Structure of sulfatides biosynthesized in vitro

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ABSTRACT Starting from galactose-14C-labeled phrenosine and 3'-phosphoadenosine-5'-phosphosulfate, radioactive sulfatides have been obtained in vitro with a biosynthetic system similar to the one described by McKhann and Ho (Ref. 6). It has thus been proved that exogenous cerebrosides can act as acceptors of sulfate. The specific radioactivity of the synthetic phrenosine used as precursor was sufficiently high to permit the proof of the structure of the resulting sulfatides to be done by methylation on an amount estimated at 0.1 μg. The sulfate group was found only at C-3 of galactose, the position at which it is located in sulfatides isolated from tissues. This observation indicates the specificity of the sulfotransferase involved in the in vivo synthesis of sulfatides.

SUPPLEMENTARY KEY WORDS sulfotransferase - micromethylation - phrenosine-14C synthesis

ALTHOUGH direct sulfation of cerebrosides is an easily conceived pathway for the biosynthesis of sulfatides, its unequivocal demonstration has been difficult to obtain.

Radin, Martin, and Brown (1) and Hauser (2) have shown that the in vivo incorporation of galactose-14C (1) and glucose-14C (2) is faster into cerebrosides than into sulfatides of rat brain. Moreover, the specific activity of the cerebrosides was higher, with most of the radioactivity being in the galactose moiety. These experiments are consistent with the idea that cerebrosides are precursors of sulfatides. They do not permit, however, the conclusion that sulfation occurs at the level of the complete cerebroside molecule and not at an earlier stage, for example, through galactose sulfate, UDP-galactose sulfate, or psychosine sulfate.

Goldberg (3) showed that extracts of liver, kidney, and brain catalyze the incorporation of sulfate-35S from 3'-phosphoadenosine-5'-phosphosulfate-35S (PAP35S) into lipids which were probably sulfatides. However, under the conditions used by this author sulfation of psychosine or cerebrosides could not be observed.

More recently, Balasubramanian and Bachhawat (4) described the formation of sulfatides when radioactive PAPS was added to brain preparations. However, they emphasized the point that exogenous cerebrosides do not seem to act as sulfate acceptors and proposed that the acceptor is a protein-bound, galactose-containing substance, present in their enzyme preparation. At about the same time, McKhann and coworkers (5, 6) succeeded in showing that, when a micromolar fraction of rat brain or kidney was used as the enzyme source, the addition of exogenous cerebrosides resulted in a three-fold increase in incorporation of 35S into sulfatides from PAP35S.

Cumar, Barra, Maccioni, and Caputto (7) provided further evidence that exogenous cerebrosides accept sulfate-35S from PAP35S. They also showed that other glycolipids and water-soluble, galactose-containing substances were sulfated by brain preparations from young rats. Indirect evidence was obtained consistent with the assumption that the sulfate was attached at C-3 of galactose in sulfatides under the experimental conditions used.

Because of the seemingly contradictory findings of Balasubramanian and McKhann and the absence of definite proof for the structure of the newly formed sulfatides, owing to the very small amounts of material produced, the present work was undertaken. In order
to demonstrate whether exogenous cerebrosides can act as precursors in the biosynthesis of sulfatides and whether the sulfate becomes attached to the galactose moiety at C-3 as it is in naturally occurring sulfatides, phrenosine, synthesized from \(^{14}\)C-labeled galactose, and PAPS, rather than unlabeled cerebroside and PAP\(^{38}\)S, were used in experiments analogous to those described by McKhann and Ho (6) and the structure of the product was established by methylation.

**MATERIALS**

Silica gel for column chromatography, grade 950, 60–200 mesh, was obtained from Davison Chemical, Baltimore, Md. Thin-layer chromatography was done on plates coated with Silica Gel G (Uniplate; Analtech, Inc., Wilmington, Del.). PAP\(^{38}\)S was purchased from New England Nuclear Corp., Boston, Mass. D-Galactose-1-\(^{14}\)C was obtained from International Chemical and Nuclear Corp., Irvine, Calif. Radioautography was done on Kodak No-Screen Medical X-ray film. Elemental analyses were performed by Midwest Microlab, Inc., Indianapolis, Ind.

**EXPERIMENTAL**

The labeled cerebrosides were synthesized by condensation of 3-O-benzoyl-ceramide with radioactive tetra-O-acetylhexosyl bromide (8). The 3-O-benzoyl-ceramide was synthesized through the 1-O-trityl derivative starting from ceramide prepared by degradation of bovine brain phrenosine (9). It thus had the natural complement of fatty acids and sphingosine bases characteristic of these cerebrosides.

**Preparation of Phrenosine and Cerasine**

The cerebrosides were obtained from a washed lower phase of a lipid extract of crudely dissected bovine brain white matter (10). The solvents were evaporated under vacuum and the residue (10 g) was treated with alkali and acid according to Schmidt, Benotti, Hershman, and Thannhauser (11), in order to hydrolyze phosphatides and plasmalogens. The insoluble portion was collected on a filter (Whatman No. 54 paper) under a slight vacuum and partially dried by suction overnight. The brown paste was slurried in 10–20 times its weight of \(\pi\)-propanol at room temperature and the suspension was kept for 24 hr. The nearly white insoluble fraction was collected on a filter and washed with \(\pi\)-propanol; the yield was 3.6 g. TLC showed that this material consisted mainly of phrenosine and a smaller amount of cerasine. Separation and purification of the cerebrosides was done by chromatography on a silicic acid-Celite column essentially according to the procedure of Carter, Rothfus, and Gigg (9). The sample was applied to the column in solution in a minimum volume of hot chloroform-methanol 10:1 to which enough Celite analytical filter aid was added to make a soft paste. In this way, phrenosine, which crystallizes on cooling, did not clog the top of the column. Elution was carried out with chloroform-methanol 10:1 and the collected fractions were monitored by TLC. Fractions containing cerasine or phrenosine, respectively, were pooled and evaporated, and the solids were recrystallized from hot methanol. TLC indicated that the resulting cerebrosides were free of contaminants. They were identified by the characteristic GLC pattern of the fatty acids (12), TLC of the sphingosine bases (13), and quantitative estimation of the galactose (14) adapted to a microscale. 1 mole of hexose was found per mole of cerebrosides. Phrenosine gave the infrared spectrum characteristic for these cerebrosides (8).

**Preparation of Ceramide from Phrenosine**

Phrenosine ceramide was obtained from phrenosine by the procedure of Carter et al. (9). This involved periodic acid oxidation, reduction with sodium borohydride, and hydrolysis with weak acid without isolation of intermediate products. The ceramide was purified by column chromatography on 200 times its weight of silica gel. The column was prepared in chloroform. Pure chloroform slowly eluted an unidentified impurity; phrenosine ceramide was then eluted with chloroform-methanol 19:1. Phrenosine ceramide was shown to be homogeneous by TLC. Its fatty acid and sphingosine patterns determined by GLC and TLC were identical with those of the phrenosine used as starting material, and no carbohydrate was detected on TLC by the anthrone-sulfuric acid reagent.

**1-O-Trityl-ceramide**

To a solution of phrenosine ceramide (1 g) in anhydrous pyridine (55 ml), chlorotriphenylmethane (500 mg) was added. The mixture was shaken until it was homogeneous and it was then heated at 70°C for 20 hr. After cooling, a small piece of ice was added to decompose the excess reagent, and after 1 hr the solution was poured onto crushed ice. The mixture was filtered through a layer of Celite; the collected gummy precipitate was washed with water and redissolved on the filter with 250 ml of chloroform-methanol 2:1. The solution was evaporated to dryness under vacuum and the remaining water was codistilled with toluene-ethanol 1:1. The oily residue was chromatographed on a column of 100 g of silica gel prepared in benzene. Pure benzene eluted triphenylcarbinol, and benzene-ether 9:1 eluted the trityl ether as an oil. The yield was 1.210 g (88%). The product appeared homogeneous by TLC in benzene-ether 4:1;
the plates were sprayed with ammonium molybdate-
HClO4 reagent (15).

3-O-Benzoyl-N-(2'-O-benzoyl-acyl)-1-O-
trityl-sphingosine
To an ice-cold solution of 1-O-trityl-ceramide (1.07 g) in anhydrous pyridine (9.8 ml), benzoyl chloride (0.59 ml) was added. The mixture was kept for 18 hr at room temperature. A small piece of ice was then added and after 1 hr the mixture was poured onto crushed ice. When the ice had melted, the oily product was extracted with ether and the solution was washed once with cold 2 N hydrochloric acid, twice with cold saturated sodium bicarbonate, and once with water. After drying over anhydrous sodium sulfate, the solution was evaporated, leaving an oil which gave a single spot on TLC in benzene-ether 9:1.

3-O-Benzoyl-N-(2'-O-benzoyl-acyl)-sphingosine
The preceding product (1.0 g), without further purification, was heated for 2 hr on a boiling water bath in 50 ml of 90% acetic acid. The resulting clear solution was evaporated to dryness, and the last traces of acid were eliminated by codistillation with toluene-ethanol 1:1. The semicrystalline product was shown by TLC in benzene-ether 9:1. The product was eluted with benzene-ether 9:1. Since the fatty acid was hydroxylinoceric acid; calculated: C, 76.93; H, 10.49 (assuming the fatty acid to be hydroxylinoceric acid); found: C, 76.90; H, 10.54

Preparation of Tetra-O-acetyl-galactopyranosyl-
1-14C Bromide
The following procedure was devised in order to prepare this labeled compound with high specific activity, starting from submilligram amounts of galactose-14C without dilution.

Conical tubes, 11 cm long, were made from 12-mm-
o.d. borosilicate glass tubing pulled at one end to form a 2.5-cm-long, tapered, thick-walled bottom and constricted at the other end by turning it in the flame until the opening was reduced to 5 mm in diameter. The lip thus formed prevents splashing of the radioactive contents when the tubes are agitated with a Vortex mixer.

In such a tube the solution of galactose-1-14C (165 µCi in 540 µg) was evaporated to dryness under a stream of nitrogen, and the residue was dried under vacuum. Acetic anhydride (0.16 ml) and, after cooling in an ice bath, 60% perchloric acid (about 3 µl) were added. The tube was stoppered with a rubber stopper, shaken occasionally, and kept at 40°C for 1 hr. The solution was then cooled to 0°C, saturated with anhydrous HBr, and kept at room temperature for 2 hr. The gas was bubbled through the solution by way of a glass capillary which passed through a plug of glass wool.

In order to perform the extraction and washings of the acetylbromogalactose with minimum decomposition, four conical tubes of the model described above, and containing 2 ml of water each, were precooled in an ice bath. 1 ml of chloroform was added to the reaction mixture cooled to 0°C, followed by 2 ml of ice-cold water. The tube was agitated with a Vortex mixer for 2 to 3 sec and the contents were centrifuged for a few seconds to separate the phases. The lower phase was aspirated as rapidly as possible, using a pipette with capillary tip adapted to a syringe, and transferred into the first tube containing water. These operations were repeated four times. The lower phase was transferred into a tube containing four beads of 8-mesh CaCl2 for drying. A second extraction was carried out in the same way with 1 ml of fresh chloroform added to the first tube and transferred through the series. The last lower phase was combined with the first chloroform extract. After drying, the chloroform solution was transferred into another tube and evaporated to dryness under a stream of dry nitrogen at room temperature; the residue was kept under vacuum at -10°C in a desiccator containing CaCl2 and NaOH.

Condensation of 3-O-Benzoyl-N-(2'-O-benzoyl-acyl)-
sphingosine with Tetra-O-acetyl-galactopyranosyl-1-
14C Bromide
Nitromethane (100 µl) and benzene (100 µl) were combined in a test tube (4 cm long and 0.5 cm i.d.) containing a small magnetic flea. The tube was placed in an aluminum block kept at 100°C on a magnetic stirrer-hot plate. When the volume of solvents was reduced to one-half, the heating block was cooled to 40°C. After addition of mercuric cyanide (2 mg) and ceramide derivative (2.5 mg) the acetylbromogalactose, redissolved in 50 µl of dry benzene, was added. The tube was stoppered and the mixture was stirred for 24 hr at 40°C. After cooling, the contents were transferred with 1 ml of ether into a conical tube containing 1 ml of cold saturated NaHCO3. The mixture was briefly agitated and then centrifuged; the lower aqueous phase was discarded. A second washing was done in the same way and a third with pure water. After drying over
anhydrous Na₂SO₄, the ether was evaporated under a
stream of nitrogen and the residue was dried under
vacuum.

Decacylation
To the dry material, suspended in 1 ml of methanol,
20 μl of 1 n barium methoxide in methanol was added.
The mixture was kept at 4°C overnight and then for
8 hr at room temperature. One drop of glacial acetic
acid was added, the solvents were evaporated under
nitrogen, and the residue was extracted three times with
1 ml of chloroform–methanol 2:1. After evaporation
of the solvents, the product was purified by preparative
TLC on Silica Gel G in n-propanol–5 N NH₄OH 4:1.
The phrenosine band, localized by radioautography, was
scraped off and eluted with chloroform–methanol 2:1.
The product also cochromatographed with authentic
phrenosine on Silica Gel G in chloroform–methanol–
concentrated ammonia 4:1:0.02. Its infrared spectrum
was identical to that of the natural phrenosine used as
starting material.

Preparation of PAPS
The sulfate-activating system was prepared from
Anheuser-Busch yeast according to the method de-
scribed by Robbins (16). However, since in our prep ara-
dialysis of the final enzyme solution resulted in
nearly complete loss of activity, this step was omitted.
The undialyzed solution could be kept for at least a week
at −10°C without loss of activity. With this enzyme
system the preparation of PAPS was carried out essen-
tially as described by Robbins (17), except that PAPS
was separated from other anions by elution from a
column of AG 1-X8, 200-400 mesh, with a concentra-
tion gradient of NaCl (18).

Preparation of Sulfotransferase
The enzyme preparation used was the supernatant solu-
tion of microsomes, sonicated in sodium deoxycholate
and obtained from the kidneys of adult rats (Charles
River Breeding Laboratories, Inc., Wilmington, Mass.)
by the method of McKhann and Ho (6).

Biosynthesis of Galactose-1-14C-labeled Sulfatides
McKhann and Ho (6) carried out the biosynthetic reac-
tion in a reaction mixture containing an excess of
acceptor cerebrosides and a level of PAPS which,
although not explicitly stated, must have been very low.
Since for the eventual characterization of the methylated
galactose, derived from the biosynthesized sulfatides,
it was essential to use phrenosine of very high specific
activity as acceptor, preliminary experiments were
performed using PAPS to test different concentrations
of the two substrates. The incubation conditions selected
were: phrenosine, 1–2 × 10⁶ cpm, approximately 20
nmoles, suspended in 50 μl of 1% Brij 96; imidazole–
HCl buffer, 0.1 M, pH 7.4; K₂SO₄, 0.8 mM; PAPS,
0.45–1.35 mM; and sulfotransferase preparation, 50 μl.
The total volume was 0.5 ml. Incubation was for 2 hr
at 37°C and was stopped by the addition of 10 ml of
chloroform–methanol 2:1.

After addition of 50 μg of sulfatides, the extract was
washed once with 0.88% aqueous KCl and once with
theoretical upper phase containing 0.375% KCl (10).
The lower phase was dried and chromatographed on
Silica Gel G plates in n-propanol–5 N NH₄OH 4:1.
After localization by radioautography, the sulfatide
area was scraped from the plate and the lipid was eluted
from the silica gel with several portions of chloroform–
methanol 1:1, with warming at 37°C. The product also
cocromatographed with authentic sulfatides in chloro-
form–methanol–concentrated ammonia 4:1:0.02, a sys-
tem in which sulfatides travel slower than cerebrosides.
In the propanol–ammonia solvent system the opposite
is true. Eluted sulfatide samples from several incubations
were combined for methylation.

Methylation
The radioactive sulfatides, mixed with an additional
250 μg of unlabeled sulfatides from bovine brain, were
methylated with methyl iodide in the presence of di-
methylsulfinyl carbaniion (19); the methylated hexose
was isolated as previously described (20), except that
the whole procedure was carried out on a scale four
times smaller. The methylated galactose was identified
by comparison on TLC with standards of tetramethyl
galactopyranose and the four isomeric trimethyl galacto-
pyranoses. The plates were developed with ace tone–
water–conc. ammonia 250:3:1.5; after drying they
were subjected to radioautography. The spots were
visualized with aniline phthalate or anthrone–sulfuric
acid spray reagents. The standards were run in separate
lanes adjacent to the unknown or, alternatively, 2,3,4,6-
trimethyl galactoses were mixed with the unknown;
the nonradioactive 2,4,6-trimethyl galactose originating
from the added sulfatides constituted an internal
standard (Fig. 1).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Only one radioactive spot was observed on the radio-
autogram of the unknown. It coincided in position and
shape with 2,4,6-trimethyl galactose (Fig. 1). No
radioactivity was detected at the level of the other stan-
dards. This indicates that C-3 of galactose became blocked
as the result of the incubation with PAPS and sulfotrans-
ferase, since phrenosine yields only 2,3,4,6-tetra-
methyl galactose on methylation.
radioactivity incorporated into the sulfatide fraction used as starting material. The fact that sulfate was of this reaction is very small, about 0.1%, based on the unknown was revealed by radioautography and anthrone-H₂SO₄ reagent, giving spots of identical shape and location with both methods of detection.

It is thus established that under the conditions used by McKhann and Ho (6) exogenous phrenosine can accept sulfate from PAPS to form sulfatides. The yield of this reaction is very small, about 0.1%, based on the radioactivity incorporated into the sulfatide fraction (i.e., 2400 cpm out of 1.8 × 10⁶ cpm in the phrenosine used as starting material). The fact that sulfate was attached to C-3 of galactose, the position it occupies in natural sulfatides (21, 22), indicates the specificity of the sulfotransferase involved. Analogous experiments starting with synthetic radioactive phrenosine are in progress.

The present demonstration does not exclude the proposition of Balasubramanian and Bachhawat (4) that protein-bound cerebrosides might be the natural precursors of sulfatides.

It is of technical interest that the proof of structure could be performed on an amount of product on the order of 0.1 nmole, corresponding to about 20 ng of galactose. This was made possible by the use of labeled phrenosine of high specific activity, the miniaturization of the chemical manipulations, and the fact that the methylation procedure of Hakomori (19) readily goes to completion. This first example opens the way towards the progress in natural sulfatides (21, 22), indicates the specificity of other biosynthesized glycolipids for which radioactive precursors may become available. Indeed, the usual means of identification of the product, analysis of constituents and chromatography of products of partial hydrolysis, while giving important data, leave uncertainty concerning possible structural differences that may be of great biological significance but would not be noticed by such techniques.

The authors wish to acknowledge the skillful technical assistance of Mrs. Lynne Osborn and Mrs. Monique Van Houtte. They also thank Dr. J. Silberr for the gift of a sample of PAP₈S.

This work was supported by U.S. Public Health Service Grants NS 06370, NS 02840, NS 00130, and FR 05484.

*Manuscript received 29 October 1970; accepted 14 January 1971.*

**References**


