Biochemical Characterization of the Essential GTP-Binding Protein Obg of Bacillus subtilis†

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An essential guanine nucleotide-binding protein, Obg, of Bacillus subtilis has been characterized with respect to its enzymatic activity for GTP. The protein was seen to hydrolyze GTP with a $K_m$ of 5.4 μM and a $k_{cat}$ of 0.0061 min$^{-1}$ at 37°C. GDP was a competitive inhibitor of this hydrolysis, with an inhibition constant of 1.7 μM at 37°C. The dissociation constant for GDP from the Obg protein was 0.5 μM at 4°C and was estimated to be 1.3 μM at 37°C. Approximately 80% of the purified protein was capable of binding GDP. In addition to hydrolysis of GTP, Obg was seen to autophosphorylate with this substrate. Subsequent release of the covalent phosphate proceeds at too slow a rate to account for the overall rate of GTP hydrolysis, indicating that in vitro hydrolysis does not proceed via the observed phosphoamidate intermediate. It was speculated that the phosphorylated form of the enzyme may represent either a switched-on or a switched-off configuration, either of which may be normally induced by an effector molecule. This enzyme from a temperature-sensitive mutant of Obg did not show significantly altered GTPase activity at the nonpermissive temperature.

Guanine nucleotide-binding proteins as components of signal transduction pathways in eucaryotes have been recognized for many years (15). Only recently has it been discovered that prokaryotes contain essential guanine nucleotide-binding proteins which hydrolyze GTP and which may be involved in signal transduction. These include Era (1) of Escherichia coli, FisZ (19, 30) and Ffh (11, 25) of both E. coli and Bacillus subtilis, and Obg (29) of B. subtilis. obg was initially identified as a gene downstream of the stage 0 sporulation gene spo0B (9, 29). Transcriptional analysis of this operon revealed that spo0B and obg are cotranscribed. All attempts to inactive Obg have resulted in loss of viability. While a null mutant of obg has not been found, Kok et al. (16) have successfully generated a temperature-sensitive mutant of obg. The two mutations in this Obg(Ts) protein are both localized in the N-terminal region of the protein, a region with homology to collagen.

Although Obg was known to be a guanine nucleotide-binding protein, little else was known of its enzymatic capabilities. The enzymatic activities involving GTP of Obg and Obg(Ts) have been examined in this study. The primary activity followed was GTP hydrolysis, including the dependence of this activity on both time of incubation and concentration of Obg and the inhibition of this activity by GDP. An additional activity concerning the autophosphorylation of the protein with $[\gamma^{32}]$GTP, as well as the subsequent release of the phosphate moiety from the covalently modified enzyme, was also examined. The chemical nature of the covalent modification was determined.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Bacterial strain. E. coli DH5α (F$^{-}$ endA1 hsdR17 supE44 thi-1 λ$^{-}$ relA1 gyrA96 recA1 Δ80d lacZΔM15) competent cells were purchased from Bethesda Research Laboratories, Inc. These cells were transformed with pJH4604, which contains the obg gene under expression control of a tac promoter. Transformed cells were grown at 37°C in Luria broth (per liter) 10 g of NaCl-10 g of Bacto Tryptone (Difco)-5 g of yeast extract (Difco) containing 200 μg of ampicillin (Sigma) per ml. These cells were induced at an optical density at 600 nm of 0.5 to 1.0 with 2 mM isopropyl-β-D-thiogalactoside (Diagnostic Chemicals) and harvested by centrifugation at 6,000 × g for 15 min after an additional 2 h of growth. Cell pellets were stored at −20°C. In the case of Obg(Ts), DH5α was transformed with pJH4223, which placed obg(Ts) under a tac promoter. In this case, cells were grown at 30°C.

Reagents. GTP was from Calbiochem. $[\gamma^{32}]$GTP (6,000 Ci/mmole) and [8.5$^{-}$3H]GDP (11.5 Ci/mmole) were supplied by New England Nuclear. IBF Biotechnics was the source of DEAE Trisacryl LS, while Bio-Rad supplied Affi-Gel blue and hydrolyapatite. Pharmacia supplied S200 resin. Activated charcoal, phenylmethylsulfonyl fluoride, and GDP were from Sigma. Proteins used to standardize the S200 column were from Sigma and Bio-Rad. Sodium dodecyl sulfate-polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis (SDS-PAGE) protein standards were from Bio-Rad.

SDS-PAGE. SDS polyacrylamide slab gels (17) were either 12% (acylamide-bisacrylamide at 29:1) or 15% running gel (15 by 8 cm) with a 5% stacking gel (15 by 1 cm). Samples were prepared by addition of 0.3 eq of tracking dye (167 μM Tris at pH 8.5, 6.7% SDS, 33% glycerol, 0.033% bromophenol blue, 7.3 M β-mercaptoethanol) to 1 eq of Obg (10 μg) or an Obg reaction mixture containing 10 μg of Obg. Unphosphorylated samples were heated at 100°C and run at a constant 200 V until the bromophenol blue reached the bottom of the gel, and the gel was stained with Coomassie blue. Phosphorylated samples were loaded to the gel without heating and run at a constant 25 mA until the bromophenol blue had run 80% of the length of the running gel. The gel was cut just above the dye line to remove any radioactivity associated with GTP or Pi. The gel was rinsed briefly in water and either exposed to X-ray film (X-Omat AR5) for −16 h at −70°C or placed in a phospho-imager cassette and kept for −16 h at room temperature.
Protein purification. All procedures were performed at 4°C. Frozen cell pellets (induced DH5α with pJH4604 or pJH4223 for the temperature-sensitive mutant) from 4 liters of culture were resuspended in 100 ml of 50 mM Tris at pH 7.5–1 mM EDTA (buffer A) supplemented with 1 mM phenylmethylsulfonyl fluoride. Following sonication, the crude lysate was clarified by centrifugation at 27,000 × g for 30 min in an SS34 rotor. All columns were pre-equilibrated with buffer A. The supernatant (Fig. 1, lane 2) was applied to a DEAE Trisacryl column (2.5 × 9 cm), washed with 100 ml of buffer A, and eluted with a 1-liter linear gradient of buffer A to buffer B containing 0.5 M KCl. The fractions of this and subsequent columns were determined by SDS-PAGE. The relevant fractions were pooled (Fig. 1, lane 3) and applied to a hydroxyapatite column (1.5 × 13 cm). The column was washed with 100 ml of buffer A and eluted with a 250-ml linear gradient of buffer A to 100 mM KCl, at pH 7.5–1 mM EDTA. The fractions of this and subsequent columns were determined by SDS-PAGE. The relevant fractions were pooled (Fig. 1, lane 4), and applied to an Affi-Gel blue column (2.5 × 9 cm), and eluted with a 1-liter linear gradient of buffer A to buffer A containing 1.0 M KCl. The protein fractions were pooled (Fig. 1, lane 5), concentrated on a 2-ml hydroxyapatite column, and eluted with 100 mM KCl, at pH 7.5–1 mM EDTA. The protein concentration (3.5 mg/ml) was stored in 0.5-ml aliquots at −20°C. Prior to use, Ogb was equilibrated on a Pharmacia Superdex 75 16/60 column with 50 mM Tris at pH 7.5–100 mM KCl (buffer B) and concentrated with an Amicon Centricon 10 at 15,000 × g.

Determination of native molecular weight. Ogb (1.7 mg/ml) and Ogb(Ts) (3.3 mg/ml) were separately chromatographed on an S200 column (2.5 × 84 cm) in buffer B. The column was standardized with cytochrome c (12.4 kDa, 4 mg/ml), equine myoglobin (17 kDa, 5 mg/ml), carbonic anhydrase (29 kDa, 4.5 mg/ml), chicken ovalbumin (44 kDa, 10 mg/ml), bovine serum albumin (66 kDa, 10 mg/ml), yeast alcohol dehydrogenase (150 kDa, 7.5 mg/ml), bovine γ-globulin (158 kDa, 10 mg/ml), and thyroglobulin (670 kDa, 10 mg/ml).

Hydrolysis of GTP. Ogb was analyzed for its ability to hydrolyze [γ-32P]GTP to the corresponding GDP plus Pi. Linearity as a function of time was established at 37°C with Ogb at 0.7 μM and GTP at 10 μM. Assays were followed over a 4 h under standard conditions, except that KCl was present at 100 mM. Standard assay conditions were 50 mM Tris at pH 8.5, 0.1 mM EDTA, 1.5 mM MgCl2, 200 mM KCl, 10% glycerol, Ogb or Ogb(Ts) at 0.8 to 1.7 μM, and [γ-32P]GTP at 2 (12.6 × 106 cpm/nmol) to 40 μM (6.3 × 105 cpm/nmol). Reactions with Ogb were run at 37°C for 3 h, while those with Ogb(Ts) were run at 37°C for 20 min. The observed rate was given in picomoles per minute-milligram. Samples were quenched with a slurry of charcoal in 1 mM KP, at pH 7.5, which would selectively bind GTP and GDP while leaving the released PI in solution. The charcoal was pelleted by centrifugation, and the free phosphate was determined by Cerenkov counting of the supernatant.

FIG. 1. SDS gel of Ogb purification. Lane 1, molecular weight standards (weights, in thousands, indicated at left); lane 2, lysozyme; lane 3, pool DEAE Trisacryl column; lane 4, pool hydroxyapatite column; lane 5, pool Affi-Gel blue column; lane 6, final concentrate.

Given the weak homology with collagen of the N-terminal domain of Ogb (29) and the apparent monomeric structure, it was of interest to see whether the rate as a function of enzyme concentration would suggest a more complex quaternary structure. The enzyme was assayed as described above except that the GTP was 10 μM (4.2 × 105 cpm/nmol) and Ogb was varied from 0.21 to 4.2 μM in 0.21 μM increments. Reactions were quenched with charcoal at times which varied from 1/2 to 3 h depending upon Ogb concentration in the assay. The extent of turnover was controlled at ≤5%.

Inhibition of GTP hydrolysis by GDP. Reaction conditions for inhibition of GTP hydrolysis by GDP were the same as those described for GTP hydrolysis except that 0, 2, 4, or 8 μM GDP was present in the reactions. Samples were quenched, the charcoal was pelleted by centrifugation, and free P1 was determined by Cerenkov counting of the supernatant. The resultant data were fit to an equation describing competitive inhibition of a single substrate enzymatic reaction.

Binding of GDP. Equilibrium dialysis at 4°C was utilized to determine the dissociation constant of GDP for Ogb. Reactions were run in duplicate in a dialysis wheel with 0.1-ml chambers on each side separated by a dialysis membrane. Initial conditions of the nonenzyme side were 50 mM Tris at pH 8.5, 100 mM KCl, 1.5 mM MgCl2, 0.1 mM EDTA, 10% glycerol, and seven GDP concentrations (2.56 × 106 cpm/nmol) ranging from 4.8 to 0.48 μM. Initial conditions of the enzyme side were 50 mM Tris at pH 8.5, 100 mM KCl, 1.5 mM MgCl2, 0.1 mM EDTA, 10% glycerol, and Ogb at 1.5 μM. The dialysis cells were rotated overnight. Samples were removed from each chamber, and an aliquot was counted by liquid scintillation in NEN BIOFLUOR to determine the concentration of GDP at equilibrium. Protein concentration was determined in those samples which contained Ogb.

Autophosphorylation with GTP. Ogb at 10 μM was autophosphorylated with 5 μM [γ-32P]GTP (30 × 106 cpm/nmol) in 50 mM Tris at pH 8.5, 0.1 mM EDTA, 1.5 mM MgCl2, 100 mM KCl, and 10% glycerol. Reactions were run at 37°C for 30 min and quenched with tracking dye, and three identical samples were loaded onto an SDS–12% polyacrylamide gel and electrophoresed at 25 mA.

Identification of the type of residue which is autophosphorylated on Ogb. After autoradiography, the gel was sliced into three parts, each containing one radioactive Ogb band. One slice was saved as a control, one was incubated at 55°C for 1 h in 0.2 N HCl, and a third was incubated at 55°C for 1 h in 1 N NaOH (6). After this treatment, the gel slices were again exposed to X-ray film.

Rate of release of P1 from the Ogb phosphoenzyme. Ogb (10 μM) or Ogb(Ts) (10 μM) was autophosphorylated with 25 μM [γ-32P]GTP (2.4 × 105 cpm/nmol) in 50 mM Tris at pH 8.5, 0.1 mM EDTA, 1.5 mM MgCl2, 160 mM KCl, and 10% glycerol in a total volume of 2 ml. The reaction was run at 37°C for 3 h, added to a Pharmacia Superdex 75 column, and eluted with buffer B. Fractions were analyzed for protein concentration and extent of phosphorylation. The appropriate fractions were pooled and concentrated with an Amicon Centricon 30. The phosphorylated Ogb protein was incubated at 37°C in 50 mM
Tris at pH 8.5, 0.1 mM EDTA, 1.5 mM MgCl₂, 200 mM KCl, 10% glycerol, and either no nucleotide triphosphate or 2.5 mM GTP. As a function of time, 20-μl samples were withdrawn, quenched with 6 μl of tracking dye, and stored at −20°C until the last samples were taken at 50 h. Quenched samples were thawed, loaded to an SDS–15% polyacrylamide gel, and run at 25 mA. The resultant running gel was exposed to a Molecular Dynamics Phospho Screen overnight at room temperature. Data were obtained with a Molecular Dynamics Phosphorimager and analyzed to determine the first-order rate constant of dephosphorylation.

RESULTS

Purification of Obg or Obg(Ts) resulted in a final product which ran at the appropriate subunit molecular mass (47.7 kDa) on SDS gels. The homogeneity of the final product (Fig. 1, lane 6) was greater than 98%. The yield per liter of culture of the purified protein was 5 to 10 mg. When examined for quaternary structure by molecular sieve chromatography, both Obg and Obg(Ts) eluted at a relative molecular weight of 56,000. This value is approximately 12% higher than the subunit molecular weight calculated from the protein's primary sequence. This difference may reflect an imperfect spherical shape of the protein, and it is believed that Obg is, indeed, monomeric. Protein autophosphorylated in vitro also eluted at a relative molecular weight of 56,000, indicating that this phosphorylation does not change the quaternary structure of Obg.

GTPase activity of Obg. Analysis of the primary sequence of Obg revealed a central portion of the protein which contained sequences identified with guanine nucleotide-binding sites in G proteins, elongation factors of E. coli, mammalian Ras, and procaryotic proteins such as Era (29). These representatives of a superfamily of proteins are known to both bind and hydrolyze GTP (3, 4). Photoactivation of GTP in the presence of Obg resulted in a covalent modification of Obg which was stable to acid precipitation, heat, and SDS-PAGE (29). While this evidence was sufficient to indicate binding of GTP to Obg, it could not address the issue of Obg's enzymatic activity with respect to GTP.

It was therefore of interest to examine directly Obg's ability to hydrolyze GTP. As a first approach, GTP radiolabelled in either the α or γ phosphate was incubated with Obg and samples of the reaction were applied to a polyethyleneimine cellulose thin-layer plate. The plate was developed under conditions which would separate GMP, GDP, GTP, and P_i (24). Following incubation with Obg, GTP labelled in the γ position was found to release labelled P_i. GTP labelled in the α position generated labelled GDP on hydrolysis by Obg. This established that Obg catalyzed the hydrolysis of GTP between the β and γ phosphates, generating GDP and P_i (data not shown). The position of hydrolysis having been established, optimal conditions for this hydrolysis were determined. It can be seen from Table 1 that the divalent metal ion, Mg²⁺, was essential for hydrolysis and that KCl enhanced the hydrolysis rate. ATP could not substitute as a substrate for hydrolysis.

Quantitation of GTPase activity was accomplished by separation of GTP and GDP from P_i by the selective binding of the nucleotides to charcoal. Other procaryotic GTPases have shown a kinetic lag in the hydrolysis of GTP as a function of time (22). There has also been evidence for cooperativity (22, 30) when GTP hydrolysis has been examined as a function of protein concentration. To exclude these complications with Obg, the hydrolysis of GTP was examined as a function of

![Graph](http://jb.asm.org/)

FIG. 2. Linearity of GTP hydrolysis as a function of time. Reactions were run as described in Materials and Methods with GTP present at 10 μM and Obg present at 0.7 μM. Samples were taken over a 4-h period.
reaction time and protein concentration. Hydrolysis of GTP by Obg was found to be linear with respect to both time (Fig. 2) and protein concentration (Fig. 3). The hydrolysis rates at 10 \( \mu \text{M} \) GTP which can be calculated from the slopes of Fig. 2 and Fig. 3 (78 and 73 \( \text{pmol/min} \cdot \text{mg} \), respectively) are consistent with the rate later observed when a substrate concentration curve was examined.

The hydrolysis of GTP by Obg was observed to be saturable and could be represented by the standard equation for a single substrate enzyme reaction. The observed \( K_m^{\text{GTP}} = 5.4 \ \mu\text{M} \), while the maximum velocity is 127 \( \text{pmol/min} \cdot \text{mg} \), which corresponds to a \( k_{\text{cat}} \) of 0.0061 min\(^{-1}\). These data are shown in Fig. 4 by the line determined in the absence of GDP.

**Inhibition of GTP hydrolysis by GDP.** GMP, GDP, and several analogs of GTP were examined to identify an inhibitor of GTP hydrolysis by Obg. The initial screen indicated that GDP was the best inhibitor of those tested. A more extensive analysis of GDP inhibition was subsequently undertaken, and the results are presented in Fig. 4. Apparent in the figure is the characteristic Lineweaver-Burk pattern of competitive inhibition, in which the rate at saturating GTP concentration converges on \( V_{\text{max}} \). The data can be fit to the equation for competitive inhibition of a single substrate enzymatic reaction in which we can identify \( K_m^{\text{GTP}} \) the apparent \( K_m^{\text{GTP}}(1 + ([\text{GDP}]/K_d^{\text{GDP}})) \). Replotting the observed apparent \( K_m^{\text{GTP}} \), at each concentration of GDP against the GDP concentration allows the \( K_d^{\text{GDP}} \) to be determined from the quotient of the intercept to the slope of the resulting line. This yields a \( K_d^{\text{GDP}} \) of 1.7 \( \mu\text{M} \).

**Determination of the dissociation constant for GDP.** In order to confirm the observed \( K_d^{\text{GDP}} \) and to establish a measure of the fraction of active protein present in the purification, equilibrium dialysis with \(^3\text{H}\)-labelled GDP and Obg was undertaken. The results of this experiment at 4°C are presented as a Scatchard (26) plot in Fig. 5 and can be described by the Scatchard equation for a single dissociation constant in which the fraction bound = nanomoles of bound GDP/nanomoles of Obg and \( n \) is equivalent to the number of available sites on the protein. The \( K_d^{\text{GDP}} \) derived from the slope of this line is 0.5 \( \mu\text{M} \), while the abscissa intercept indicates that 0.78 mol of GDP is bound per mol of Obg. Sizing of Obg by molecular sieve chromatography had indicated that the protein is monomeric, so that approximately 80% of the

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**FIG. 3.** Linearity of GTP hydrolysis as a function of protein concentration. GTP was present at 10 \( \mu\text{M} \) under standard hydrolysis conditions. The Obg concentration was varied from 0.21 to 4.2 \( \mu\text{M} \). The time of each reaction was varied to control the turnover of substrate at \( \approx 8\% \).

**FIG. 4.** Inhibition of Obg's hydrolysis of GTP by the product GDP. Reactions were run as described in Materials and Methods. GDP was present at 0 \( \mu\text{M} (+) \), 2 \( \mu\text{M} (\triangle) \), 4 \( \mu\text{M} (\bigcirc) \), or 8 \( \mu\text{M} (+) \). Data are presented as a Lineweaver-Burk plot.
purified protein can be considered to be capable of binding GTP.

To estimate the \( K_{d}^{GDP} \) at 37°C, equilibrium dialysis was repeated at 25°C. In this case, the observed \( K_{d}^{GDP} \) was 0.93 \( \mu M \). With the dissociation constants at 4 and 25°C, the van't Hoff equation was utilized to estimate the value at 37°C. Plotting \(-\ln K_{d}^{GDP} \) versus the reciprocal of temperature in kelvins generated a line from which the \( K_{d}^{GDP} \) value of 1.3 \( \mu M \) at 37°C can be estimated. This value is very close to the \( K_{d}^{GDP} \) of 1.7 \( \mu M \) determined from the inhibition kinetics.

**Autophosphorylation of Obg.** It has been observed with certain oncogenic (14) forms of Ras that the protein is autophosphorylated by GTP. As a consequence, the ability of Obg to autophosphorylate with GTP as a substrate was examined and Obg was found to be covalently modified. The nature of the phosphorylated residue was investigated by observation of the stability of the protein-phosphate bond in acid or base (16). Figure 6A presents the autoradiograph of three equivalent phosphorylated Obg samples following electrophoresis on SDS-polyacrylamide gels. Three slices of this gel were then examined for acid-base stability as described in Materials and Methods. Following acid or base treatment, the gel slices were again autoradiographed. It is obvious from Fig. 6B that the in vitro-phosphorylated form of the protein is stable to base (lane 1) but labile in acid (lane 2). This result implicates the modification of a nitrogen group on the protein, generating a phosphoamidate. ATP could not substitute for GTP in the in vitro autophosphorylation reaction.

It was necessary to examine this phosphorylated form of Obg in greater detail to determine if the hydrolysis of GTP proceeded by a covalent phosphoenzyme intermediate. Obg-P was prepared and separated from excess GTP by chromatography through a molecular sieve column. It was noted that the eluted radiolabelled phosphoprotein represented only 0.002 eq of the total protein. With this protein, the off-rate of labelled phosphate under standard GTPase assay conditions was examined. The release of phosphate was followed over 50 h at 37°C and seen to be first order (Fig. 7). The rate of release of this covalently bound phosphate is equivalent to 0.693/(t1/2), where \( t_{1/2} \) is defined as the time required to remove 50% of the phosphate. This rate is equivalent to 0.00036 min⁻¹. This off-rate, which is equivalent to the hydrolysis rate of covalently bound phosphate, is only 6% of the observed \( k_{cat} \) of GTP hydrolysis and is not consistent with the covalent phosphate lying along the reaction path of this enzyme. While the data in Fig. 7 were obtained in the absence of GTP, only minimal (<15%) decrease in the half-life was observed in the presence of 2.5 mM GTP, a result which also suggests that Obg-P is not on the reaction pathway.

**Effect of temperature on GTPase activity of Obg and Obg(Ts).** A Ts mutant of Obg [Obg(Ts)] has recently been isolated (16). This protein has been purified by the same procedure as that which was used for the wild-type protein. The protein is observed to be monomeric both before and after in vitro autophosphorylation. Small differences in the kinetic

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**FIG. 5.** Scatchard plot of GDP binding to Obg. Equilibrium dialysis was run as described in Materials and Methods.

**FIG. 6.** Acid-base stability of phosphorylated Obg. Obg was autophosphorylated as described in Materials and Methods. (A) Three equivalent samples of Obg-P electrophoresed on an SDS–12% polyacrylamide gel and autoradiographed. (B) The samples from panel A were sliced into three fragments. Lane 1 was treated with 1.0 N NaOH, lane 2 was treated with 0.2 N HCl, and lane 3 represents an untreated control. Following treatment, the three fragments were again autoradiographed.
parameters between Obg(Ts) and Obg have been noted. For Obg(Ts), the \( k_{\text{cat}} = 0.015 \text{ min}^{-1} \), while the \( K_m^{\text{GTP}} = 2.3 \text{ mM} \). Analysis of both Obg(Ts) and Obg at 45°C instead of 37°C revealed only small changes in \( k_{\text{cat}} \) and \( K_m \), consistent with results which might be expected from an increase in temperature of 8°C. When autophosphorylated in vitro, 0.008 eq of phosphate was present per eq of protein. The observed off-rate of this radiolabelled phosphate was seen to be 0.00045 \( \text{min}^{-1} \). This off-rate is only 3% of the \( k_{\text{cat}} \) of GTP hydrolysis. These small differences are not consistent with a major effect on the GTPase activity being responsible for the observed in vivo effects of Obg(Ts).

**DISCUSSION**

A kinetic scheme which represents Obg hydrolysis of GTP is presented in Fig. 8. In this scheme, the bold arrows represent the primary pathway of this reaction. It is believed that hydrolysis is the result of an in-line attack of an activated \( \text{H}_2\text{O} \) molecule upon the \( \gamma \) phosphate of GTP. This would result in a stereoechemical inversion of configuration of the \( \gamma \) phosphate, as has been directly determined for p21\textsuperscript{Hsras} (10). The scheme further shows that GDP is the last product released, which is consistent with the observed competitive inhibition of GDP for the substrate GTP, implying that both nucleotides interact with the same form of the free enzyme.

The light arrows in the scheme represent what is believed to be a minor reaction catalyzed by Obg in vitro which generates a covalently phosphorylated form of the enzyme. Only low, less-than-1% phosphorylation of the protein has been observed in vitro. If this phosphoenzyme form was on the overall reaction pathway, the release of radiolabelled covalent phosphate from the enzyme would have to be at least as fast as the observed \( k_{\text{cat}} \) of the overall reaction. However, the observed off-rate of covalently bound phosphate from Obg is less than 10% of the \( k_{\text{cat}} \) for GTP hydrolysis. Consequently, the significant in vitro hydrolysis of GTP cannot proceed via this phosphoenzyme intermediate.

The acid-base stability of this phosphoenzyme establishes that a phosphoamidate has been formed. On the basis of probable structure homology with the Ras protein (8), it is believed that the modified residue is His-189 of Obg. This equivalent position in the Ras protein lies within loop 2, a region of the protein which is seen to move further into the substrate pocket on binding GTP (21). Recently, Sood et al. (28) have shown that Era from *E. coli* can be autophosphorylated by GTP, generating both phosphoserine and phosphothreonine residues. Sequence localization of the modified residues with respect to the Ras structure placed them within the equivalent of loop 2 of Ras. For Ras, loop 2 is known to be involved in the interaction of the protein with GAP (31).

It is unclear at this time whether Obg is phosphorylated in vivo. In vivo phosphorylation has been observed for both Era (28) and certain mutants of p21\textsuperscript{Hsras} (14). In the case of p21 from Harvey murine sarcoma virus (27), the radiolabelled peptides resulting from both in vivo and in vitro labelling are identical, suggesting that phosphorylation of this protein is an autophosphorylation both in vitro and in vivo. It is possible that Obg is extensively phosphorylated in vivo, thus limiting the in vitro phosphorylation to less than 1%. If this were the case, phosphorylated Obg would be capable of both binding and hydrolyzing GTP. Alternatively, the protein as isolated from *E. coli* may be poorly phosphorylated and the observed low extent of in vitro autophosphorylation may be the result of the absence of a *B. subtilis* effector molecule. In this case, it will not be clear whether the phosphorylated protein remains active in binding and/or hydrolyzing GTP.

It is unknown whether the phosphorylated form of Obg has any signal-transducing activity, although it is believed that Obg, as a member of the superfamily of guanine nucleotide-binding proteins, functions in vivo in some (at this time undefined) signalling pathway. It is interesting to speculate that the phosphorylated form of the molecule might represent either a switched-on or a switched-off conformation (3, 4) of Obg that may be normally induced by some effector molecule. In the absence of such a molecule in vitro, only a small portion of the protein may be found in this conformation. Alternatively, the phosphorylation of Obg might be required to generate the
proper charge distribution or hydrogen-bonding potential for interaction with a select effector molecule or transducing-signal recipient. Phosphorylation does not alter the molecular weight of Obg, indicating that it does not modify the aggregation state of Obg.

Of the procaryotic guanine nucleotide-binding proteins which have been examined in vitro, Era most closely resembles Obg in parameters such as $k_{cat}, K_{d,\text{GTP}}$, and $K_{d,\text{GDP}}$. Unlike Ras, both proteins have micromolar binding constants for GDP. In the case of Ras, it has been argued that an aromatic-aromatic interaction between the guanine base and Phe-28 are, in part, responsible for the high affinity which Ras has for both GDP and GTP (31). This phenylalanine residue is not conserved in either Era or Obg.

Both Era (13, 18, 20) and Obg (16) are essential for cellular viability, and both have yielded Ts mutations. In contrast to the Ts Era, both wild-type and Ts forms of Obg are quite similar in kinetic parameters with respect to GTP hydrolysis, at permissive and nonpermissive temperatures in vitro. It has been speculated that in the case of Era, the Ts GTPase activity is responsible for the loss of viability at the nonpermissive temperature (18). This cannot be the case for Obg(Ts). It seems unlikely that the observed in vivo phenotype of the Ts mutant is the result of the slightly higher $k_{cat}$ for GTP hydrolysis. It is generally believed that the members of the GTPase superfamily function by cycling between the GTP-bound on state and the GDP-bound off state (3, 4). In terms of Obg lying on a signal-transducing pathway, this slight activation of Obg(Ts) would shut off the presumed signalling form of the protein more quickly. Such slight activation is trivial compared with the 10-fold increase in GTP hydrolysis rate seen for Ras in the presence of GAP (2, 31). It seems more likely that the Ts mutation in Obg(Ts) impairs the ability of this protein to interact with other proteins of the signal transduction pathway.

The rate of GTP hydrolysis by Obg, 0.006 min$^{-1}$, is similar to that which has been observed for Ras and is much slower than the rates for the α subunit of G proteins, which are in the range of 3 to 5 min$^{-1}$ (15). The rate at which Ras can hydrolyze GTP is greatly enhanced by effector molecules such as GAP (2, 31). Although it can be speculated that a GTPase-activating protein may well function in the signal transduction pathway of Obg, no evidence for such a protein has yet been found.

Bourne et al. (4) have described primary structure sequence motifs (G1 to G5) which are associated with the GTPase superfamily. Analysis of the primary sequence of Obg, deduced from the nucleotide sequence of the gene, revealed a central portion of the protein which contained amino acid motifs characteristic of a guanine nucleotide-binding protein (29). It was later proposed on the basis of the G1 (P-loop) sequence that Obg and several other proteins belonged in a discrete subfamily of guanine nucleotide-binding proteins, all of which are of unknown function (12). Further examination of the amino acid sequences of Obg, Schizosaccharomyces pombe GTP1, and the deduced product of an open reading frame of Halobacterium cutirubrum reveal a conserved G2 sequence, Y(E/H)FTTL, supporting the argument that these three proteins belong in a distinct subfamily. It has also been suggested that HfIX of E. coli (23) also belongs in this subfamily. However, to the extent that G1 and G2 are subfamily specific, HfIX has probably been misassigned.

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