-acetylsereine sulfhydrylase A activity (6), and the amount of cysteine formed was determined spectrophotometrically. Using gravimetrically standardized solutions of O-acetyl-L-serine, the amounts of cysteine formed were found to be 92 to 96% of those expected theoretically, and were linearly proportional to the amounts of added substrate. 1,2,4-Triazole at concentrations as high as 30 mM does not interfere with this assay.

Synthesis of Radiolabeled Compound TS—A mixture was prepared containing 75 μmol of Tris-HCl, pH 7.6; 0.09 μmol of L-[14C]serine (115 Ci/mmol); 0.5 μmol of acetyl-CoA; 20 μmol of 1,2,4-triazole; 0.7 μl of purified serine transacetylase (as cysteine synthetase); and 28 units of purified wild-type O-acetylsereine sulfhydrylase A in a final volume of 0.75 ml. The reaction was allowed to proceed for 30 min at 25°, at which time the solution was titrated to pH 11 with 1 N NaOH to convert any remaining O-acetyl-L-serine to N-acetyl-L-serine. After 10 min, the solution was diluted to 10 ml of 0.01 N HCl, and sufficient 6 N HCl was added to give a final pH of 2. This material was applied to a 5-ml column of AG 50W-X8-H+ 200 to 400 mesh resin, which was then washed with 20 ml of water. The absorbed radiolabel was eluted with 1 N NH4OH, concentrated to a small volume, and purified by high voltage electrophoresis for 4 hours on Whatman No. 1 paper in 0.04 M pyridine acetate, pH 3.6, at 50 volts/cm. Compound TS was localized by spraying with 0.2% ninhydrin in ethanol. Ninhydrin-reactive product was then determined by adding 0.1 ml of 7 M acetic acid (to neutralize the alkali) and 2.4 ml of ninhydrin reagent (19), and then heating in a boiling water bath for 20 min. After cooling, the absorbance at 570 nm was measured, and the concentration of product formed was calculated using an extinction coefficient determined for purified product (Compound TS) in an identical assay. Appropriate blanks were used to correct for the amount of color attributable to Tris buffer and to bovine serum albumin in our reaction mixture, and by a small contaminant of L-serine in our O-acetylsereine-l-serine. 1,2,4-Triazole at concentrations as high as 50 mM neither contributed to nor interfered with color development.

Using this assay, the amount of ninhydrin-reactive material enzymatically produced was linearly proportional to the time of incubation for 15 min and to the amount of added enzyme up to at least 1.8 mM product formation.

The assay used for the enzymatic synthesis of L-cysteine from O-acetyl-L-serine and sulfide has been described (6).

Other Methods—Thin layer chromatography was performed on 250 μm thick plates of Silica Gel G obtained from Analtech Inc. 1,2,4-Triazole and N-acetylsereine were detected on thin layer plates, and paper electropherograms using the chloride/starch/dielectric iodide procedure of Rydon and Smith (20), and ninhydrin-reactive compounds were localized by spraying with 0.2% ninhydrin in ethanol. Autoradiography was performed as described previously (4).

Radiolabel was determined by mixing aqueous samples with a toluene-based scintillation fluid containing Triton X-100 (21) and counting in a Mark I scintillation counter at 80% efficiency for both 14C and 35S. All counts were corrected for quench using an external standard. Proton NMR spectroscopy at 100 MHz was performed using a JOELCO model MH-100 spectrometer. Chemical shifts were calculated downward from an internal tetramethylsilane standard.

Protein was determined by the method of Lowry et al. (22) using bovine serum albumin as a standard, and glutathione was assayed by a procedure which detects both the reduced and oxidized forms of this compound (23).

RESULTS

Preliminary experiments showed that 1,2,4-triazole at concentrations as high as 50 mM did not inhibit O-acetylsereine
Sulfhydrylase A activity when assayed at O-acetyl-L-serine concentrations of 1.0 to 100 mM and at sulfide concentrations of 0.5 to 3 mM. However, when 1,2,4-triazole and O-acetyl-L-serine were incubated with enzyme in the absence of sulfide, a time-dependent loss of O-acetyl-L-serine was noted. The rate of consumption of this substrate was found to be constant with time between O-acetyl-L-serine concentrations of 1.0 and 0.3 mM (Fig. 1), and directly proportional to the concentrations of enzyme and 1,2,4-triazole (Fig. 2).

Semiquantitative analyses of such reaction mixtures by thin layer chromatography (Table I) also revealed a time-dependent loss of O-acetyl-L-serine together with the appearance of a new ninhydrin-reactive compound distinct from serine and the ninhydrin-unreactive compounds, N-acetylserine and 1,2,4-triazole. In reaction mixtures containing large amounts of enzyme and O-acetyl-L-serine in molar excess over 1,2,4-triazole, a decrease in the latter compound also was noted with time. We inferred from these data that O-acetylserine sulfhydrylase A catalyzes a reaction between O-acetyl-L-serine and 1,2,4-triazole giving a ninhydrin-reactive product, which we provisionally designated Compound TS. The enzymatic synthesis and purification of gram quantities of this material were accomplished as described below.

Preparation and Characterization of Compound TS—A solution was prepared containing 60 mmol of 1,2,4-triazole and 20 mmol of O-acetyl-L-serine in 100 ml of water, and, after adjustment of the pH to 7.2 with 0.5 M triethylamine, the reaction was started by the addition of 3 mg (3450 units) of highly purified, wild type O-acetylserine sulfhydrylase A in a small volume of 0.1 M Tris-HCl, pH 7.6. This mixture was maintained at pH 7.0 to 7.4 by the frequent addition of 0.5 M triethylamine, and after 1 hour at 23°C, an additional 20 mmol of dry O-acetyl-L-serine and 1 mg of enzyme were added. After another hour of incubation, the reaction was terminated by adjusting the pH to 9.0 with triethylamine. The solution was evaporated to dryness in a rotary evaporator at 30°C, following which the residue was extracted with 60 ml of warm water and filtered. Five volumes of ethanol were added to the filtrate, and, after storage for 16 hours at -20°C, the resultant precipitate was collected by filtration. The precipitate was washed with cold ethanol and air dried, giving 3.80 g of white crystalline material. This product was dissolved in 30 ml of warm water and recrystallized by the addition of 2 volumes of cold ethanol, followed by overnight storage at -20°C. The final yield was 2.66 g.

The crystalline product has a melting point of 255-257°C (with decomposition), and, after either thin layer chromatography in several solvent systems, or paper electrophoresis at pH 1.9 and at pH 3.6, gives a single spot reactive to both ninhydrin and the chlorine/starch/potassium iodide reagent (20). Good separations between Compound TS, L-serine, O-acetyl-L-serine, N-acetyl-L-serine, L-cystine, and 1,2,4-triazole can be achieved using the systems noted in Table I.

Acid-base titration curves at 23°C between pH 1 and pH 12 revealed the presence of titratable groups with pK values of 1.7 and 7.8 for Compound TS, 2.1 and 9.2 for L-serine, and 1.8 and 10.2 for 1,2,4-triazole. The ninhydrin reactivity of Compound TS and the pK of 7.8 indicate that the amino group of the serine-derived portion of this compound is free, a conclusion with which the infrared absorption spectrum is compatible. The infrared absorption spectrum of Compound TS also shows an intense, broad band at 1600 cm⁻¹, characteristic of a free carboxylate group, which very likely accounts for the pK of 2.1.
From these data and the fact that Compound TS is formed from O-acetyl-L-serine and 1,2,4-triazole by an enzyme which normally effects a substitution at the β carbon atom of serine, it seems most likely that this product is a 1,2,4-triazoylalanine. The elemental analysis agrees quite well with this possibility.

C₆H₈N₃O₃
Calculated: C 38.46, H 5.16, N 35.88
Found: C 38.3, H 5.26, N 35.7

Three possible 1,2,4-triazoylalanines exist in which the β carbon atom of alanine is attached to either the N-1, the N-4, or the C-3 position of 1,2,4-triazole. The C-3-substituted compound, 1,2,4-triazole-3-alanine, is known to inhibit the growth of S. typhimurium in the presence of 20 mM 3-amino-1,2,4-triazole (24). Compound TS does not inhibit S. typhimurium under these conditions, and can be separated from authentic 1,2,4-triazole-3-alanine by paper electrophoresis (Table I). Furthermore, the infrared absorption spectra of these two compounds were found to differ in many respects.

Proton nuclear magnetic resonance spectroscopy was used to differentiate between the remaining two possible structures. The proton NMR spectrum of Compound TS in D₂O at 100 MHz at 30°C is shown in Fig. 3, in which are seen the expected doublet for the methylene protons at δ 1.66 ppm, and a triplet for the α proton at δ 4.64 ppm. Two singlets at δ 88.39 ppm and 88.77 ppm also are noted, which, by exclusion, may be assigned to the C-H protons of the triazole ring. Since the ring C-3 and C-5 positions are asymmetrical, these protons would be expected to give one singlet of two protons. The finding of two singlets is predicted for the N-1-substituted derivative, in which the ring C-3 and C-5 positions are asymmetrical, and we conclude, therefore, that Compound TS is 1,2,4-triazole-1-alanine. We assume that the configuration of the alanine portion of this compound is that of L-alanine.

Kinetic Studies—Our proposed structure for Compound TS implies that 1,2,4-triazole can serve as a sulfide analogue in a reaction catalyzed by O-acetylserine sulphydrylase A, giving 1,2,4-triazole-1-alanine as a product rather than L-cysteine. Thus, we conclude that O-acetylserine sulphydrylase A also has O-acetylseryl triazoylase activity.

Since measuring the rate of consumption of O-acetyl-L-serine is a relatively insensitive and inaccurate method for determining triazoylase activity, a new assay was developed (described in detail under "Experimental Procedure"), in which the appearance of alkali-resistant, ninhydrin-reactive product is measured. This method is based on the fact that the ninhydrin-reactive substrate, O-acetyl-L-serine, is readily converted to its ninhydrin-unreactive isomer, N-acetyl-L-serine, by brief exposure to an alkaline pH, while the product of the triazoylase reaction is unaffected by such treatment. Using this assay with wild type O-acetylserine sulphydrylase A, kinetic experiments confirmed the conclusions drawn from experiments in which substrate disappearance was measured. The rate of the triazoylase reaction was found to be first order with regard to 1,2,4-triazole at concentrations as high as 50 mM (2 mM O-acetyl-L-serine), and zero order or saturated for O-acetyl-L-serine at concentrations as low as 0.5 mM (20 mM 1,2,4-triazole).

Under our standard assay conditions of 2 mM O-acetyl-L-serine and 20 mM 1,2,4-triazole, 1 unit of wild type sulphydrylase activity is equivalent to 0.0063 unit of triazoylase activity (Table II), where a unit of either enzyme activity is defined as that amount which catalyzes the formation of 1 µmol of product/min. It should be noted that the sulphydrylase is assayed under conditions of near saturation for both O-acetyl-L-serine (100 mM with a Kₘ of 4 mM) and sulfide (2.6 mM with a Kₘ < 0.5 mM), while the triazoylase reaction is saturated only for O-acetyl-L-serine.

The results of similar analyses of the purified O-acetylserine sulphydrylase A enzymes from two 1,2,4-triazole-resistant cysK strains, DW130 and DW132, are also contained in Table II. Although the mutant protein from DW130 retains 1.6% of the wild type level of sulphydrylase activity, the triazoylase activity of this enzyme is only 0.62% that of wild type. This preferential loss of triazoylase activity is even more dramatically evident in the case of the DW132 enzyme, which has 31% of wild type sulphydrylase activity, but only 1.6% of wild type triazoylase activity. Thus, while the ratio of sulphydrylase to triazoylase activity is 158 in the wild type enzyme, this ratio is 418 for the DW130 protein and 3105 for the enzyme from DW132.

Dissociation of Cysteine Synthetase—Cysteine synthetase, a bifunctional protein complex from S. typhimurium, is dissociated by low concentrations of O-acetyl-L-serine into 2 molecules of O-acetylserine sulphydrylase A and 1 molecule of...
serine transacetylase (7). Since sulfide is known to prevent this dissociation, we investigated whether 1,2,4-triazole might act in a similar manner.

The assay used for these studies has been described (7), and is based on the fact that the O-acetylserine sulfhydrylase enzyme activity of the cysteine synthetase complex is only about one-half that expected from its content of O-acetylserine sulfhydrylase A protein. The increase in enzyme activity noted after a brief preincubation with O-acetyl-L-serine is taken as a measure of the amount of dissociation of the complex to give fully active O-acetylserine sulfhydrylase A. The actual preincubation time is not crucial, because an equilibrium between fully active and partially active enzyme is reached in less than a minute after the addition of O-acetyl-L-serine. Dissociation of cysteine synthetase by the high concentration of substrate used in the actual enzyme assay is prevented by starting the reaction with the simultaneous addition of O-acetyl-L-serine and sulfide.

Although the dissociation of cysteine synthetase appears to be a complicated phenomenon, we find it convenient to analyze our data by a method based on an arbitrary mechanism in which 1 molecule of the enzyme complex reacts with 1 molecule of O-acetyl-L-serine to give an enzyme form with full activity. This activated species of enzyme is not necessarily free, dissociated O-acetylserine sulfhydrylase A. This simple scheme may be represented as:

\[ E + A = EA \]  

(1)

where \( E \) is nonactivated cysteine synthetase, \( A \) is free O-acetyl-L-serine (always in large excess over total enzyme), and \( EA \) is "activated enzyme" containing 1 mole of bound O-acetyl-L-serine. By analogy with the derivation of the Michaelis-Menten equation (25) and one of its linear transforms (26), the following expression can be derived:

\[ \frac{1}{(EA)} = \frac{K_d}{E_i(A)} + \frac{1}{E_i} \]  

(2)

where \( K_d \) is the dissociation constant for \( EA \) in Equation 1 and \( E_i \) is the sum of \( E \) and \( EA \). A double reciprocal plot of activation data can then be used to obtain apparent values for \( K_d \) (that concentration of O-acetyl-L-serine necessary for half-maximum activation) and \( E_i \) (the maximum amount of activation possible).

The data in Fig. 4 show that 1,2,4-triazole does inhibit the activation of cysteine synthetase. Double reciprocal plots of these data (Fig. 5) give apparent values for \( K_d \) which range from 0.11 mM in the absence of inhibitor to 1.6 mM at 10 mM 1,2,4-triazole, and the intersection of these plots at the same point on the vertical axis suggests that inhibition of activation is competitive with O-acetyl-L-serine. If one assumes that 2.4-triazole competes with O-acetyl-L-serine for a binding site on \( E \), our model becomes equivalent to that given for competitive inhibition of a single substrate enzyme reaction (27). The slopes of our double reciprocal plots then would be equal to \( \frac{K_d}{1 + I/K_i}E_i \), where \( I \) is the concentration of inhibitor, and \( K_i \) is an inhibition constant for 2.4-triazole in the reaction with nonactivated cysteine synthetase and O-acetyl-L-serine. In this case, a replot of slopes versus inhibitor concentration should give a straight line with a horizontal intercept equal to \(-K_i\). The straight line obtained from such a replot of our data gives a value for \( K_i \) of 1.1 mM (Fig. 5).

Direct assays of preincubation mixtures revealed that the triazolylase reaction utilized less than 15% of the O-acetyl-L-serine initially added, ruling out O-acetyl-L-serine depletion as a possible explanation for these results. Control studies showed that the inclusion of 20 mM 1,2,4-triazole or 1 mM Compound TS in the enzyme assay itself does not inhibit significantly the O-acetylserine sulfhydrylase activity of either nonactivated or previously activated cysteine synthetase, and 1 mM Compound TS neither activates nor inhibits the activation of cysteine synthetase.

**In Vivo Synthesis of Compound TS**—The addition of 4 mM 1,2,4-triazole to a dilute, exponentially growing culture of wild type *S. typhimurium* causes a decrease in growth rate, which becomes increasingly pronounced over a period of several
hours. In the experiment depicted in Fig. 6, the generation time gradually rose from 50 min to a value of 750 min within 4 hours after the addition of 1,2,4-triazole. This slow growth rate then remained constant for approximately 18 hours, at which time the culture became overgrown with spontaneously arising, mutant bacteria resistant to this inhibitor.

Analyses of the media from cultures treated with 1,2,4-triazole revealed the presence of a ninhydrin-reactive material which was shown by thin layer and ion exchange chromatography and by high voltage electrophoresis to be identical with Compound TS. This material accumulated at a rate which was approximately linear with time, and eventually reached a concentration of almost 1 mM (Fig. 6). Ninhydrin-reactive material similar to Compound TS could not be detected in control cultures lacking 1,2,4-triazole.

In order to compare the relative rates of cysteine biosynthesis in vivo with those of Compound TS, the total protein and sulfur content of exponentially growing cells were determined. A known number of bacteria grown on $^{35}$SO$_4$ as sole sulfur source were carefully harvested, washed, disrupted by sonic oscillation, and assayed for total protein, glutathione, and radiolabel. The results showed that $1.0 	imes 10^8$ cells/ml. No inhibitor (●-●); 4 mM 1,2,4-triazole (△--△). Samples of medium from the inhibitor-treated culture were assayed at various times for Compound TS (○--○).

DISCUSSION

Our results show that O-acetylseryl-$\gamma$-lyase catalyzes a reaction between O-acetyl-$\gamma$-lyase and 1,2,4-triazole,
TABLE III
Effects of 1,2,4-triazole on enzymes of cysteine biosynthesis in wild type Salmonella typhimurium

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Time 1,2,4-triazole</th>
<th>ATP sulfurylase</th>
<th>Adenosine 5'-phosphosulfate kinase</th>
<th>3-Phosphoadenosine 5'-phosphate reductase</th>
<th>Sulfite reductase</th>
<th>O-Acetylserine sulfhydrylase</th>
<th>Serine transacetylase</th>
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<td>hours</td>
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L-cysteine biosynthesis, resulting not only from the utilization of O-acetyl-L-serine in the triazolylase reaction, but perhaps also from the ability of the inhibitor to compete for enzyme. Although our in vitro studies have not demonstrated inhibition of the sulfathylase reaction by 1,2,4-triazole, it may be argued from kinetic principles that such inhibition should occur at low enough sulfide concentrations. Our in vivo studies leave little doubt that O-acetyl-L-serine is consumed at a rapid rate by the triazolylase reaction.

If sulfide and 1,2,4-triazole do compete with one another for O-acetyl-L-serine and O-acetylserase sulfhydrylase A, one would expect the resultant decrease in the rate of the sulfathylase reaction to lead to an accumulation of sulfide, which, in turn, might eventually allow the cell to overcome inhibition. Instead, we find that the degree of inhibition gradually increases with time, reaching a steady state approximately 4 hours after the addition of inhibitor. It is unlikely that the accumulation of 1,2,4-triazole-1-alanine accounts for this finding, since we have found that concentrations of this compound as high as 20 mM do not inhibit growth.

The gradual decreases in levels of several enzymes in the sulfate reduction pathway observed in 1,2,4-triazole-treated cells offer a possible explanation for the kinetics of growth inhibition noted in Fig. 6. During early exponential growth on sulfur, sulfide might be plentiful enough initially to allow the sulfathylase reaction to compete reasonably well with the triazolylase reaction. However, if the increased rate of O-acetyl-L-serine utilization were to lower significantly the intracellular concentration of this inducer, this effect eventually would give rise to decreased levels of the enzymes necessary for sulfide production, and hence to less sulfide, that substrate with which the inhibitor competes in the first place. A gradual slowing of the growth rate would result, owing to dilution and degradation of the sulfate-reducing enzymes, and the eventual extent of inhibition would be due in large part to the ability of 1,2,4-triazole to inhibit sulfide production, as well as to the capacity of this compound to compete with sulfide for O-acetyl-L-serine and enzyme.

The gradient of susceptibility to 1,2,4-triazole noted for the various cysteine biosynthetic enzymes parallels the ease with which these enzymes are repressed by growth on different sulfur sources (10). This finding is consistent with the notion that both phenomena are caused by decreases in the intracellular concentration of O-acetyl-L-serine. The striking reduction in the level of ATP sulfurylase, resulting from a 4-hour exposure to 1,2,4-triazole, is probably sufficient in itself to account for the observed decrease in growth rate. The fact that...
sulfite reductase activity was reduced by only 50% would account for the ability of exogenous sulfite to overcome inhibition.

Our data allow us to calculate that the total in vivo rate of O-acetyl-L-serine synthesis per cell mass is 2 to 3 times greater in inhibitor-treated bacteria than in control cultures. If L-serine were a limiting substrate for serine transacetylase, the ability of exogenous L-serine to overcome inhibition could be explained on the basis of an increased rate of O-acetyl-L-serine synthesis.

According to our model, mutations in cysK, the structural gene for O-acetylserine sulfhydrylase A, could lead to 1,2,4-triazole resistance in one or both of two different ways. A mutation such as is present in strain DW192, which results in a marked decrease in triazolylase activity with a relative sparing of sulfhydrylase activity, would prevent excessive O-acetyl-L-serine utilization by 1,2,4-triazole, and allow sulfide production and cysteine biosynthesis to proceed at an adequate rate in the presence of this inhibitor. In DW132, the in vitro measured loss of triazolylase activity is 20 times greater than the loss of sulfhydrylase activity, and a 74-fold decrease in the ratio of Compound TS to cysteine production is noted in vivo.

The second type of cysK mutation leading to 1,2,4-triazole resistance would be one in which both enzymic activities are severely impaired, resulting in the accumulation of O-acetyl-L-serine and sulfide behind a "metabolic block." The presence of a high concentration of sulfide at the time of 1,2,4-triazole addition would inhibit the triazolylase reaction, and the small amount of O-acetyl-L-serine consumed by the inhibitor would not lower an already elevated level of this inducer below that necessary for the synthesis of the enzymes of sulfate reduction. The cysK allele in DW130 appears to be an example of this type of mutation, and the 3700-fold decrease in the in vivo ratio of Compound TS to cysteine synthesis observed in this strain suggests that a "metabolic block" in the sulfhydrylase reaction can be very effective in overcoming 1,2,4-triazole inhibition.

Mutations in loci other than cysK are also capable of leading to 1,2,4-triazole resistance. We have recently isolated and studied a strain of S. typhimurium which appears to contain a mutation in the promoter region of cysE, the structural gene for serine transacetylase. This prototroph is resistant to 1,2,4-triazole and contains 5 times the normal, wild type level of serine transacetylase. The resistance of this strain to 1,2,4-triazole probably results from its ability to synthesize O-acetyl-L-serine at a rapid enough rate to prevent both the depletion of this substrate and the subsequent repression of the enzymes of sulfate reduction.

cysB1352 is a mutant allele of the regulatory gene cysB, which results in the constitutive expression of the cysteine biosynthetic enzymes even in strains unable to synthesize O-acetyl-L-serine (8, 10). The resistance of strains bearing this mutation (11) is easily understood on the basis of our model, and emphasizes the importance of enzyme repression during inhibition by 1,2,4-triazole.

Acknowledgments—The authors wish to thank Dr. Robert Foote and Dr. Peter Jeffs for their assistance in interpreting spectroscopic data, and Dr. Larry Fretto for performing our amino acid analyses.

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