

The Role of Glutathione and Glutathione Transferases in Chemical Carcinogenesis

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I. INTRODUCTION

The importance of the covalent binding of electrophilic metabolites of carcinogens to macromolecules, in particular DNA, as a critical event in chemical carcinogenesis was established in the 1960s. This was largely through the work of James and Elizabeth Miller and colleagues.¹ Since then, the metabolism of many chemical carcinogens has been investigated and the details of their activation to electrophilic metabolites have been established.¹⁻³

That glutathione (GSH) can act as an alternative (competing) nucleophilic site to the nucleophilic portions of DNA, and hence afford protection against genotoxic electrophiles, was first recognized by Boyland and Chasseaud⁴ and Chasseaud.⁵ It has now been established that GSH reacts with a number of electrophiles derived from carcinogens and that these reactions form an important detoxification mechanism.^{5,6} Boyland's laboratory was also the first to show that many of the reactions of GSH with electrophiles are enzyme catalysed.⁷ This catalysis was referred to as glutathione *S*-transferase (GSH transferase) activity, and was shown to reside in a number of isoenzymes with broad substrate specificity by Jakoby and colleagues.⁸ It is now known that these isoenzymes (E.C.2.5.1.18) are products of a gene superfamily.⁹⁻¹²

In this review the role of GSH conjugation in the overall metabolism of carcinogens is discussed both in general and in relation to specific carcinogens.

II. CARCINOGEN METABOLISM

Many lipophilic carcinogens are metabolized to polar conjugates in order to be detoxified and excreted. Metabolism of xenobiotics is usually referred to as phase I and phase II, where phase II metabolism involves the conjugation of phase I products. Oxidative phase I metabolism, generally by cytochrome P450, but occasionally by flavin mixed function oxidation, is of particular relevance to carcinogen metabolism, but carcinogens and their oxidation products may be susceptible to further phase I metabolism (e.g., nitroreduction or the action of epoxide hydrolase). Phase II metabolism includes the formation of glucuronide, sulfate, and glutathione conjugates and usually results in detoxication, as the polar conjugates are readily excreted. Thus, during

the metabolism of carcinogens, alternative pathways of phase I and phase II metabolism operate simultaneously, yielding a complex mixture of products.¹³

In general, the metabolism of carcinogens to electrophiles involves at least one oxidative (phase I) step. This may be sufficient to produce a toxic (and in particular genotoxic) species (e.g., polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbon [PAH] diol epoxides), but phase II metabolism is often involved as a critical step in the formation of genotoxic electrophiles. Sulfation in particular is known to be an activation step for weakly electrophilic arylhydroxylamines and benzylic alcohols (see below), but acylation, glucuronidation, and occasionally GSH conjugation can all be activation steps.

The production of electrophiles is a source of danger to the cell, and the detoxication of these electrophiles is therefore essential if toxicity or carcinogenesis is to be prevented. For example, a tissue may be susceptible to chemical carcinogenesis because it is exposed to an electrophile that has the capacity to react with DNA (a genotoxic electrophile), but is poorly detoxified in that tissue and also produces DNA damage that is not repaired correctly.

There are a number of points at which detoxication may occur. It may involve direct reaction with electrophiles, several of which may arise in the metabolism of a particular carcinogen (see Section VII.A, below) or to strong competition from alternative metabolic pathways that do not yield electrophiles. The relative effects of competing pathways on overall metabolism may be changed by the action of selective enzyme inducers or the availability of co-substrate (e.g., reduced nicotinamide dinucleotide phosphate [NADPH], uridine diphosphate [UDP]-glucuronic acid, GSH) utilized in one pathway but not another.

III. THE SPONTANEOUS REACTION OF GLUTATHIONE WITH ELECTROPHILES ARISING DURING CARCINOGEN METABOLISM

A. Tissue Distribution of GSH

The reaction with GSH may be spontaneous or enzyme

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assisted. If the spontaneous reaction is the only means whereby a particular electrophile is detoxified by GSH, the susceptibility of *in vivo* systems to that electrophile will depend on the concentration of GSH present. Levels are as high as 15 mM in the lens, 5 to 10 mM in the liver, and 1 to 2 mM in many other tissues.¹⁴ Although a tissue may contain GSH, it is not necessarily in all the cells that compose it. For example, the overall concentration of GSH in the brain is 1.5 to 2 mM,¹⁵ but histochemical studies show that, while it is abundant in the astroglial cells and the ependymal cells, it is absent from the neuronal stroma. In the lung it is found in the interalveolar, but not the alveolar cells. In the kidney it is rich in the proximal convoluted tubules, but not so apparent elsewhere. In the lens it is highly concentrated in the periphery, but less so in the interior, and so on.¹⁶ In certain cells, most notably the hepatocyte, GSH concentrations vary according to circumstance, being depleted during starvation and by a heavy electrophile load, or having levels higher than normal as the result of a rebound effect following a period of depletion.^{17,18}

B. Chemical Reactivity of GSH with Genotoxic Electrophiles

It has been recognized that if an electrophile is to be genotoxic it must have a "high chemical reactivity" in order to react with the weakly nucleophilic positions of DNA bases (e.g., $-O^6$ of guanine).^{1,19,20} In general, genotoxic electrophiles are species that have a high degree of localized charge, for example, carbonium ions derived from nitrosoureas, nitrenium and arylcarbonium ions from aromatic amine carcinogens, and benzylic carbonium ions from polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons. All these species are of high energy compared with, for example, alkyl and aryl halides and aliphatic epoxides. GSH, on the other hand (or more accurately the thiolate anion, since in all cases studied it is the anion that is the reactive species), is a highly polarizable nucleophile. As a consequence of this, the spontaneous reaction of GSH with genotoxic electrophiles is not very rapid. Conversely, the reaction of GSH with polarizable electrophiles, e.g., by Michael addition to conjugated double bonds, is rapid. (For a discussion, see Reference 21.)

Quantitative data for the noncatalytic reaction of electrophiles derived from xenobiotics with GSH are extremely limited, but two examples show the range of rates and illustrate the point made above. The second-order rate constant for the reaction of the mutagen 1-nitropyrene-4,5-oxide with GSH is $1.7 \times 10^{-1} M^{-1}s^{-1}$,²² while that for the highly polarizable and nongenotoxic *N*-acetyl-*p*-benzoquinone imine, the cytotoxic metabolite of the drug acetaminophen, is approximately $3 \times 10^4 M^{-1}s^{-1}$,²³ an order of 10^5 times more reactive. Other reactions of GSH with model electrophiles have been reviewed.²⁴

There is a range of nucleophilic species *in vivo*. At one end are protein thiols, which are similar in their susceptibility to electrophiles as GSH itself, while at the other are the nucleophilic sites on DNA, which are toward the polarized end of the nucleophilicity scale, that are susceptible to carcinogenic electrophiles.²¹

IV. GLUTATHIONE TRANSFERASES

A. Importance of Enzymic Catalysis for the Reactions of GSH with Genotoxic Electrophiles

Because GSH detoxifies genotoxic electrophiles poorly by the spontaneous reaction, catalysis of GSH conjugation by the GSH transferases is particularly important and can lead to efficient detoxication.

The rates of noncatalytic reactions of electrophiles with GSH will depend on the thiol concentration and pH. However, the enzyme-catalyzed reaction is less dependent on GSH concentration, since the K_m for GSH is of the order of 0.1 mM,²⁵ and reaction rates will fall only when GSH levels approach this value. In addition, there is evidence that, in the case of "Bay region" diol epoxides of benzo(a)pyrene, benz(a)anthracene, and chrysene as substrates, the K_m for GSH falls at low GSH concentrations, perhaps due to some conformational change in the enzyme.^{26,27} The same argument applies to the electrophilic substrate where K_m s are generally in the μM range.

B. Glutathione Transferase Isoenzymes in the Rat

Most of the exploratory work on GSH transferases has been done in the rat and, therefore, in terms of structure, function, and tissue distribution, they provide the standards with which others are usually compared.

Soluble GSH transferases, regardless of their species, are dimeric enzymes and, in the rat, at least 11 subunits have been characterized, although more are known to exist.

Several nomenclatures are used, the two most common being shown. In the nomenclature used in this paper, each subunit is given a number based on the chronological order of its characterization. The basis of the other nomenclature is the mobility of subunits on sodium dodecyl sulfate-polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis.²⁸

1. Multigene Families: Primary Structure and Gene Structure

Complete primary structures, deduced from cDNA sequences, are known for subunits 1,^{29,31} 2,³² 3,³³ 4,³⁴ and 7.^{35,36} Based on these sequences, these subunits fall into three categories comprising 1 and 2, 3 and 4, and 7. There is 69% identity in sequence between 1 and 2, 77% identity between 3 and 4, and very little identity among the three categories, showing that these categories represent multigene families. This is supported by studies of gene sequences, now known for subunit 1,³⁷ subunit 3,³⁸ and subunit 7,³⁹ which show that exon-intron structures differ with the family. They have been named alpha (1 and 2), mu (3 and 4), and pi (7), respectively.^{9,40} On the basis of present evidence, including complete or partial amino acid sequences, enzymic properties, and immunological cross-reactivity, the genetic relationship among all 11 subunits is believed to be as follows: alpha family, subunits 1, 2, 8, and 10; mu family, subunits 3, 4, 6, 9, and 11; and pi family, subunit 7 only. Subunit 5 has yet to be assigned.^{41-45a}

Within a multigene family, subunits may form heterodimers. GSH transferases 1-2, 3-4, 6-9, 3-6, and 4-6 so far having been identified.⁴⁴

The upstream regulatory regions of these genes are clearly of interest with respect to tissue-specific expression and enzyme induction. Those for subunits 1 and 7 have been mapped and show substantial differences.

The subunit 7 gene has sequence motifs associated with "housekeeping" genes, such as a high G and C and CpG content around their promoters, and GC boxes matching the consensus sequence for their binding site of the transcription factor SP1. In addition, it has a phorbol ester responsive element (TRE).^{39,46} It has been shown that c-Ha-ras and phorbol esters, both of which can activate the polyoma virus enhancer, act through an enhancer element closely related in sequence to TRE.⁴⁷ The 5' flanking region of subunit 1³⁷ does not appear to contain either motifs associated with "housekeeping genes" or the phorbol ester responsive element. It contains an element required for maximal basal promoter activity and also a β -naphthoflavone responsive element. As yet, it is not known whether the β -naphthoflavone responsive element is activated directly or indirectly by a trans-acting protein.

2. The Tissue Distribution of GSH Transferases

GSH transferases have been found in almost every rat tissue examined, although not necessarily in every cell type. Their distribution might be expected to parallel that of GSH, but at the moment more information is available about the histochemical localization of GSH transferases than of GSH. The distribution of GSH transferases in any one tissue or cell type may be one of the determinants of its susceptibility to carcinogenesis. GSH-transferase activity using 1-chloro-2,4-dinitrobenzene as substrate (CDNB) varies considerably from high values in the liver and testis to very low values in the nonlactating mammary gland and negligible levels in epididymal sperm.⁴⁸ In addition, striking differences in isoenzyme distribution occur from one tissue to another.

The content of GSH transferase subunits in a tissue is readily determined by reverse-phase HPLC analysis of the GSH transferase fraction obtained from tissue homogenates by GSH agarose affinity chromatography.⁴⁹ Analyses of the liver, kidney, lung, interstitial cells, and spermatogenic tubules of the testis are shown in Figure 1. In the liver, the organ most active in GSH-dependent detoxication, subunits 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, and 9 are clearly distinguished (both subunits 1 and 8 resolve into two forms).

In some tissues one subunit predominates; for example, in the red blood cell it is subunit 8,^{49a} in the small intestine it is subunit 7,⁵⁰ while in the lactating mammary gland and the adrenal gland it is subunit 2. In some tissues a subunit usually encountered in small amounts may be abundant. Thus, the testis is rich in subunits 6 and 9 and the brain in subunit 6.^{50a}

Immunohistochemistry has revealed interesting differences within tissues; it has shown that in the normal liver, subunit 7 is

present in all bile duct cells and in occasional hepatocytes,⁵¹ and that, although subunits 1, 2, 3, and 4 are present in all hepatocytes, they are more abundant in the area around the central vein than in the periportal region.^{51,52} In the brain, GSH transferases, like GSH, have been detected only in the astroglial and ependymal cells and not at all in the neuronal stroma.⁵³

3. Enzymic Activity

Most of the work done with GSH transferases involves substrates chosen, not because of their biological significance, but because their GSH conjugation results in an optical density change that can be made the basis of a convenient spectrophotometric assay, and much of our current understanding of GSH transferases relates to these substrates (see Table 1). The most commonly used is CDNB, since it is utilized well by most of the rat subunits. Exceptions are subunit 5 and subunit 9.^{56,56a} Other substrates are chosen because they are relatively specific for a particular subunit and may be used to detect and quantify it.

Many mutagenic and carcinogenic electrophiles react with GSH to produce conjugates. It is often assumed that they are substrates for GSH transferases, but this has not always been proven, and surprisingly few have been studied with respect to isoenzyme specificity. The spontaneous and enzymic reaction of specific carcinogenic electrophiles with GSH are discussed below.

C. Glutathione Transferase Isoenzymes in Man

1. Multigene Families: Primary Structure and Gene Structure

Studies on GSH transferases of the rat and other laboratory animals have been undertaken with the expectation that they might provide suitable models for the human. As more is known about human GSH transferases, it becomes apparent that information obtained with the rat is indeed relevant to man. The same multigene families are seen in both species, and there is considerable identity in primary structure across the two species.

The first separation of human liver GSH transferases involved a tissue sample from a single individual. Five related "cationic" forms, named α through ϵ were separated⁵⁷ and are now known to be related to the alpha class of rat GSH transferases. Isoenzymes at each extreme of the range of isoelectric points have been shown to be homodimers, while those with intermediate isoelectric points are heterodimers. Homodimers and heterodimers are most readily identified and quantified by reverse-phase HPLC (see Figure 2). The monomeric forms have been named either Y_1 and Y_4 ,⁵⁸ B_1 and B_2 ,⁵⁹ or α_x and α_y ,⁴⁹ B_1 , Y_1 , and α_x being the more basic of the two subunits in each nomenclature. Two homogeneous monomers would be expected to give two homodimers and only one heterodimer. The multiplicity of forms that have been observed is yet to be explained.

Two full-length cDNA clones for alpha family subunits, referred to as Ha_1 and Ha_2 , have been described^{60,61} having 96% identity in the nucleotide sequence of the coding region. Com-

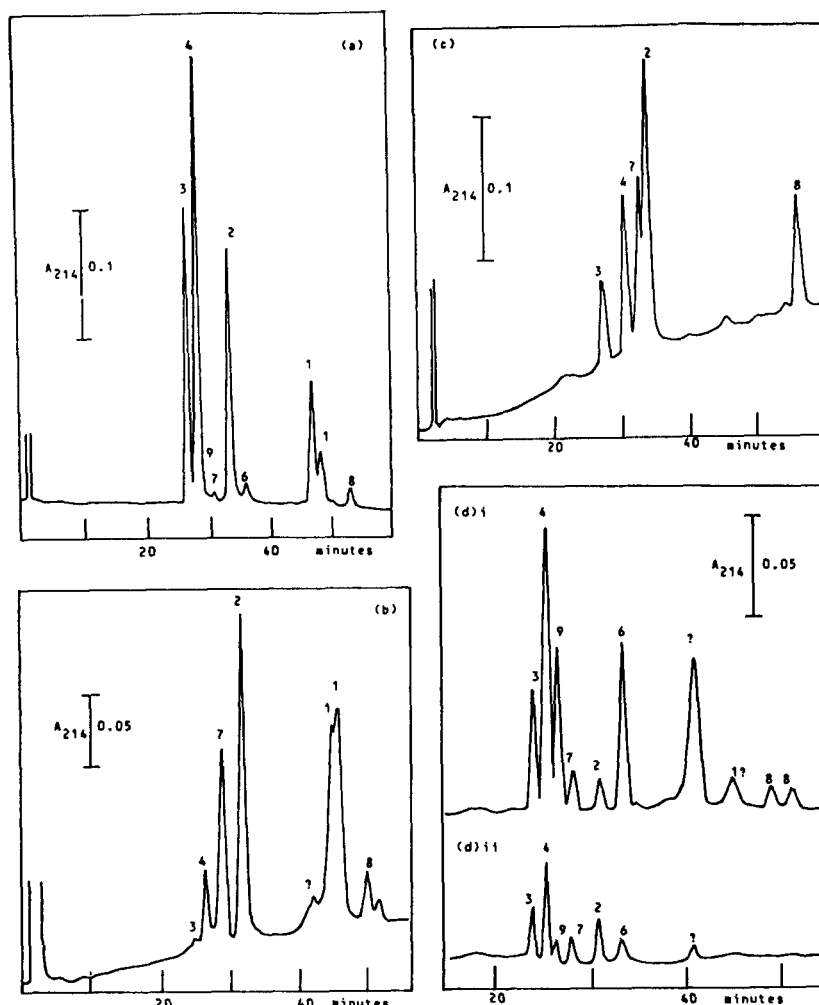


FIGURE 1. GSH transferase composition of the soluble fraction of rat tissues of (a) liver, (b) kidney, (c) lung, (d) i) spermatogenic tubules, and (dii) interstitial cells of testis as analyzed by HPLC separation of subunits. Data from the Cancer Research Campaign Molecular Toxicology Research Group.

parisons of deduced sequences show that between species, human and rat alpha class GSH transferases are approximately 75% identical in amino acid sequence.

"Near neutral" and "anionic" forms were found in later studies of human liver from various sources and shown to be homologous with the mu and pi families, respectively, in the rat.^{40,46,58,60-63} The human π gene has been mapped and shown to have features in its upstream regulatory region similar to those seen in rat subunit 7, for example, sequences associated with "housekeeping" genes, such as a high G and C and CpG content around its promoters, GC boxes matching the common sequence to the binding site of transcription factor SPI, and a phorbol ester/ras responsive element.⁴⁶

Whereas representatives of the alpha family GSH transferases are abundant in all human livers, mu class enzymes are either of low abundance or not present at all. This is illustrated in Figure

2, which shows the analysis of three human livers by HPLC. From genetic studies of 179 liver samples from Chinese, Indian, and Caucasian subjects, it was concluded that the mu locus (GST I) has two expressing genes and a null allele.⁶⁴ This conclusion has been supported by other population studies.⁶⁵⁻⁶⁷ It has been suggested that the null allele either gives no product or an inactive product incapable of forming dimers, with the result that the mu family is either absent or represented by either one or other of two active homodimers or an active heterodimer.⁶⁴ Comparison between sequences at present available for human and rat GSH transferases of the mu family once more show considerable homology between the species.^{64a}

2. Tissue Distribution

A survey of a number of tissues shows that, in most cases, humans have more CDNB-GSH transferase activity than the

Table 1
Rat GSH Transferases^a

Substrate	Enzymes by class							
	Alpha			Mu			Pi	Unassigned
	1-1	2-2	8-8	3-3	4-4	6-9	7-7	5-5
1-Chloro-2,4-dinitrobenzene	40.0	38.0	10.0	50.0	20.0	190.0	20	<0.15
1,2-Dichloro-4-nitrobenzene	0.15	0.15	0.12	8.4	0.7	2.4	<0.05	nil
<i>trans</i> -4-Phenyl-3-buten-2-one	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	1.2	0.2	0.02	<0.001
1,2-Epoxy-3-(<i>p</i> -nitrophenoxy)propane	0.7	0.9	nd ^b	0.2	0.9	<0.5	1.0	25.5
Ethacrynic acid	0.3	2.1	7.0	0.4	1.0	<0.5	4.0	nil
4-Hydroxynon-2-enal ^{54,55}	2.6	0.7	170.0	2.7	6.9	nd	nd	nd
Cumene hydroperoxide	1.4	3.0	1.1	0.1	0.4	0.04	0.01	12.5
Linoleate hydroperoxide	3.0	1.6	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.06	1.5	5.3
Δ^5 -Androstene-3,17-dione	0.23	0.07	nd	0.02	0.002	nd	<0.001	nd

Note: Data are from the Cancer Research Campaign Molecular Toxicology Research Group, unless otherwise stated.

^a Activities ($\mu\text{mol}\cdot\text{min}^{-1}\cdot\text{mg}^{-1}$) toward model substrates, some of which are used to specify subunits.

^b nd = not determined.

rat.⁶⁸ Many data are now available concerning isoenzyme content of the liver and interindividual variation in that organ. Information in the same detail is rarely available for other tissues, where in most cases the enzymes present are usually identified as “cationic”, “near neutral”, or “anionic”, and, although these broad designations may sometimes equate with alpha, mu, and pi, this equivalence cannot be taken for granted. In an early study, all three forms of GSH transferase, namely, “anionic”, “near neutral”, and “acidic”, were found in the adrenal, testis, and ovary; “anionic” alone occurred in the lung.⁶⁹ In certain tissues, such as erythrocyte, platelet,⁷⁰ thyroid,⁷¹ placenta, lung, heart, spleen, kidney, pancreas, and liver,⁷² the acidic transferase has been identified as GSH transferase π . Subsequently, the kidney has been analyzed, showing that multiple forms of the alpha class together with the pi class are well represented, and small amounts of the mu class are present.^{73,74} This pattern is comparable to that found in rat kidney.

Three further mu class enzymes associated with extrahepatic tissues are GST 4, which is muscle specific,^{65,74} GST 5, which has so far only been found in brain,⁷⁴ and the alpha class GSH transferase 9.9. This last isoenzyme, which has been isolated from skin, differs from hepatic alpha enzymes in its N-terminal sequence, which is identical to that of rat GSH transferase subunit 2 and its higher apparent molecular weight.⁷⁵

Relatively little is known of the occurrence of GSH transferase mu in extrahepatic tissues. However, the availability of the substrate *trans*-stilbene oxide now provides a sensitive means for detecting it and can be used to gather information about it. The considerable variation in isoenzyme content among individuals should result in corresponding variations in their susceptibility to drugs and toxins. An interesting study with mononuclear leukocytes measured activity toward *trans*-stilbene oxide in a survey

of smokers who were either control subjects without disease or lung cancer patients. It was found that a greater proportion of control smokers (59%) had *trans*-stilbene oxide-GSH transferase activity than those with cancer (35%), which led to the conclusion that the gene expressing mu may be a host determinant of susceptibility to lung cancer.⁷⁶⁻⁸⁰

3. Enzymic Activity

Within the same family, human and rat isoenzymes have similar enzymic activities. Subunits α_x and α_y are associated with Se-independent GSH peroxidase activity, subunit α_x being more active than α_y . GSH transferase μ , like rat subunit 4, has activity toward *trans*-4-phenyl-3-butene-2-one, and GSH transferase π , like rat subunit 7, is a good enzyme for ethacrynic acid and a better Se-independent GSH peroxidase with linoleate hydroperoxide than with cumene hydroperoxide (see Table 2).

Although information is fragmentary, biologically significant substrates are utilized by human transferases, as would be expected from the known behavior of their rat equivalent. For example, this has been demonstrated with the catalysis of the reaction of *N*-acetyl-*p*-benzoquinone imine with GSH. Here, the pi family enzymes 7-7 and π are good catalysts for conjugation, and the alpha class enzymes of rat and man are also good catalysts, but for both conjugation and reduction to acetaminophen.²³ Other examples from PAH chemistry are discussed in Polyaromatic Hydrocarbon Epoxides (see below).

D. Glutathione Transferase Isoenzymes in the Mouse

1. Structure and Nomenclature

The alpha, mu, and pi multigene families have also been recognized in the mouse. These designations have been made largely on the basis of substrate specificity, immunological

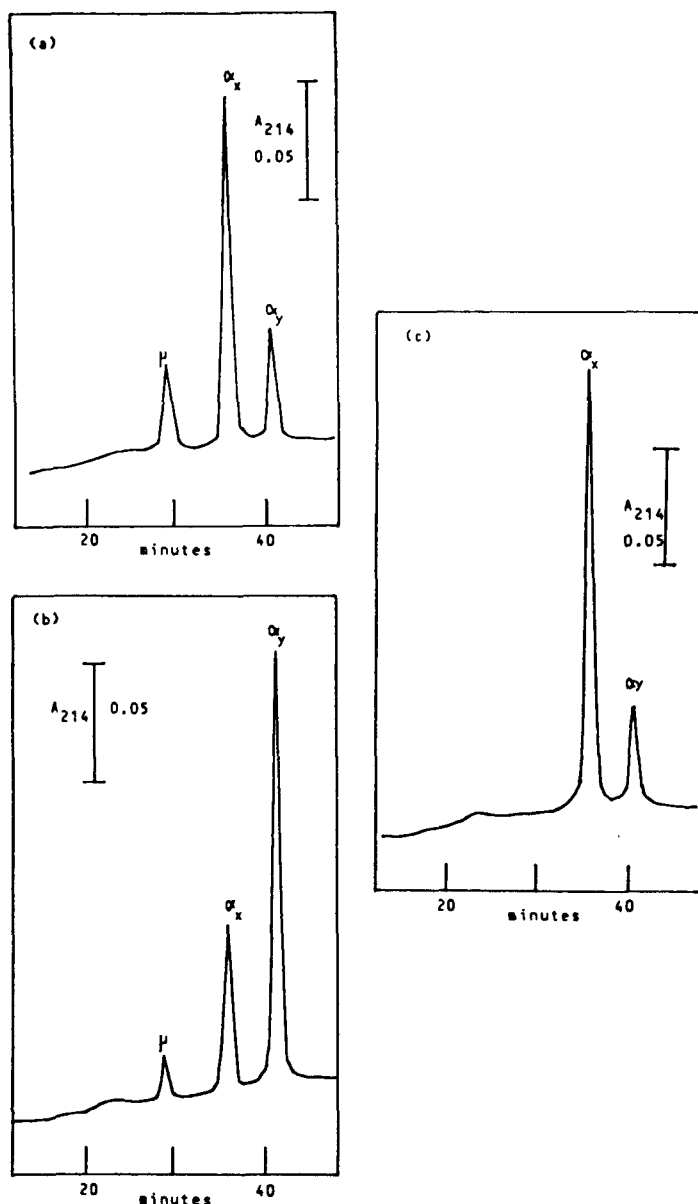


FIGURE 2. Separation of GSH transferase subunits from three human livers by HPLC, showing interindividual variation in enzyme composition. (From Ostlund Farrants, A.-K., Meyer, D. J., Coles, B., Sonthan, C., Aitken, A., Johnson, P. J., and Ketterer, B., *Biochem. J.*, 245, 423, 1987. With permission.) Data from the Cancer Research Campaign Molecular Toxicology Research Group.

cross-reactivity with antisera against rat GSH transferases, and electrophoretic mobility on sodium dodecyl sulfate-polyacrylamide gels.^{40,81} Chromatography on hydroxy-apatite has shown that pi type enzymes can be resolved into three forms,⁸² but whether these are posttranslational modifications or the products of more than one gene is not known. So far, only one expressing gene has been detected in rat and man. Certainly, the pi family is expressed differently in the mouse compared with rat and man. It is a prominent component in the liver and particularly

Table 2
Human GSH Transferases^a

Substrate	Enzyme by class			
	Alpha		Mu	Pi
	$\alpha_x\alpha_x$	$\alpha_y\alpha_y$	μ	π
1-Chloro-2,4-dinitrobenzene	55	60	90	72
1,2-Dichloro-4-nitrobenzene	0.3	0.8	0.03	0.6
<i>trans</i> -4-Phenyl-3-buten-2-one	nil	nil	0.36	0.01
1,2-Epoxy-3-(<i>p</i> -nitrophenoxy)propane	nil	nil	0.11	1.8
Ethacrynic acid	0.11	0.14	0.081	1.9
Cumene hydroperoxide	6.2	2.1	0.63	0.04
Linoleate hydroperoxide	4.7	1.6	nd	0.44

Note: Data are from the Cancer Research Campaign Molecular Toxicology Research Group.

^a Activities ($\mu\text{mol}\cdot\text{min}^{-1}\cdot\text{mg}^{-1}$) toward substrates used to specify subunits

abundant in the female liver,⁸¹⁻⁸³ whereas in many extrahepatic tissues it is said to be absent.⁸¹⁻⁸³

2. GSH Transferases Across the Lifespan

A study of GSH-CDNB transferase activity in the female mouse liver, lung, and intestine between the ages of 2 weeks and 18 months show that in the 9 months following birth the activity increases from 40 nmol mg protein⁻¹ min⁻¹ to 160 nmol mg protein⁻¹ min⁻¹ and then falls away steeply to postnatal levels by 15 months. Similar changes are seen in lung and intestine and may also occur in other species.⁸⁴ Such reduced GSH transferase levels may be associated with the increased susceptibility to disease and drugs that occurs with advanced age.⁸⁵

V. GLUTATHIONE TRANSFERASES IN TUMORS

In tumors, GSH transferases are of interest for several reasons. They may confer an advantage on preneoplastic and neoplastic cells over their normal neighbors, they may confer resistance to chemotherapeutic drugs, and also they may have diagnostic value as tumor markers.

A. Hepatocarcinogenesis in the Rat

An early effect of feeding hepatocarcinogens, such as 3'-methyl-*N,N*-dimethyl-4-aminoazobenzene or aflatoxin B₁, is an overall induction in subunits 1 and 3.⁸⁶ Subsequently, foci of hepatocytes rich in subunit 7 appear,^{87,88} many developing into nodules where, in addition to GSH transferases, epoxide hydrolase, NAD(P)H-quinone oxido-reductase, and UDP-glucuronyl transferase are also seen to be increased.⁸⁹ Most foci and nodules redifferentiate into apparently normal liver tissue, but some nodules persist and become neoplastic.⁹⁰ The primary hepatomas that result have a similar isoenzyme content to that in the

nodules.⁴² During the progression of hepatoma to greater malignancy, all but subunit 7 may be repressed.^{42a} Subunit 7 is therefore a very useful marker for both hepatocellular preneoplasia and hepatocarcinoma. It also appears to be ras responsive, since it can be induced *de novo* in rat liver epithelial cells by transformation with a *N-ras* oncogene.⁸⁸

B. Human Tumors

Present evidence suggests that, in human tumors, the expression of alpha enzymes indicates a hepatocellular carcinoma, and GSH transferase π either a cholangiocarcinoma or a metastasis from the colon. Many other human tumors show a common pattern, namely, enhanced expression of GSH transferase π . This has been demonstrated immunohistochemically in cancer of the colon,⁹¹ stomach, pancreas, and uterine cervix^{91,92} and by immunoblotting techniques in adenocarcinoma of the breast and lung, nodular small-cell lymphoma and mesothelioma,⁹³ and metastatic melanoma.⁹⁴ It has also been demonstrated by isoelectric focusing in renal cortex tumors.⁹⁵ In the case of liver tumors, GSH transferase π , unlike subunit 7 in rat hepatoma, is not a generally recognized marker for human hepatocellular carcinoma.^{58,91,96}

Tumor cell lines may also have elevated GSH transferase π , for example, small-cell⁹⁷ and nonsmall-cell lung carcinoma cell lines derived from ovarian carcinoma and EJ6 bladder carcinoma.⁹⁸ There are human tumor cell lines with very low levels of GSH transferases, for example, a MCF7 mammary carcinoma cell line. Induction of resistance to adriamycin in this MCF7 cell lines, however, has resulted in a 45-fold increase in an acid isoenzyme believed to be GSH transferase π .⁹⁹ Neither adriamycin nor its known metabolites are known to be substrates for GSH transferase π , which it induces in MCF7 cells.

The possibility that ras acts through TRE elements of cellular genes is highly relevant to tumor-specific induction of GSH transferase π expression, as amplified or activated ras genes are frequently found in human tumors.

VI. MEMBRANE-BOUND GLUTATHIONE TRANSFERASES

Although soluble GSH transferases have been the most intensively studied, membrane-bound forms also occur. They have been observed in hepatic microsomes and mitochondria and membrane fractions from other cells,¹⁰⁰ for example, the leukotriene C_4 synthase activity of the particulate fraction of rat basophil leukemia cells.¹⁰¹ When isolated from rat liver, microsomes contain both strongly adsorbed soluble GSH transferases and at least one intrinsic enzyme.¹⁰⁰

The major intrinsic enzyme is referred to as microsomal GSH transferase. It has a molecular weight of 17,200 and a primary structure that has no apparent homology with the amino acid sequences of known soluble GSH transferase subunits.¹⁰⁰ This enzyme is activated by reagents that react with thiols, including

N-ethylmaleimide, disulfides, and perhaps also quinones and products of carbon tetrachloride metabolism.¹⁰⁰ This enzyme has appreciable activity toward 1-chloro-2,4-dinitrobenzene and some other model substrates, and low activity toward two carcinogenic electrophiles, namely, 1-nitropyridine-*N*-oxide (10 nmol/min/mg) and benzo(a)pyrene-4,5-oxide (2.4 nmol/min/mg).¹⁰⁰

In the rat, microsomal GSH transferase is found principally in the liver, although it has been detected in extra-hepatic tissues, and a similar enzyme is found in the liver of other mammals.¹⁰⁰

Its importance in carcinogenesis is not clear. A microsomal enzyme has been implicated in the metabolism of the renal carcinogen, hexachlorobutadiene.¹⁰² Immobilized microsomal fractions have also been used to catalyze GSH-dependent detoxication of the genotoxic nitrogen mustard, melphalan.¹⁰³

VII. EXAMPLES OF THE DETOXICATION OF CARCINOGENS BY GLUTATHIONE CONJUGATION

A. Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons

A number of PAH carcinogens have been shown to participate in the GSH conjugation pathway. These include benz(a)anthracene (BA),¹⁰⁴ 7-methyl-benzanthracene, 7,12-dimethyl-benzanthracene,¹⁰⁵ benzo(a)pyrene (BP),¹⁰⁶ and 3-methylcholanthrene.¹⁰⁷ The literature has been reviewed.¹⁰⁸⁻¹¹⁰ The electrophiles involved are predominantly the k-region epoxides; for example, GSH conjugates form about 70% of the biliary metabolites of BP-4,5-oxide in the rat.¹¹¹ The K-region epoxides are positive in bacterial and other mutagenicity tests, and therefore are genotoxic. However, DNA adducts have not been detected in experimental animals and they have not been implicated in carcinogenesis. It is assumed that they are effectively detoxified by GSH transferases and epoxide hydrolase. Table 3 shows that BP-4,5-oxide is utilized by a number of GSH transferase isoenzymes.

The metabolites responsible for the carcinogenic effect of PAH are "Bay region" diol epoxides, which bear a highly reactive benzylic epoxide carbon atom¹¹⁴ and are poor substrates for epoxide hydrolases. They are, however, substrates for GSH transferase isoenzymes (see Table 3). The importance of GSH conjugation as a protective mechanism for DNA binding of the "Bay region" epoxide BP-7,8-diol-9,10-oxide (BPDE) has been shown in a number of systems, including the rat hepatocyte, in which activation and detoxication occur together, or in *in vitro* systems involving BP epoxides and nuclear DNA.^{115,116} BP and other PAHs are not carcinogenic for rat liver, but are carcinogenic for mouse skin and rat mammary gland.^{117,118} This may be due to the very high levels of GSH transferase activity found in the rat liver and the much lower levels found in the mouse skin and rat mammary gland.

Epoxidation of PAH is not the only reaction that gives rise to genotoxic electrophiles. In the case of 7,12-dimethyl-benz(a)anthracene, activation to a DNA-binding species occurs by methyl oxidation to 7,12-dihydroxymethylbenz(a)anthracene,

Table 3

Activities of Rat GSH Transferases toward Some Electrophiles Derived from Carcinogens and Some Model Electrophiles

Substrate	GSH transferase isoenzyme						Ref.
	1-1	2-2	3-3	4-4	7-7	5-5	
<i>N</i> -Acetyl- <i>p</i> -benzoquinone imine	240	48.0	6.0	3.0	60.0	nd	23
Aflatoxin B ₁ -8,9-oxide	0.0001	0.001	nil	nil	nil	nd	113
Benzo(a)pyrene-4,5-oxide	0.011	0.004	0.087	nd	nd	0.069	112
\pm anti Benzo(a)pyrene-7,8-diol-9,10-oxide	0.1	0.08	0.03	0.33	0.33	nd	26, 27
\pm anti Benz(a)anthracene-3,4-diol-1,2-oxide	nd	nd	nd	2.1	nd	nd	27
\pm anti Chrysene-1,2-diol-3,4-oxide	nd	nd	nd	1.5	nd	nd	27
1-Nitropyrene-4,5-oxide	0.01	0.03	0.30	0.3	0.02	nd	27
1-Nitropyrene-9,10-oxide	0.06	0.01	0.40	0.20	0.08	nd	27
(<i>R</i>)- α -Bromoisovalerylurea	0.005	0.05	0.13	0.14	nil	nd	206
(<i>S</i>)- α -Bromoisovalerylurea	0.016	0.14	0.055	0.015	nil	nd	206

Note: Activities expressed in $\mu\text{mol}\cdot\text{min}^{-1}\cdot\text{mg}^{-1}$. nd = not determined.

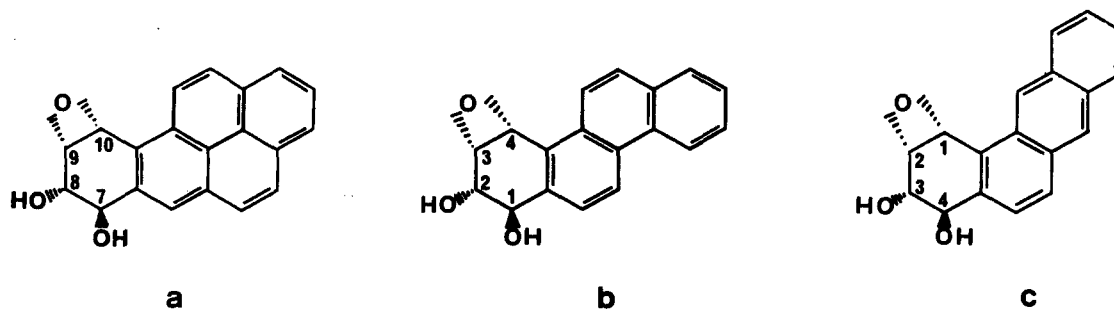


FIGURE 3. Related structures of Bay region diol-epoxides of (a) benzo(a)pyrene, (b) chrysene, and (c) benz(a)anthracene.

followed by sulfation. Dihydroxymethylbenz(a)anthracene-7-sulfate has been shown to be a good substrate for GSH transferases, forming *S*-(12-hydroxymethylbenz(a)-anthracene-7-yl)methyl glutathione. Inhibition of DNA binding by GSH transferase catalyzed conjugation appears to be complete, since binding of the 7-sulfate to calf thymus DNA *in vitro* and the mutagenicity of the sulfate can be abolished by GSH and the GSH transferases of rat liver cytosol.¹¹⁹ The isoenzyme specificity for this substrate has yet to be determined.

1. Stereoselectivity and Regioselectivity in Glutathione Conjugation of PAH and Related Epoxides

There is now considerable evidence that catalysis of conjugation of "Bay region" diol epoxides and K-region epoxides with GSH occurs stereoselectively. A high degree of stereoselective attack is observed toward the isomers of BPDE and the diol epoxides of benz(a)anthracene and chrysene (*trans*-3,4-dihydroxy-1,2-epoxy-1,2,3,4-tetrahydroxybenz(a)anthracene and *trans*-1,2-dihydroxy-3,4-epoxy-1,2,3,4-tetrahydroxychrysene, respectively).²⁷ Conjugation catalyzed by GSH transferase 4-4 is

specific for the (+)-enantiomer in each case. The three oxides are structurally closely related (Figure 3), and all have the benzylic carbon, at which attack occurs, in the *R* configuration. GSH transferase 7-7 has also been found to be specific for attack at the *R*-configured carbon of (+)-*anti*-BPDE.¹²⁰

The conjugation of (\pm)-*anti*-BPDE has also been examined for the human isoenzymes α through ϵ (as a mixture), μ , and π , which have been shown to be 59, 60, and 90% selective for the (+) enantiomer, respectively.¹²¹ It is of interest that human GSH transferase μ , although resembling rat GSH transferase 4-4 in that it utilizes *trans*-phenyl-4-buten-2-one as a diagnostic model substrate, is not as selective as GSH transferases 4-4 with respect to the (+)-enantiomer.

Stereoselectivity also occurs for the *R*-configured carbon of K-region epoxides during catalysis of GSH conjugation by mu class isoenzymes. Some of the most detailed studies are those of Boehlert and Armstrong¹²² and Cobb et al.,¹²³ who used purified optical isomers of azaarene and arene oxides and purified rat isoenzymes 3-3, 3-4, and 4-4. These workers have shown that stereoselectivity is most pronounced with isoenzyme 4-4. For both the *R,S*- and *S,R*-epoxide enantiomers, the C-O bond of the

carbon that has the R absolute configuration (R-carbon) is preferentially attacked. The absolute configuration of the carbon atoms of the epoxide ring is more important than the electronic differences between the two carbon atoms. Further studies of phenanthrene-9,10-oxide and GSH transferase 4-4 showed that specificity of attack at the R-carbon was lost by replacing GSH with glycylcysteinyl glutamate ("retro-inverso GSH"),¹²⁴ but the reaction rate is only 1/1000 the rate of the reaction catalyzed by GSH.

BP-4,5-Oxide reacts with GSH catalytically at both the 4- and 5- positions. However, when the purified optical isomers are used it is found that (–)-(4R,5S)-BP-oxide is attacked predominantly at the R-configured carbon to form (4S)-glutathionyl-(5S)-hydroxy BP, and (+)-(4S,5R)-BP-oxide is also attacked at the R-carbon to form (5S)-glutathionyl-(4S)-hydroxy-BP.¹²⁵⁻¹²⁷ The human GSH transferase isoenzyme μ is also specific for the R-carbon of (–)-(4R,5S)-BP-4,5-oxide. Conversely, cytosolic GSH transferases from rat kidney and spleen catalyze attack of BP-4,5-oxide, pyrene-4,5-oxide, and benz(a)anthracene-5,6-oxide at the S-carbons.¹²⁶ The major isoenzymes of these organs are in the alpha family. Preference for attack at the S-carbon of the K-region epoxides has also been found with cytosolic fractions of rabbit tissues, but the enzymes involved in these studies have not been characterized.¹²⁷

The stereospecificity for attack at the R-carbon of K-region PAH epoxides has been rationalized by a simple model in which the structurally related aromatic rings and epoxide group are arranged in the catalytic site of the enzyme in the same way.^{123,126} The PAH diol epoxides mentioned above do not fit into this scheme as readily.

2. Chemical Reactivity vs. Stereoselectivity of Attack in PAH and Related Epoxides

An interesting situation arises when attack is preferred chemically at a more reactive benzylic position of an epoxide, but there is stereochemical restraint of attack because the configuration at the benzylic carbon is unfavorable for GSH transferase-catalyzed reaction. For example, racemic styrene oxide reacts with GSH in the enzyme (rat liver cytosol)-catalyzed reaction preferentially at the R-carbon, i.e., (R)-(+)-styrene oxide at the benzylic carbon and in (S)-(-)-styrene oxide at the nonbenzylic carbon, despite the benzylic carbon being the more reactive.¹²⁸

In the case of *anti*-BP diol epoxide isomers, the (–) *anti*-isomer, which has a S-configuration at the benzylic carbon, is not a substrate for GSH transferases 4-4 and, in fact, appears to be an inhibitor of the enzymic activity toward the (+)-*anti* isomer.²⁶ In this case, the behavior is presumably due to the complexity of the molecule that leads to restricted access of GSH to the R-configured, nonbenzylic carbon, and to the intrinsic lower reactivity of the nonbenzylic carbon compared with the benzylic (S)-carbon.

B. Aflatoxin B₁ (AFB₁)

A GSH conjugate has been found as a major biliary metabolite

of this potent mycotoxin and hepatocarcinogen.^{129,130} In the rat, it can account for up to one third of the biliary metabolites of AFB₁ (about 10% of a 0.5-mg/kg dose).^{113,131}

Activation of AFB₁ involves cytochrome P-450 oxidation of the 8,9-double bond. The unstable epoxide binds to guanine residues in DNA at the N-7 position.¹³²⁻¹³⁵ The structure of the GSH conjugate has been determined by proton nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR) and mass spectroscopy,¹³⁶ and is in agreement with its formation by stereospecific attack of GSH at the 8-position of the 8,9-oxide (Figure 4).

Conjugation of the oxide is an important detoxication route for the epoxide that otherwise hydrolyzes to the diol.^{137,138} The diol itself must be regarded as a toxic product since it reacts readily with protein by Schiff base formation,¹³⁸ and there is some evidence that the diol can bind to DNA.¹³⁹ Thus, GSH conjugation prevents the toxicity of both the epoxide and its hydrolysis product. The possibility that the GSH conjugate could be formed via the ring-opened form of the diol (which is a hemiacetal) has been investigated, but this reaction does not occur.¹¹³

Experiments with AFB₁ oxide have required the activation of the toxin by microsomal oxidation or peroxo-acid oxidation (although the oxide has recently been isolated in a relatively stable form^{139a}). Using microsomal oxidation to activate AFB₁, it has been shown that GSH conjugation occurs only in the presence of the GSH transferases.^{113,131,140,141} The catalysis of conjugation has not been investigated in detail, but of those GSH transferase isoenzymes investigated (rat enzymes 1-1, 2-2, 3-3, and 4-4) only enzymes containing subunits 1 and 2 (alpha class) are responsible for activity.¹¹³

A number of studies have shown how the species resistance to the acute toxic effects of AFB₁ correlate with the GSH transferase activity of their respective liver cytosols to catalyze AFB₁ oxide conjugation.¹⁴²⁻¹⁴⁴ In addition, AFB₁ binding to DNA is inhibited by the GSH transferases. For example, experiments using hepatic microsomal activation of AFB₁ in the presence of liver cytosols have shown that GSH conjugation is responsible for 5 to 60% inhibition of DNA binding in rats,^{113,145} 50 to 80% in the hamster,¹⁴⁵ and 22 to 38% in the mouse.¹⁴⁶ Studies *in vivo* have given similar results.^{146,147} These experiments establish the importance of GSH conjugation as a mechanism that confers resistance to the acute hepatotoxic effects of AFB₁. It would appear that in the rat liver, the GSH transferases become significantly anticarcinogenic if inducers are fed. For example, the powerful inducer ethoxyquin results in a fourfold to fivefold increase in the biliary excretion of AFB₁-GSH conjugate and a marked decrease in genotoxicity as demonstrated by 90% reduction in DNA adducts and greater than 95% reduction in the percentage of liver occupied by preneoplastic foci.¹⁴⁸

C. Aromatic Amines

GSH conjugation of aromatic amine carcinogens forms an important detoxication route. Extensive study of the metabolism of aromatic amine carcinogens has shown that a critical step in the

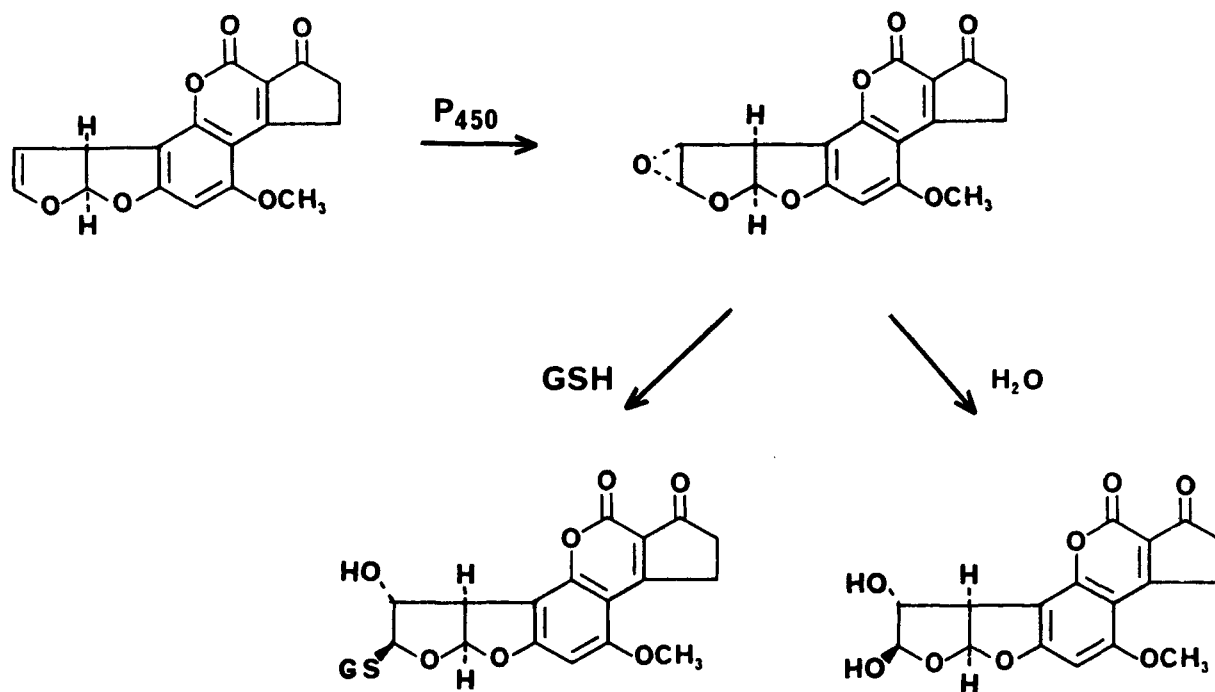


FIGURE 4. Metabolism of aflatoxin B₁ by P₄₅₀ to the 8,9-oxide and its reaction with GSH and water.

formation of the genotoxic electrophile is oxidation of the amine to the *N*-hydroxy compound.¹⁴⁹ *N*-Hydroxyarylamines have limited electrophilic activity, and although they are known to react directly with DNA (e.g., *N*-hydroxy-2-aminofluorene, see below), a further critical esterification step is usually required to generate the ultimate carcinogen. Several N-O esters are known to be involved, and the route of esterification depends on the carcinogen and the species of animal, for example, sulfation in aminoazodye carcinogens,¹⁵⁰ sulfation and *N*- and *O*-acetylation for aminofluorene and related compounds in the rat,¹⁵¹⁻¹⁵³ and acetylation in the case of benzidine.¹⁵⁴ Other mechanisms are also involved, for example, *N*-hydroxy-2-naphthylamine is activated via *N*-glucuronidation in the dog,¹⁵⁵ and aminoacyl *t*-RNA synthetases have been implicated in the esterification of *N*-hydroxy derivatives of food pyrolysis carcinogens.¹⁵⁶

These ultimate carcinogens have in common the presence of a good leaving group on the amine nitrogen. *N*-Sulfates spontaneously lose sulfate to form nitrenium ions and their delocalized aromatic carbonium ion tautomers. *N*-Acetoxy compounds react in a similar way, although S_N2 character is more pronounced. In the case of the *N*-glucuronide of 2-naphthylamine, the carcinogen is unstable at low pH.¹⁵⁵ In the dog, this results in expression of genotoxicity in the bladder where, during urinary excretion, the glucuronide is exposed to low pH. It should be noted that the parent hydroxylamines also show more pronounced electrophilic character under acid conditions where protonation leads to loss of water and the generation of the electrophilic species.

Although *N*-hydroxylation is a critical step in the generation of genotoxic electrophiles derived from aromatic amine carcinogens, oxidative metabolism also occurs at other sites. In general, these reactions are detoxication steps, since electrophiles are not produced, or those formed do not, apparently, react with DNA. For example, extensive P-450-catalyzed oxidation of aminoazodye carcinogens occurs in the rat to form phenols (excreted as sulfate and glucuronide conjugates).¹⁵⁷

Nitro PAH are subject to oxidative metabolism that leads to the generation of epoxides and phenols. However, the present evidence is that these are not responsible for the carcinogenic effects of nitro PAH, since the oxides involved are mainly K-region oxides. Activation to genotoxic electrophiles appears to occur by the same route as the aromatic amine carcinogens and therefore involves a reductive or series of reductive steps via the nitroso compound and hydroxylamine to the amine.¹⁵⁸⁻¹⁶⁰

Aromatic nitroso compounds react rapidly with GSH and thiols in general, and thus may be detoxified by this mechanism. The reaction of nitrosoaromatics with thiols has been studied in detail using nitrosobenzene and thioethyleneglycol¹⁶¹ (Figure 5). Of particular note in this study is the isolation of the unstable intermediate "semimercaptal", which is the first product of the addition of the thiol to the nitroso compound. The "semimercaptal" may be reduced by excess thiol to the hydroxylamine or the sulfenamide conjugate. Hydrolysis of the sulfenamide forms the parent amine. Alternatively, the "semimercaptal" may rearrange to the sulfinamide.

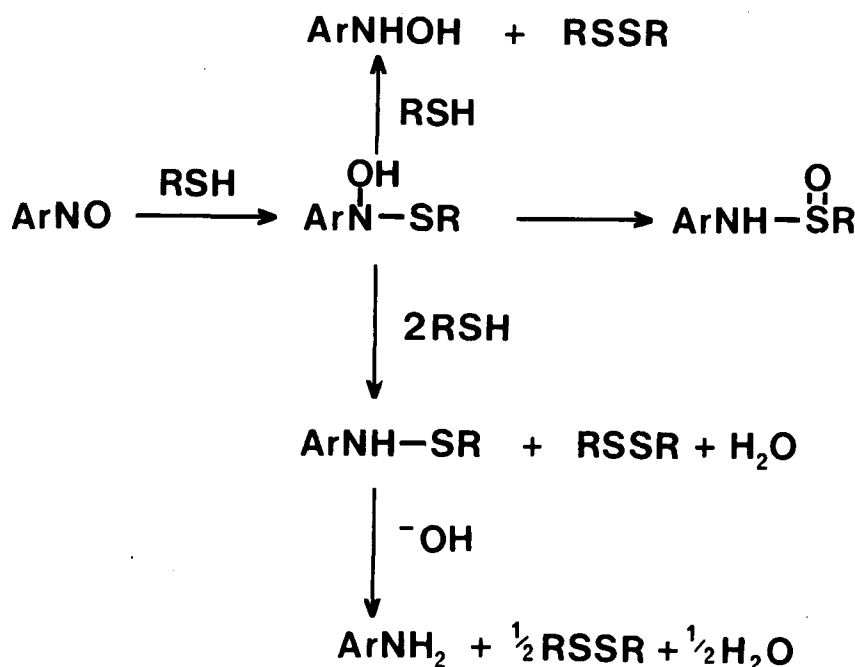


FIGURE 5. Summary of the reaction of nitrosoaromatics (ArNO) with thiols (RSH) via the unstable "semimercaptal" intermediate.

The products of the reaction of nitrosoaromatics with GSH will depend on the ratio of reductant (GSH) to nitroso compound and the rate constants for the various reactions in the proposed scheme. A study of the reaction of a series of *p*-substituted phenylnitroso compounds has shown that the rate of reaction depends on the *p*-substituent; for example, *k* (the second-order rate constant for reaction with GSH at pH 7.4 and 37°C) varies from 1.5 for 4-nitroso-*N,N*-dimethylaniline to 80,000 for 4-nitrosoacetophenone.¹⁶² The thiol has less effect. Using nitrosobenzene (*k* = 5000), the rate constant varies from 1300 with β-mercaptoethanol as the thiol to 12,000 with cysteine or cysteamine.

The ratio of products also depends on the substituent effects. For example, in the case of 4-nitroso-*N,N*-dimethylaniline (electropositive *p*-substituent), formation of the amine is the preferred pathway, via the unstable sulfenamide conjugate. In contrast, with 4-nitrosoacetophenone (electronegative *p*-substituent), the hydroxylamine is formed exclusively. Nitrosoaromatics bearing *p*-substituents of intermediate character (e.g., nitrosobenzene itself) give rise to the sulfinamide conjugate and the hydroxylamine. Thus, substitution with a substituent having a negative Hammett constant appears to form a "hemimercaptal", which is electrophilic and favors nucleophilic attack at the thiol. Substituents with a positive Hammett constant favor attack on the sulfenamide hydroxyl.

These observations may have a bearing on the potential detoxication of aromatic nitroso compounds derived from carcinogens. Those that are effectively electronegatively substi-

tuted would react rapidly with GSH to (re)form the hydroxylamine via an electrophilic "semimercaptal" conjugate.

1. *N*-Methyl-4-Aminoazobenzene (MAB)

GSH conjugates are important constituents of the biliary metabolites of MAB. The major series of GSH conjugates, which form some 70% of the biliary metabolites of a 5-mg/kg dose of MAB in the rat, are derived from aminoazobenzene methimines.^{157,163,164} The sequence of reactions involved (Figure 6) is methyl oxidation by cytochrome P-450 to the *N*-hydroxymethyl-4-aminoazobenzene. This dehydrates (presumably spontaneously) to the methimine, which reacts with GSH to give *N*-methylene glutathion-*S*-yl-4-aminoazobenzene. In addition to *N*-methyl oxidation, 4'-hydroxylation, followed by conjugation with either sulfate or glucuronide, occurs. Double conjugates with GSH and either sulfate or glucuronide are the result.¹⁶⁴ *N*-Methylene-glutathione conjugates are relatively unstable giving formaldehyde and 4-aminoazobenzene (or its sulfate or glucuronide conjugate).

There are no reports of the methimine reacting with DNA, and the genotoxic metabolite of MAB results from *N*-oxidation by the flavin mixed-function oxygenase and sulfation of the hydroxylamine to *N*-sulfonyloxy MAB.¹⁵⁰ This dissociates to a nitrenium ion and its delocalized tautomers to give electrophiles that either react with DNA at the C-8 and N² positions of guanine residues¹⁶⁵ or with GSH to give 3-, 2'-, and 4'-(glutathion-*S*-yl)-MAB (Figure 4).^{166,167} Unlike the *N*-(glutathion-*S*-methylene) conjugates, these are minor metabolites.¹⁶⁸

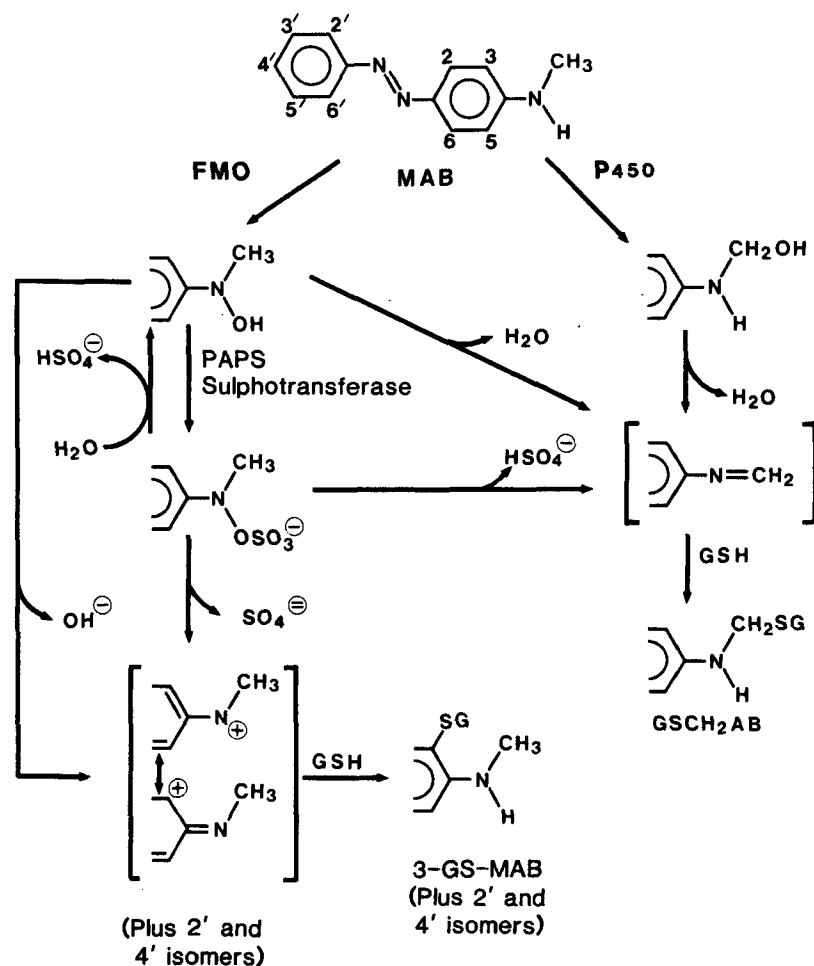


FIGURE 6. Metabolism of *N*-methyl-4-aminoazobenzene: *left*, flavin monooxygenase-catalyzed metabolism to the *N*-hydroxylamine to form the carcinogenic *N*-sulfate and its detoxication by reaction with GSH; *right*, cytochrome P450 oxidation to a methimine and its reaction with GSH.

It is of note that the two sets of detoxication pathways are not as distinct as they may seem. Detailed studies of the reaction of *N*-hydroxy-MAB and *N*-sulfonyloxy-MAB with GSH *in vitro* show that 3-(glutathion-*S*-yl)-*N*-methyl-4-aminoazobenzene and *N*-(glutathion-*S*-methylene)-4-aminoazobenzene are formed in both cases, but that the ratio differs — *N*-hydroxy-MAB reacts mainly via a methimine and *N*-sulfonyloxy-MAB via a nitrenium ion and its delocalized tautomers¹⁶⁹ (Figure 6). The yield of all GSH conjugates is dependent on the GSH concentration and is not affected by liver cytosol or GSH transferases isolated from liver cytosol.^{166,168} *In vivo*, the formation of GSH conjugates is profoundly inhibited by GSH depletion with diethyl maleate.¹⁵⁷ Thus, although GSH may play a role in the detoxication of both classes of electrophile, neither appears to be a substrate for rat hepatic GSH transferases, with the result that the genotoxic *N*-sulfate is poorly detoxified.¹⁶⁸

2. *N*-Acetyl-2-Aminofluorene (AAF)

GSH conjugates of the hepatocarcinogen AAF have been detected in the bile of rats after administration of the carcinogen and account for some 17% of a 13-mg/kg dose.¹⁷⁰ Activation of AAF occurs in a way similar to that of MAB, i.e., *N*-hydroxylation followed by *N*-sulfation. The *N*-sulfate, *N*-sulfonyloxy-AAF, has been shown to be the electrophile that is responsible for DNA binding of the carcinogen *in vivo*.¹⁵¹

The structures of the GSH conjugates have been determined by NMR and mass spectral analyses of the conjugates formed *in vitro*, using the analog of the *N*-sulfate, *N*-acetoxy-AAF. Four conjugates are formed, 1-, 3-, 4-, and 7-(glutathion-*S*-yl)-AAF.¹⁷⁰ The conjugates are formed in a ratio that is in agreement with that predicted from the delocalization of a nitrenium ion to its aromatic carbonium ion tautomers (Figure 7). Subsequent synthesis of the unstable sulfate ester has given direct evidence that the

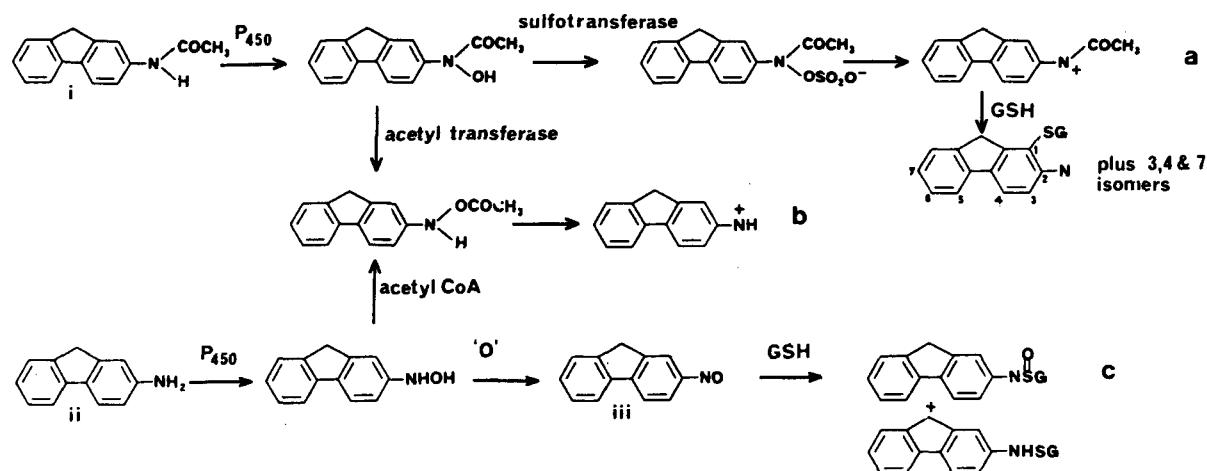


FIGURE 7. Metabolism of *N*-acetylaminofluorene (i) and aminofluorene (ii) (a) cytochrome P450 oxidation to the carcinogenic *N*-sulfate and detoxication with GSH; (c) cytochrome P450 oxidation of aminofluorene to nitrosofluorene (iii) via the hydroxylamine and the reaction with GSH; (b) shows possible routes to a nitrenium ion involving acetyltransferase or acetyl coA-dependent acetylation.

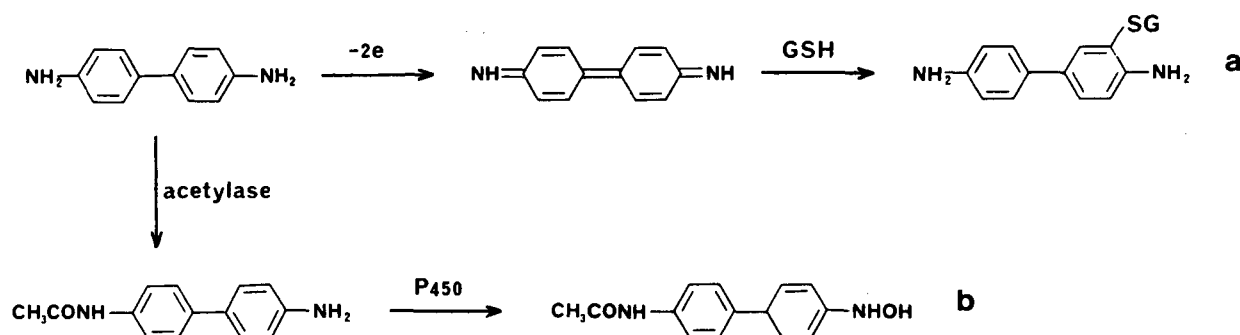


FIGURE 8. Metabolism of benzidine: (a) 2-electron oxidation to the diimine and its detoxication by reaction with GSH; (b) formation of the proximate carcinogen, *N*-acetyl-*N'*-hydroxy benzidine.

same GSH conjugates are formed by reaction of the *N*-sulfate with GSH.¹⁷¹

In vivo, only the 1- and 3-isomers are found in bile.¹⁷⁰ The reason for this is not known. *N*-Sulfonyloxy and *N*-acetoxy AAF are not substrates for rat hepatic GSH transferases,^{170a} and as with DAB, the excretion of GSH conjugates derived from AAF is directly related to GSH status, a characteristic of nonenzymic GSH conjugation.¹⁷²

In vitro, GSH decreased the binding of *N*-sulfonyloxy-AAF to the DNA of isolated nuclei by 15 to 35%.¹⁷² On the other hand, *in vivo* depletion of GSH, which decreases the biliary excretion of the GSH conjugates, did not appear to affect DNA binding.¹⁷² The interpretation of this apparent paradox may depend on the complex situation that occurs *in vivo*, in that deacetylated adducts of AAF, i.e., 2-aminofluorene (AF), are bound to DNA by an as yet unknown mechanism.¹⁷³

The only electrophilic derivative of AF that has been studied with respect to reactions with GSH is *N*-hydroxyaminofluorene,

where the reaction with GSH appears to be slow.¹⁷⁴ In contrast, the reaction of nitrosofluorene, which is an oxidation product of the hydroxylamine, with GSH is rapid. Neither of these reactions were catalyzed by liver cytosol or purified GSH transferases 1-2 or 3-3.^{173a} The products of the reaction of GSH with nitroso-AF are a sulfinamide and the reduced analog the sulfenamide (Figure 7).¹⁷⁴ It has also been shown that *N*-OH-AF can be activated by acetyl coenzyme A-dependent acylation. The same product can also be formed from *N*-OH-AF by *N*-*O*-acetyltransferase-catalyzed acetyl transfer^{152,153} (Figure 7).

3. Benzidine

Benzidine is activated to a DNA-binding electrophile by a similar pathway as other aromatic amines, involving *N*-acetylation and *N'*-hydroxylation, and subsequent *N*-*O*-acetylation¹⁵⁴ (Figure 8). The GSH conjugates of benzidine have not been studied *in vivo*, but the synthetic *N*-sulfate reacts with GSH to produce a GSH conjugate^{154a} (Figure 8).

Benzidine is also metabolized to an electrophile by ram seminal vesicle peroxidase mediated oxidation to benzidine-diimine. The diimine reacts with DNA¹⁷⁵ and GSH,¹⁷⁶ the latter reaction giving a 3-(glutathion-S-yl) benzidine conjugate. GSH has been shown to inhibit DNA binding of the diimine by more than 98%,¹⁷⁵ but the significance of this pathway *in vivo* is not known.

4. Heterocyclic Amine Carcinogens from Cooked Food

Heterocyclic aromatic amines, formed in the cooking of food, have been found to be some of the most potent bacterial mutagens known and have been shown to be carcinogenic.^{156,177} Several classes of heterocyclics have been isolated.

The most potent bacterial mutagens found in cooked food are those with an imidazoquinoline structure: IQ (2-amino-3-imidazo[4,5-f]quinoline); MethylIQ (4-methylIQ); MeIQx (2-amino-3,8-dimethylimidazo-[4,5-f]quinoxaline); 7,8-dimethyl-IQx (2-amino-3,7,8-trimethylimidazo-[4,5-f]quinoxaline); 4,8-dimethyl-IQx (2-amino-3,4,8-trimethylimidazo-[4,5-f]quinoxaline). Formation of these carcinogens appears to involve Maillard reaction products and creatinine.¹⁵⁶ IQ, MeIQ, and IQx induce tumors at multiple sites in rodents; for example, IQ has been shown to induce tumors in the liver, stomach, small and large intestines, Zymbals gland, clitoral gland, skin, oral cavity, and mammary gland (for review, see Reference 156). Other products, although formed in greater quantity, are less mutagenic, e.g., 2-amino-1-methyl-6-phenylimidazo-4,5-pyridine (TMIP).¹⁷⁷

Mutagenic heterocyclics have been isolated from pyrolysates of amino acids or protein: the tryptophan pyrolysis products Trp-P-1 (3-amino-1,4-dimethyl-5H-pyrido[4,3-b]indole); Trp-P-2 (3-amino-1-methyl-5H-pyrido[4,3-b]indole); glutamate pyrolysis products GluP1 (2-amino-6-methyldipyrido[1,2- α :3',2'- d]imidazole); GluP2 (2-amino-dipyrido[1,2- α :3',2'- d]imidazole); and two structurally related products A α C (2-amino-9H-pyrido[2,3-b]indole) and 3-methyl-A α C. Other mutagens have been shown to be present in cooked foods, including 1-nitropyrene and dinitropyrenes.¹⁵⁶

Activation of the heterocyclic arylamine carcinogens, as with other aromatic amines, is thought to require oxidation to the hydroxylamine followed by esterification. *N-O*-Acyl derivatives of Glu-P2 and Trp-P2 have been shown to react with the C-8 carbon of guanine residues in DNA.^{178,179} Seryl and propyl t-RNA synthetase may be involved in the activation of *N*-hydroxy-Trp-P2,¹⁸⁰⁻¹⁸² and *N*-hydroxy-Trp-P2 and -Glu-P1 can be activated by an acetyl CoA-dependent enzyme.¹⁸³ Sulfation may be involved, in part, in the activation of Glu-P1 and IQ.¹⁸⁴ The hydroxylamines react very poorly with DNA (e.g., *N*-hydroxyamino-Trp-P2¹⁷⁸).

GSH conjugation has been shown to occur with the hydroxylamines or nitroso compounds, which are their readily formed oxidation products, derived from Trp-P2 and Glu-P1, and this

offers a potential detoxication process for carcinogenic aromatic amines.

Nitroso-Trp-P-2 reacts with GSH to produce mainly *N*-hydroxy-Trp-P-2 as well as two GSH conjugates, probably similar in structure to those formed from nitrosofluorene (see above and cf. Figure 5).¹⁸⁵ GSH also reacts slowly with *N*-hydroxy-Trp-P-2. This reaction was subject to catalysis by the GSH transferases present in cytosol, but isoenzyme specificity has not been determined. Three conjugates are formed, two of which appear to be similar to those formed from nitroso-Trp-P-2 and GSH, but the third is a GSH conjugate, which is more mutagenic than the parent hydroxylamine.¹⁸⁵ It is interesting to speculate that this electrophilic GSH conjugate is the "semimercaptal" intermediate referred to above. Whether such "semimercaptal" intermediates are responsible for mutagenic or carcinogenic effects of other arylamine carcinogens is not known.

A mass spectroscopy study of the reaction of nitroso-Glu-P-1 with GSH has also shown GSH conjugates to be formed. The unstable conjugates were analyzed by fast-atom bombardment mass spectroscopy and a scheme for their formation proposed that involves the unstable semimercaptal intermediate (see above).¹⁸⁶ Further studies have shown that a *N*-hydroxyamino sulfonamide conjugate is formed in addition to the sulfinamide conjugate and that the sulfonamide is not a simple oxidation product of the sulfinamide.¹⁸⁷

IQ is one of the most important of the heterocyclic aromatic amine carcinogens. However, a search for GSH conjugates among the biliary metabolites of IQ in the rat has shown that they are not formed. The major product is a *N*-sulfamate.¹⁸⁸ The metabolism of MeIQ^{188a} and MeIQx appears to be similar.¹⁸⁹

6. Nitropolycyclicaromatic Hydrocarbons

The carcinogenicity of nitropolycyclicaromatic hydrocarbons is associated with reductive metabolism of the nitro group to the *N*-hydroxy compound, which is then thought to be activated by esterification in a similar manner to other aromatic amine carcinogens.¹⁵⁸⁻¹⁶⁰ Since these carcinogens are also PAH, they are susceptible to epoxidation.

The only member of the group in which GSH conjugation has been studied in any detail is 1-nitropyrene, which is the predominant nitrated PAH identified in environmental samples. 1-Nitropyrene is a powerful indirect bacterial mutagen and is tumorigenic in the rat and mouse.^{160,190,191} GSH conjugates form approximately one third of the biliary metabolites of 1-nitropyrene in the rat.²² The conjugates arise from the K-region oxides, mainly from the 9,10-oxide with lesser amounts from the 4,5-oxide (Figure 9). The structures of the GSH conjugates have been determined by mass spectroscopic and NMR studies of the four conjugates isolated from *in vitro* studies of the conjugation of the synthetic 4,5- or 9,10-oxides. Both 4- and 5- or 9- and 10-substitution by GSH occurs, but it was not possible to separate the isomeric conjugates from each other on a preparative scale, and

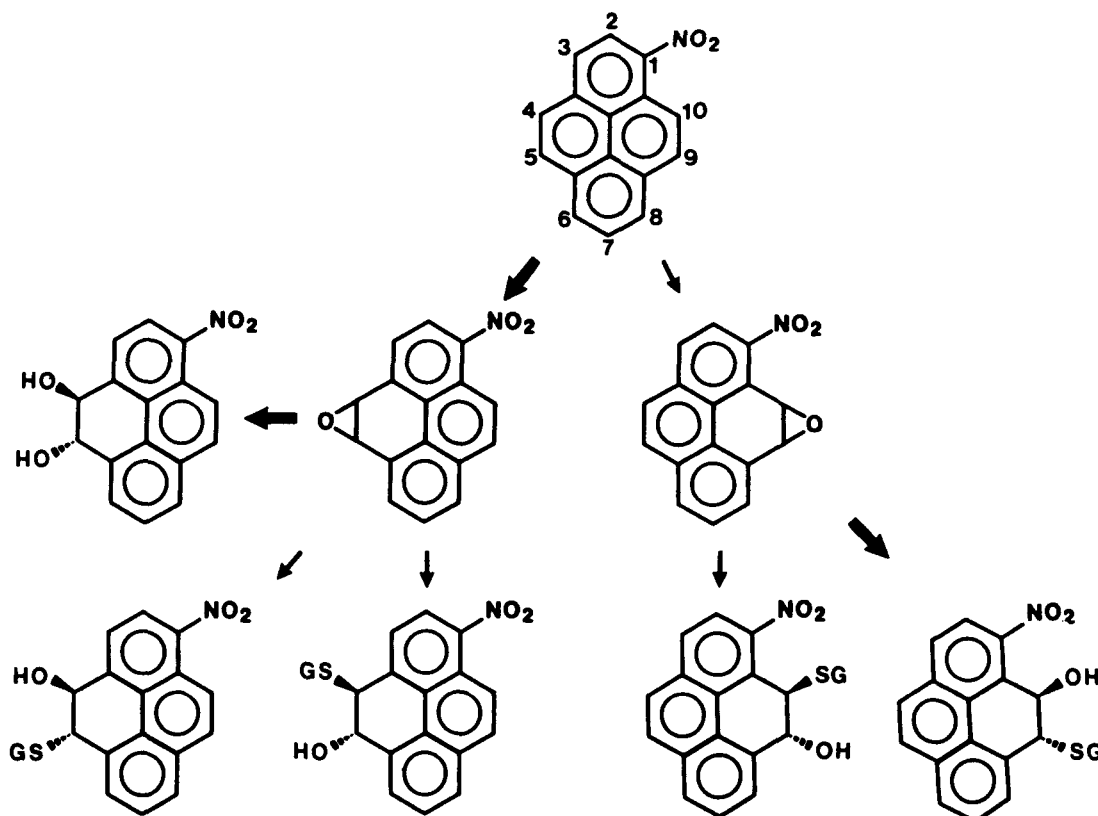


FIGURE 9. Metabolism of 1-nitropyrene in the rat. The major pathways of metabolism are shown by bold arrows. (From Djuric, Z., Coles, B., Fifer, E. K., Ketterer, B., and Beland, F. A., *Carcinogenesis*, 8, 1781, 1987. With permission.)

NMR data were obtained using mixtures. *In vitro*, both K-region oxides have been shown to be substrates for the GSH transferases, they have low K_m (μM range), and low V_{max} . Of the rat isoenzymes tested, those containing the 3 and 4 subunits are the most effective enzymes (Table 4). Isoenzyme 3-3 catalyzed reaction of the 4,5-oxide with GSH gave a 1:1 mixture of the 4- and 5-glutathionyl conjugates, but the 9,10-oxide gave a 2:1 mixture of the 9- and 10-conjugates. This latter observation suggests that there is steric interference caused by the 1-nitro group, which hinders attack at the 10-carbon. The stereochemistry of conjugation has not been examined. It has been suggested that the extensive metabolism of 1-nitropyrene to epoxides rather than by nitro reduction is a major contributing factor to its low carcinogenicity. In contrast, the highly carcinogenic 1,6- and 1,8-dinitropyrenes are able to undergo nitro reduction without extensive competitive metabolism to form epoxides.²²

1-Nitrosopyrene reacts with GSH *in vitro* to give GSH conjugates, which have yet to be characterized. The reaction is apparently complex, since five GSH conjugates can be separated by HPLC. GSH conjugates are also detected as biliary metabolites after administration of 1-nitrosopyrene to rats. Some of the GSH conjugates are base-labile, which suggests that they are similar in structure to the sulfenamide conjugates formed from other nitrosoaromatics.^{22a}

D. Alkylating Agents

The alkylating agent ethylmethane sulfonate was one of the first genotoxic electrophiles shown to be a substrate for rat hepatic GSH transferases *in vitro*.⁷ The mercapturic acid *S*-ethyl-*N*-acetylcysteine had been isolated previously from the urine of rats given ethyl methanesulfonate, indicating that GSH conjugation is an *in vivo* pathway of detoxication.¹⁹²

Dimethylnitrosamine is metabolized to a methylating agent, which may also be detoxified by GSH. Thus *N*-acetyl-*S*-methyl cysteine and *S*-methyl cysteine have been detected in rat urine following administration of the carcinogen dimethylnitrosamine.¹⁹³ These presumably arise from the reaction of GSH with dimethyldiazonium hydroxide, which is the supposed electrophilic metabolite of dimethylnitrosamines.¹⁹⁴ An increase in the formation of *N*-7-methylguanine and *O*-6-methylguanine following GSH depletion confirms the suggested role of GSH in dimethylnitrosamine detoxication.¹⁹⁵ It is not known if this reaction is enzymically catalyzed.

Cancer chemotherapeutic agents, such as the bifunctional alkylating agents, also react with GSH. For example, the sulfur mustard *bis*-(2-chloroethyl)-sulfide and its sulfone are metabolized in part to GSH conjugates.¹⁹⁶ The nitrogen mustard melphalan (*bis*-(2-chloroethyl)-phenylalanine) gives three adducts with GSH due to substitution of either one or both of the chlorine

Table 4**kcat, Km, and Catalytic Efficiency of Some Electrophiles Derived from Carcinogens and Some Model Substrates**

Substrates	Isoenzyme	kcat(s ⁻¹)	Km(μM)	kcat/Km(M ⁻¹ s ⁻¹)	Ref.
<i>N</i> -Acetyl- <i>p</i> -benzoquinonimine	2-2	35	0.7	5 × 10 ⁷	23
1-Nitropyrene-4,5-oxide	4-4	0.3	1.0	3 × 10 ⁵	22
1-Nitropyrene-9,10-oxide	4-4	0.2	2.0	1 × 10 ⁵	22
± <i>anti</i> Benzo(a)pyrene-7,8-diol-9,10-oxide	4-4	0.23	11	2.1 × 10 ⁴	27
± <i>anti</i> Benz(a)anthracene-3,4-diol-1,2-oxide	4-4	0.044	125	0.7 × 10 ⁴	27
± <i>anti</i> Chrysene-1,2-diol-3,4-oxide	4-4	0.005	105	0.6 × 10 ⁴	27
(<i>R</i>)-α-Bromoisovalerylurea	3-3	0.15	2.6 × 10 ³	57	206
(<i>S</i>)-α-Bromoisovalerylurea	2-2	0.26	1.4 × 10 ³	185	206

**FIGURE 10.** Reaction of 1,2-dibromoethane with GSH to form the electrophilic episulfonium ion.

substituents¹⁰³ and the formation of *p*-(glutathion-*S*-yl) phenylalanine.¹⁹⁷ The former reaction was catalyzed by microsomal fractions from both rabbit and human liver.¹⁰³

bis-(2-Chloroethyl)nitrosourea is another bifunctional alkylating agent that is enzymically detoxified by GSH. In the rat, it is a substrate for GSH transferase subunits 3 and 4 in a reaction giving nitrite, GSH disulfide, and the urea. In a rat brain tumor cell line, resistance to this drug is associated with induction of GSH transferase subunit 3.¹⁹⁸

VIII. GLUTATHIONE AND TOXICATION OF ELECTROPHILES

It has been emphasized that the great majority of the reactions of electrophiles with GSH are detoxication processes. However, it has been noted above that the reaction of GSH with *N*-hydroxy-Trp-P-2 produces a genotoxic electrophile as one of the products. Several other cases are known where reaction of alkyl and alkenyl halides with GSH leads to toxic products. This field has been reviewed recently.^{199,200}

Ethylene dibromide reacts with GSH to form 1-bromo-2-*S*-glutathionyl ethane. The unstable product is a sulfur mustard, which reacts with nucleophiles such as water, GSH, and the N-7 positions of guanine in DNA via an episulfonium ion.²⁰¹⁻²⁰⁴ Reaction with DNA is thought to be responsible for the genotoxicity of ethylene dibromide. The reaction of the dibromide with GSH requires catalysis by GSH transferase subunits 1, 2, or 3.²⁰⁴ As can be seen in Figure 10, the episulfonium ion is a charged species with electrophilic properties quite different from those of alkyl halides. From the discussion presented above, it would be expected that the episulfonium ion would be capable of reacting with the bases of DNA, but the alkyl halide would not. This is

found to be the case, since the species bound to DNA retain the glutathionyl moiety, indicating that reaction has occurred via the episulfonium ion.

Polyhalogenated alkenes form GSH conjugates, which are genotoxic after further metabolism. For example, hexachlorobutadiene forms the GSH conjugate, *S*-(1,2,3,4,4-pentachlorobutadienyl)-glutathione, which becomes mutagenic after metabolism by the mercapturic acid pathway to cysteinyl derivatives followed by the action of β-lyase to a vinylic mercaptan.^{102,200}

IX. OVERVIEW OF GSH TRANSFERASE CATALYSED CONJUGATION OF CARCINOGENS

A. Substrate Specificity

All PAH epoxides so far examined have proven to be substrates for GSH transferases (see above and Table 3), as have other oxides, e.g., AFB₁^{113,144} and styrene oxide.¹²⁸ Some aromatic amine metabolites may be substrates, e.g., *N*-OH-Trp-P-2¹⁸⁵ and *N*-acetyl-*p*-benzoquinone imine,²³ but a number of the electrophiles derived from aromatic amines (e.g., the esters of *N*-hydroxy AAF and *N*-hydroxy MAB) are not. The basis of substrate specificity is not known. Catalysis may be associated with a multigene family of enzymes, for example, AFB₁-oxide is conjugated catalytically by isoenzymes 1-1, 1-2, and 2-2,¹¹³ i.e., the alpha family. *Anti*-BPDE, on the other hand, is a substrate for all families of the rat GSH transferases, but it is the best substrate for the pi family (rat 7-7 and human π)¹²¹ followed by rat subunit 4 and human GST μ of the mu family.²⁶

This has important implications where the anticarcinogenic effects of inducers are concerned. AFB₁ is a poor substrate for GSH transferase subunits 1 and 2 only, with the result that

induction of subunit 1 has a significant effect on the detoxication of AFB₁.¹⁴⁸ BPDE, on the other hand, is a substrate for all subunits in the liver, and a particularly good substrate for subunit 4, which is not subject to induction. Therefore, inducers are expected to have only a small effect in this case.

B. Catalytic Constants, Catalytic Specificity

The ratio of k_{cat} (maximum turnover number, V_{max} expressed in molar units) to K_m describes the specificity of an enzyme for its substrate. This ratio, which has the dimensions of a second-order rate constant, cannot be greater than any second-order rate constant on the forward reaction pathway, and therefore sets a lower limit on the rate constant for the association of an enzyme with its substrate. In very efficient enzymes, k_{cat}/K_m can approach the value for a diffusion-controlled rate of reaction between enzyme and substrate, for example, k_{cat}/K_m for crotonase and fumarase are 2.8×10^8 and $1.6 \times 10^8 \text{ M}^{-1}\text{s}^{-1}$, respectively.²⁰⁵ Catalytic specificities for several carcinogen metabolites and some model compounds are presented in Table 4. It can be seen that these vary from the very efficiently catalyzed substrate *N*-acetyl-*p*-benzoquinone imine (NABQI) at $5 \times 10^7 \text{ M}^{-1}\text{s}^{-1}$ ²³ to the very poorly catalyzed substrate (R)- α -bromoisovaleryl urea at $57 \text{ M}^{-1}\text{s}^{-1}$,²⁰⁶ with the majority of values around $10^5 \text{ M}^{-1}\text{s}^{-1}$.

E. Rate Enhancement

The ratio of k_{cat}/K_m to k_2 , the second-order rate constant for the spontaneous reaction with GSH, has been mentioned as a possible indicator of rate enhancement²⁴ brought about by an enzyme. In the case of NABQI and GSH transferase 2-2, this value is 1.7×10^3 , but in the case of 1-nitropyrene-4,5-oxide and GSH transferase 4-4 it is 6.5×10^5 , which is more than two orders of magnitude greater (Table 5). Thus, although the catalytic specificity of the GSH transferase 2-2 catalyzed reaction of *N*-acetylbenzoquinone imine with GSH is very high, these advantages are offset by the very high second-order rate constant for the spontaneous reaction.

VIII. INDUCTION AND ANTICARCINOGENESIS

A. The Rat

A wide range of chemicals, both naturally occurring and

Table 5
Approximate Rate Enhancement by the GSH Transferases

Substrate	Isozyme	k_{cat}/k_m $\text{M}^{-1}\text{s}^{-1}$	k_2^*	$k_{cat}/K_m/k_2$
<i>N</i> -Acetyl- <i>p</i> -benzoquinone imine	2-2	5×10^7	3×10^4	1.7×10^3
1-Nitropyrene-4,5-oxide	4-4	3×10^5	0.17	1.8×10^6

* = The approximate second-order rate constant at pH 7.4

synthetic, induce GSH transferases in the rat, including barbiturates; PAHs;²⁰⁷ other carcinogens, such as *N,N*-dimethyl-4-aminoazobenzene; certain antioxidants, such as butylated hydroxytoluene (BHT), butylated hydroxy-anisole (BHA), and ethoxyquin^{87,208,209} the GSH transferase substrate *trans*-stilbene oxide,²¹⁰ and natural products such as dithiolthiones isolated from the Brassica family.²¹¹ These inducers appear to be selective for subunits 1 and 3, and the β -naphthoflavone responsive element found in the regulatory region of the subunit 1 gene may be associated with this induction.

The above inducers are anticarcinogenic in those cases where the genotoxic electrophile is a good substrate for GSH transferase subunits 1 and 3. This is illustrated above with respect to the carcinogen aflatoxin B₁-8,9-oxide.

B. The Mouse

The mouse has been used to detect inducing activity in a wide range of compounds. Inducers such as phenobarbitone, BHA, and BHT can increase GSH transferase levels up to tenfold.^{208,209} A number of other compounds induce between twofold and fivefold, for example, the coffee bean diterpene esters, kahweol- and cafestrol-palmitates,²¹² and also angelica lactone, coumarin, disulfiram, indole-3-carbinol and indole-3-acetonitrile,^{213,214} while still others like streptozotocin, diethylnitrosamine,²¹⁵ and chronic ethanol induce up to twofold.²¹⁶ Induction by extracts of brassicas and tea leaves have also been observed.^{212,213} None of the above studies have identified the isoenzymes affected by the inducers. Many of these inducers are also active in the esophagus, forestomach, and intestine.^{212,213,217} Enhanced GSH transferase activity in the forestomach, brought about by some of these inducers, has been shown to reduce benzo(a)pyrene-induced neoplasms in this organ.²¹⁸

X. CONCLUSIONS

Living organisms encounter a wide range of chemical structures among the xenobiotics to which they are exposed. A characteristic of many enzyme systems that metabolize them is multiplicity (e.g., cytochrome P-450, GSH transferases, UDP glucuronyl transferases, sulfotransferases).²¹⁹ However, as far as the GSH transferases are concerned, the multiplicity that exists is not sufficient to enable electrophiles derived from all xenobiotics to be utilized as substrates. The protection afforded by GSH transferases is imperfect, and cytotoxic or genotoxic damage cannot always be avoided. This is well illustrated by AFB₁-8,9-oxide, which is a poor substrate for the GSH transferases, and the aromatic amines, which are not substrates and which escape the abundant GSH transferase activity of the liver. Similarly, the PAHs which, though effectively dealt with in the liver, may not encounter appropriate isoenzymes in sufficient quantity in mouse skin or rat mammary gland for effective detoxication.

Although these enzymes do not provide a perfect protection, they are valuable to the cell, as is shown by their abundance in

tumor cells that require advantages over the normal neighbors with which they compete and their induction in cells that become resistant to anticancer drugs.

In this review we have concentrated on chemical carcinogenesis. However, GSH transferases also have endogenous substrates, such as lipid and nucleic acid hydroperoxides, and the alkenals, which result from the decomposition of lipid hydroperoxides.²²⁰ The oxygen toxicity that gives rise to these substrates is a constant feature of aerobic metabolism and provides another important reason for the abundance of these isoenzymes in both normal and tumor tissue.

These endogenous substrates may play a role in chemical- and radiation-induced carcinogenesis, but the significance pathway is not as well established as that of the xenobiotic metabolism described above.

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