

Studies on the Oxidative Stress

Response of

Porphyromonas gingivalis



Studies on the Oxidative Stress Response
of *Porphyromonas gingivalis*

A thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for
admission to the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

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Signed Statement

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Summary

Porphyromonas gingivalis is a Gram-negative anaerobic cocco-bacillus strongly implicated in the aetiology of adult periodontitis. During the colonisation of the oral cavity it is likely that *P. gingivalis* encounters different sources of oxidative stress. Adaptation to this challenge is necessary for the microorganism to survive and establish in the periodontal environment. The aim of the present study was, therefore, to investigate the oxidative stress survival mechanisms of *P. gingivalis*.

P. gingivalis was grown under different oxygenated environments in a continuous culture system under conditions of haemin-limitation and excess. Steady state was achieved under moderately oxygenated atmospheres, although a decrease in cell viability was observed as the oxygen concentration in the gas mixture increased. Haemin-excess conditions seemed to increase the ability of a culture to cope with a determined oxygen concentration. The main change in fermentation end-products characterising oxygen stressed cultures was an increase in the production of acetate. Scanning electron micrographs showed that oxygen triggers a change in the cell shape from a cocco-bacillary to a short rod.

The effect of oxygen on the expression of cysteine proteinases, critical virulence factors of *P. gingivalis*, was assayed in supernatants and cell fractions and further analysed by 2-D gel electrophoresis. Both evaluations showed an increase in the cell-associated Arg-gingipain and a decrease in Lys-gingipain in oxygen stressed cells.

Assays for NADH oxidase, NADH peroxidase and superoxide dismutase in cell extracts showed an increase in their activities as the environment became more

oxygenated. The NADH oxidase activity was partially purified and characterised and, surprisingly, the isolated protein was identified as a 4-hydroxybutyryl-CoA dehydratase. This is the first report of NADH oxidase activity associated with this enzyme.

The existence of other open reading frames in the *P. gingivalis* genome sequence that would encode for proteins with the potential for NADH oxidase/peroxidase activity was further investigated. The transcription product of the identified ORFs, encoding for a possible NADH oxidase (Nox) and an alkyl hydroperoxide reductase (AhpF-C), was analysed under anaerobic and oxygenated environments by northern blot hybridization. No mRNA for Nox was detected but AhpF-C was expressed constitutively in anaerobic cells and slightly increased under oxygenated conditions.

Furthermore, the possibility of the existence of a common transcriptional switch for oxidative stress-related proteins was investigated. A homologue of OxyR, a redox-sensitive transcriptional activator, was identified in the *P. gingivalis* genome sequence and an OxyR-disrupted mutant was constructed. Mutants exhibited decreased tolerance to air and hydrogen peroxide and were characterised by the absence of alkyl hydroperoxide reductase mRNA, suggesting a control of OxyR over its expression.

The second part of this research project consisted of studies of *P. gingivalis* in co-culture with *F. nucleatum*, under oxygenated environments. These studies showed that not only does *F. nucleatum* have a much higher tolerance to oxygen than *P. gingivalis* but, in co-culture, it can protect the latter organism and increase its ability to survive under oxygenated conditions. Additionally, it was observed

that *F. nucleatum* is able to generate a capnophilic environment essential for the growth of *P. gingivalis*.

In conclusion, this study showed that *P. gingivalis* possesses basic mechanisms to cope with moderate or transient oxidative stress while it probably relies on the protection of other organisms, like *F. nucleatum*, to survive and replicate in highly oxygenated atmospheres.

Contents

SIGNED STATEMENT	III
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	IV
SUMMARY.....	VI
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 PERIODONTAL DISEASES.....	2
1.2 <i>PORPHYROMONAS GINGIVALIS</i>	3
1.2.1 <i>General considerations</i>	3
1.2.2 <i>Nutritional requirements and cytotoxic end-product formation</i>	5
1.2.3 <i>Proteinases</i>	6
1.2.4 <i>Interactions of P. gingivalis with epithelial cells and other microorganisms</i>	10
1.3 REGULATION OF GENE EXPRESSION IN <i>P. GINGIVALIS</i>	12
1.4 OXYGEN TOXICITY TO ANAEROBES AND MICROBIAL RESPONSE TO OXYGEN	15
1.4.1 <i>Oxygen toxicity to anaerobes</i>	15
1.4.2 <i>Anti-oxidant enzymes</i>	18
1.4.3 <i>Global regulation of the anti-oxidant response</i>	23
1.5 OXYGEN AS A ENVIRONMENTAL CUE IN THE ORAL ENVIRONMENT AND THE OXIDATIVE STRESS RESPONSE OF <i>P. GINGIVALIS</i>	25
1.6 SUMMARY AND AIMS	31
2. CHARACTERISATION OF THE GROWTH OF <i>P. GINGIVALIS</i> UNDER OXYGENATED ENVIRONMENTS.....	34
2.1 EFFECT OF EXPOSURE TO OXYGEN ON THE VIABILITY OF INDIVIDUAL CELLS.....	35
2.1.1 <i>Methods</i>	35
2.1.2 <i>Results</i>	36
2.2 EFFECT OF OXYGEN ON <i>P. GINGIVALIS</i> GROWN IN CONTINUOUS CULTURE.....	39
2.2.1 <i>Methods</i>	39

2.2.1.1 Microorganism and maintenance of the strain.....	39
2.2.1.2 Continuous culture growth conditions.....	39
2.2.1.3 Statistical Analysis.....	40
2.2.2 <i>Results and discussion</i>	41
2.3 EFFECT OF HAEMIN ON THE CONTINUOUS CULTURE GROWTH AND OXYGEN TOLERANCE	44
2.3.1 <i>Determination of the optimum haemin concentration to be used</i>	45
2.3.1.1 Methods.....	45
2.3.1.2 Results.....	45
2.3.2 <i>Effect of oxygen on the haemin-limited continuous culture growth of P. gingivalis</i>	46
2.3.2.1 Methods.....	46
2.3.2.2 Results and discussion.....	47
2.4 MORPHOLOGICAL CHANGES IN <i>P. GINGIVALIS</i> GROWN UNDER ANAEROBIC AND OXYGENATED ENVIRONMENTS.....	49
2.4.1 <i>SEM analysis</i>	49
2.4.1.1 Methods.....	49
2.4.1.2 Results.....	49
2.4.2 <i>Analysis of capsule production</i>	51
2.4.2.1 Methods.....	51
2.4.2.2 Results.....	51
2.5 EFFECT OF OXYGEN ON THE FORMATION OF ACIDIC METABOLIC END-PRODUCTS.....	51
2.5.1 <i>Methods</i>	51
2.5.2 <i>Results</i>	52
2.6 SUMMARY OF RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.....	56
3. EFFECT OF OXYGEN ON <i>P. GINGIVALIS</i> CYSTEINE PROTEINASES	
.....	62
3.1 EFFECT OF OXYGEN ON THE ACTIVITY OF ARG- AND LYS-PROTEINASES.....	63
3.1.1 <i>Methods</i>	63
3.1.2 <i>Results and discussion</i>	64

3.2 ANALYSIS OF PROTEINASES IN <i>P. GINGIVALIS</i> OUTER MEMBRANES BY 2-D GEL ELECTROPHORESIS.....	68
3.2.1 <i>Methods</i>	68
3.2.1.1 Growth and harvest of <i>P. gingivalis</i>	68
3.2.1.2 Outer membrane preparation,	68
3.2.1.3 2D PAGE.....	69
3.2.1.4 In-gel digestion of proteins separated by 2D PAGE.....	70
3.2.1.5 Peptide mass fingerprinting (PMF).....	71
3.2.1.6 Protein identification.....	71
3.2.2 <i>Results and discussion</i>	72
3.2.2.1 Results for Arg-proteinase (RgpA and RgpB).....	73
3.2.2.2 Results for Lys-proteinase (Kgp).....	73
3.2.2.3 Other findings	74
3.3 SUMMARY OF RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.....	77
4. STUDIES ON ENZYMES INVOLVED IN THE METABOLISM OF OXYGEN BY <i>P. GINGIVALIS</i>	80
4.1 THE EFFECT OF OXYGEN ON THE ACTIVITY OF ANTI-OXIDANT ENZYMES	81
4.1.1 <i>Methods</i>	81
4.1.1.1 Preparation of crude cell extracts.....	81
4.1.1.2 Enzyme Assays.....	81
4.1.1.3 Further analysis of NADH oxidase activity.....	82
4.1.2 <i>Results and discussion</i>	83
4.1.2.1 Effect of O ₂ on the activity of anti-oxidant enzymes of <i>P. gingivalis</i> grown under haemin-excess and haemin-limited conditions.	83
4.1.2.2 Further analysis of NADH oxidase activity.....	85
4.2 ISOLATION AND CHARACTERISATION OF NADH OXIDASE ACTIVITY.....	89
4.2.1 <i>Methods</i>	89
4.2.1.1 Determination of the effect of the cysteine proteinase inhibitor TLCK on NADH oxidase activity.....	89

4.2.1.2 Growth conditions and harvesting of cells.....	90
4.2.1.3 Preparation of cell extracts.....	90
4.2.1.4 Protein content and enzyme activity determinations.	90
4.2.1.5 Ammonium sulphate fractionation.	91
4.2.1.6 Ion Exchange Chromatography (IEC).	91
4.2.1.7 Hydrophobic Interaction Chromatography (HIC).....	92
4.2.1.8 Sodium dodecyl sulphate polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis (SDS PAGE).	92
4.2.1.9 Molecular mass estimation.	93
4.2.1.10 Analysis of sample S4.....	93
4.2.1.11 Identification of the protein with NADH oxidase activity in sample S4.	94
4.2.1.12 Mass spectrometry (MS) identification of purified protein.	95
4.2.2 <i>Results and discussion</i>	95
4.2.2.1 Determination of the effect of the cysteine proteinase inhibitor TLCK on NADH oxidase activity.	95
4.2.2.2 NADH oxidase purification	96
4.2.2.3 Identification of the protein with NADH oxidase activity in sample S4.	100
4.2.2.4 Mass spectrometry identification.....	101
4.2.2.5 Analysis of NADH oxidase activity in sample S4.....	103
4.3 ANALYSIS OF PG 0625 SEQUENCE.....	106
4.3.1 <i>Gene ID</i>	106
4.3.1.1 Methods	107
4.3.1.2 Results	108
4.3.2 <i>Further evidence of NADH oxidase activity in an AbfD protein</i>	116
4.4 IDENTIFICATION OF OTHER CANDIDATE GENES RESPONSIBLE FOR NADH OXIDASE ACTIVITY IN THE <i>P. GINGIVALIS</i> GENOME SEQUENCE.....	117
4.4.1 <i>Methods</i>	118
4.4.2 <i>Results and discussion</i>	120
4.5 EXPRESSION OF NOX AND AHPF-C UNDER ANAEROBIC AND OXYGENATED ENVIRONMENTS	125
4.5.1 <i>Methods</i>	125
4.5.1.1 Growth of <i>P. gingivalis</i> W50.....	125

4.5.1.2 RNA isolation	125
4.5.1.3 Determination of RNA purity and concentration.....	126
4.5.1.4 Electrophoresis and blotting of RNA.....	126
4.5.1.5 Probe preparation.....	127
4.5.1.6 Northern hybridization and detection	129
4.5.2 <i>Results</i>	129
4.5.2.1 Expression of AhpF under anaerobic and oxygenated environments	129
4.5.2.2 Expression of Nox under anaerobic and oxygenated environments	130
4.6 SUMMARY OF RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.....	131

5. STUDIES ON POSSIBLE REGULATORY SYSTEMS OF THE OXIDATIVE STRESS RESPONSE IN *P. GINGIVALIS*141

5.1 IDENTIFICATION OF POSSIBLE TRANSCRIPTIONAL REGULATORS OF THE OXIDATIVE STRESS RESPONSE IN THE <i>P. GINGIVALIS</i> GENOME SEQUENCE.....	142
5.1.1 <i>Methods</i>	142
5.1.2 <i>Results and discussion</i>	144
5.2 CONSTRUCTION OF A <i>P. GINGIVALIS</i> OXYR-INACTIVATED MUTANT.....	146
5.2.1. <i>Methods</i>	146
5.2.1.1 Primers and <i>oxyR</i> amplification	146
5.2.1.2 Construction of an <i>oxyR::tetQ</i> DNA fragment	147
5.2.1.3 <i>P. gingivalis</i> transformation.....	148
5.2.1.4 Southern blot and PCR analysis of recombinant clones	148
5.2.2 <i>Results</i>	149
5.3 CHARACTERIZATION OF THE <i>P. GINGIVALIS</i> W50 OXYR ⁻ MUTANT.....	152
5.3.1 <i>Methods</i>	152
5.3.1.1 Effect of <i>oxyR</i> disruption on anaerobic growth.....	152
5.3.1.2 Air sensitivity on solid media of OxyR ⁻ and wild-type.....	152
5.3.1.3 H ₂ O ₂ sensitivity in liquid cultures.....	152
5.3.2 <i>Results</i>	153
5.3.2.1 Effect of <i>oxyR</i> disruption on the anaerobic growth of <i>P. gingivalis</i>	153

5.3.2.2 Air sensitivity of the OxyR ⁻ mutant	154
5.3.2.3 H ₂ O ₂ sensitivity in liquid cultures.....	155
5.4 NORTHERN BLOT ANALYSIS OF THE EXPRESSION OF AHPF-C IN <i>P. GINGIVALIS</i> W50 WILD-TYPE AND OXYR ⁻ MUTANT	161
5.4.1 Methods	161
5.4.2 Results.....	162
5.5 NADH OXIDASE ACTIVITY IN WILD-TYPE AND OXYR ⁻ CELL EXTRACTS	163
5.5.1 Methods	164
5.5.2 Results.....	164
5.6 SUMMARY OF RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.....	165
6. A COMPARISON OF THE TOLERANCES TO OXYGEN OF <i>P. GINGIVALIS</i> AND <i>FUSOBACTERIUM NUCLEATUM</i> AND THEIR INTERACTIONS AS A CONTINUOUS AERATED CO-CULTURE	172
6.1 COMPARISON OF THE TOLERANCES TO OXYGEN OF <i>P. GINGIVALIS</i> AND <i>F. NUCLEATUM</i> WHEN GROWN UNDER THE SAME CONDITIONS AS CONTINUOUS, AERATED MONOCULTURES.....	174
6.1.1 Methods	174
6.1.1.1 Microorganisms and maintenance of the strains.....	174
6.1.1.2 Growth conditions	174
6.1.1.3 Gaseous atmospheres tested.....	175
6.1.1.4 NADH oxidase and SOD activity of <i>F. nucleatum</i>	175
6.1.1.5 Fermentation end-products	176
6.1.2 Results.....	176
6.2 THE SURVIVAL OF <i>P. GINGIVALIS</i> IN OXYGENATED ENVIRONMENTS WHEN GROWN AS A CONTINUOUS AERATED CO-CULTURE WITH <i>F. NUCLEATUM</i>	180
6.2.1 Methods	180
6.2.2 Results.....	181
6.3 CO ₂ REQUIREMENTS OF <i>P. GINGIVALIS</i> AND <i>F. NUCLEATUM</i>	187
6.3.1 Methods	187
6.3.2 Results and discussion	188

6.4 SUMMARY OF RESULTS AND DISCUSSION	191
7. GENERAL DISCUSSION.....	198
7.1 OXYGEN TOXICITY TO <i>P. GINGIVALIS</i>	199
7.2 THE ANTI-OXIDANT DEFENCES OF <i>P. GINGIVALIS</i>	202
7.3 <i>F. NUCLEATUM</i> PROTECTS <i>P. GINGIVALIS</i> FROM OXIDATIVE DAMAGE	206
BIBLIOGRAPHY	211