Clavulanic Acid Biosynthesis: the Stereochemical Course of β-Lactam Formation from Chiral Glycerol

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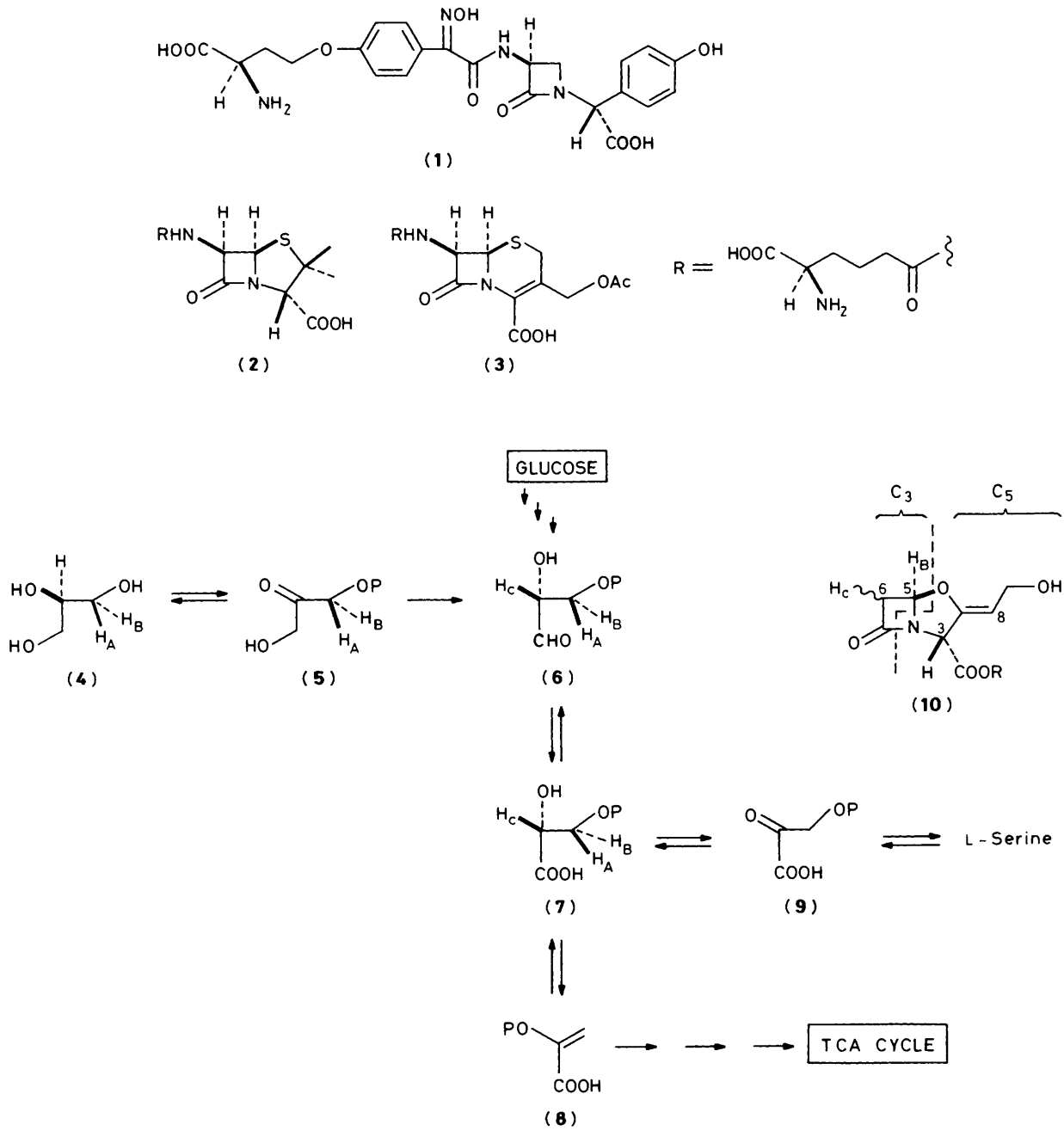
The overall stereochemical course of β-lactam formation in clavulanic acid was determined to be retention from (1*R*,2*R*)- and (1*S*,2*R*)-[1-^{3}H],[1,3-^{14}C]glycerol.

The monocyclic β-lactam ring of nocardicin A (**1**) is assembled from L-serine[1,2] in a reaction path occuring with inversion of configuration[3] and no change in oxidation state at the seryl β-carbon.[3] In contrast, the corresponding four-membered rings of penicillin N (**2**) and cephalosporin C (**3**) are derived from L-cysteine in a sequence involving oxidative cyclization of a tripeptide precursor[4] and overall retention of configuration[5] at the cysteinyl β-carbon. We record in this communication a notable parallel to the latter process where the *pro*-(*R*)-hydroxymethylene of glycerol (**4**,-CH_AH_BOH), diastereotopically labelled with tritium, is shown to give rise to clavulanic acid (**10**, R=H) with overall retention of configuration.

The incorporation of [1,3-^{3}H],[1,3-^{14}C]glycerol (**4**) into the β-lactam carbons (C_3-unit ≡ C-5—7) of clavulanic acid (**10**, R = H) is known to take place with retention of one quarter of

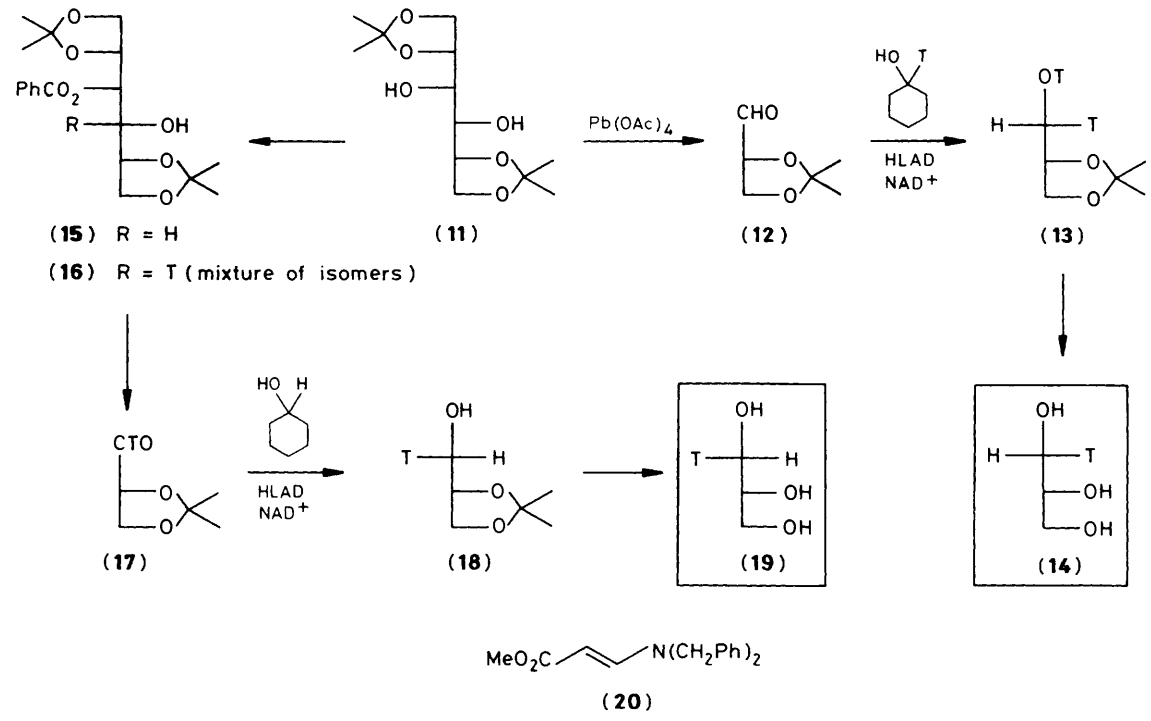


Scheme 1

its tritium activity;[6,7] that is, of the four methylene hydrogens of glycerol, one was shown by unambiguous degradation to label H-5. In contrast, tritium label from [2-^{3}H],[1,3-^{14}C]glycerol was completely lost on incorporation into (**10**).[6] A broad screening of potential C_3-intermediates identified[6] glyceric acid (**7**)† as the likely source from primary metabolism of the β-lactam carbons. While specific incorporations of radiolabel were low from (**7**), owing presumably to rapid flux through the glycolytic pathway, specificity of labelling in the C_3-unit of (**10**) was successfully demonstrated. In particular D-[2-^{3}H],[1-^{14}C]glyceric acid (**7**, H_C) was shown by careful degradation to selectively label H-6 (**10**, H_C).[6] Therefore, the present purpose of determining the stereochemical course of β-lactam formation in clavulanic acid was made experimentally accessible from glycerol by the conservation of the *pro*-(*R*)-hydroxymethylene stereocentre (**4**,-CH_AH_BOH) through the glycolytic intermediates (**6**) and (**7**) (see Scheme 1).

D-Mannitol was converted into its bis-acetonide (**11**) (Scheme 2).[7] Oxidative cleavage[7] to the acetonide of D-glyceraldehyde (**12**) and reduction with horse liver alcohol dehydrogenase (HLAD)[8] in the presence[9] of [1-^{3}H]cyclohexanol

† In strict terms the double-label incorporation experiments described in ref. 6 indicating the intermediacy of D-glycerate (**7**) could also be satisfied in principle by D-glyceraldehyde (**6**) as they do not address the issue of oxidation state at C-1 in these equilibrating glycolytic intermediates.



Scheme 2

Table 1. Incorporation of diastereotopically-labelled glycerols (**4**) into *p*-bromobenzyl clavulanate (**10**, R = PBB).

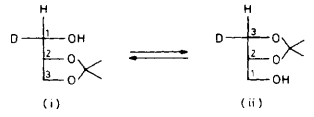
	$^3H/^{14}C$ (% ^3H retained)		
Substrate	(**14**) : (**19**)[a]	(**10**, R = PBB)	(**20**)
(1*R*,2*R*)-[1-^{3}H],[1,3-^{14}C]Glycerol (**14**)	12.28	6.71 (55%)	10.73 (87%)
(1*S*,2*R*)-[1-^{3}H],[1,3-^{14}C]Glycerol (**19**)	10.85	0.78 (7%)	0.98 (9%)

[a] Doubly-labelled glycerols were accurately counted as their tris(*p*-nitrobenzoyl) esters.

and NAD$^+$ gave the (1*R*,2*R*)-alcohol (**13**).‡ Mild acid hydrolysis afforded (1*R*,2*R*)-[1-^{3}H]glycerol (**14**). The diastereoisomeric (1*S*,2*R*)-[1-^{3}H]glycerol (**19**) was more difficult to obtain.[10] Attempted preparation of tritiated aldehyde (**17**) by reduction of (**12**) with sodium borotritide and reoxidation under a variety of conditions was unsatisfactory. Finally, the D-mannitol derivative (**11**) was converted into its monobenzoate (**14**).[11] Oxidation[11] of the remaining secondary hydroxy group followed by sodium borotritide reduction gave (**16**) (3:1 mixture of diastereoisomers favouring the isomer shown). After saponification of the benzoate (68% overall yield from introduction of the radioisotope), (**16**) was cleaved as above to give the desired tritiated aldehyde (**17**). Enzymic reduction and acetal hydrolysis (Scheme 2) afforded (1*S*,2*R*)-[1-^{3}H]glycerol (**19**).

The diastereomerically labelled glycerols (**14**) and (**19**) were separately combined with [1,3-^{14}C]glycerol and administered to cultures of *Streptomyces clavuligerus* (ATCC 27064) grown in a triglyceride medium.[12,13] The results obtained are shown in Table 1. Glycerol labels not only the C_3-unit of clavulanic acid, but also the C_5-unit by circulation of radioisotope around the TCA cycle and incorporation as a C_5-amino acid derived from α-ketoglutarate (Scheme 1).[13] Significant losses of tritium that attend these latter metabolic events account for the low $^3H:^{14}C$-ratios observed for (**10**, R = PBB). However, methanolysis of (**10**, R = PBB) in the presence of dibenzylamine isolates the β-lactam carbons as the crystalline derivative (**20**) (Table 1).[13,14] The data in the last column for this derivative show excellent complementarity, the glycerol *pro*-(1*S*) label (**4**, H_A) being largely lost while the *pro*-(1*R*) tritium (**4**, H_B) is largely retained in clavulanate.

‡ While expected, based on ample precedent, the structure assigned to (**13**) was supported by independent ^{1}H n.m.r. experiments with the corresponding deuteriated materials. At 400 MHz the methylene hydrogens of glycerol acetonide give four well separated doublets of doublets (C-1: δ 3.59 and 3.74, J_{gem} 11.8 Hz; C-3: δ 3.79 and 4.04, J_{gem} 8.3 Hz). The deuteriated material (i) corresponding to (**13**) showed



disappearance of the resonance at δ 3.74 and significant broadening of that at the δ 3.58. Equilibration of the acetonide in acetone (cat. dry *p*-$MeC_6H_4SO_3H$, 3 Å molecular sieves, room temp., 5 days) gave a mixture of (i) and (ii) where the site of deuteriation in the latter could be securely assigned to the (3*S*)-locus [T. D. Inch and N. Williams, *J. Chem. Soc.* (*C*), 1970, 263].

In conclusion, the normal metabolic course of glycerol to the glycolytic intermediates (**6**) and (**7**) is borne out in the biosynthesis of clavulanic acid in that the *pro*-(*R*) hydroxymethylene of (**4**, $-CH_AH_BOH$) becomes C-5 in (**10**). The absolute sense of chirality at this centre is maintained through the biosynthetic pathway to label clavulanate with overall retention of stereochemistry at C-5. The diastereotopic tritium labels in (**4**, H_A and H_B) do not become homotopic, thereby ruling out the intermediacy of, *e.g.*, free pyruvate. The observation of stereochemical retention in the β-lactam ring closure of clavulanic acid is an important parallel to the oxidative cyclizations that characterize penicillin and cephalosporin biosynthesis.[4,5] The extent of the similarities between these two pathways will be further defined in due course.

The National Institutes of Health and the Sloan and Dreyfus Foundations are gratefully acknowledged for financial support. C. A. T. is a Research Fellow of the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation 1982—1986, and Camille and Henry Dreyfus Foundation Teacher Scholar 1983—1988.

Received, 11th February 1986; Com. 191

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