

## AN ATTEMPT TO EVALUATE THE RATE OF THE HABER-WEISS REACTION BY USING 'OH RADICAL SCAVENGERS

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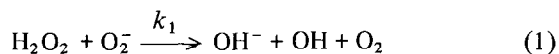
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Received 20 April 1977

### 1. Introduction

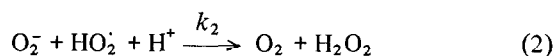
The reaction between superoxide and hydrogen peroxide



was proposed in 1934 by Haber and Weiss [1] and it was recently suggested by Beauchamp and Fridovich [2] and Peters and Foote [3] to be a source of 'OH in biological systems. This reaction would thus amplify the toxicity of superoxide, because of the high oxidizing power of 'OH.

The value of  $k_1$ , which would allow one to predict the amount of 'OH radical formed from  $\text{O}_2^-$ , is still uncertain. Dainton and Rowbottom [4] gave a value of  $3.4 \text{ M}^{-1} \text{ s}^{-1}$ , while Bray [5], McClune and Fee [6] and Halliwell [7] were unable to show the occurrence of the reaction by various approaches. However a limiting value  $k_1 \leq 10 \text{ M}^{-1} \text{ s}^{-1}$  can be deduced from their data. This value, although small in comparison to other rate constants of the  $\text{O}_2^-$  reactions, is still large enough for reaction (1) to be significant under some conditions. For instance at physiological pH

values, assuming  $\text{H}_2\text{O}_2 \leq 10^{-5} \text{ M}$  and  $\text{O}_2^- \leq 10^{-8} \text{ M}$  [8], reaction (1) will be competitive with the spontaneous dismutation of  $\text{O}_2^-$ :



It seemed therefore important to test the occurrence of reaction (1) by a direct assay of the formation of 'OH radicals. The present report is primarily concerned with setting up the experimental conditions and the theoretical basis which will permit the use of specific scavengers of 'OH for this purpose. By this approach it was possible to demonstrate that the rate constant for reaction (1) is less than  $10^{-4} \text{ M}^{-1} \text{ s}^{-1}$ .

### 2. Materials and methods

Potassium superoxide was from K and K, USA. Other chemicals were reagent grade. *p*-Nitrosodimethylaniline (PNDA) was produced by nitrosation of dimethylaniline [9] and was recrystallized from benzene. Aqueous solutions were made with twice

glass distilled water. Absorbance and pH were measured with a Varian (Palo Alto, USA) 635 M spectrophotometer and with an Amel (Milan, Italy) mod. 331 pH meter respectively.

Since the study of reaction (1) requires concentrated  $O_2^-$  solutions and dimethylsulfoxide or tetrahydrofuran cannot be used as solvents because they are good  $\cdot OH$  radical scavengers, alkaline aqueous solutions of  $KO_2$  were used. It was found that adding 4 M solid  $KO_2$  to 1 M NaOH results in a 2 M solution of  $O_2^-$ , as determined by gas volumetric analysis. This superoxide solution slowly decomposes by a first order process (half-time 6 h at  $0^\circ C$ ) to  $O_2$  and  $H_2O_2$ . The reaction of  $O_2^-$  with  $H_2O_2$  was studied at  $25^\circ C$  by slow continuous addition of the  $O_2^-$  alkaline solution to a reaction vessel containing all the other reagents. A 60%  $H_3PO_4$  solution was also added continuously into the system to keep the pH constant. Efficient stirring of the reaction assured a homogeneous composition of the reaction mixture.  $\cdot OH$  radicals were produced by photolysis of  $H_2O_2$  with a black-Ray UVL-36 Lamp in the presence of variable amounts of ethanol as scavenger [10] to obtain different yields of radicals.

Gas chromatography was carried out with a Hewlett-Packard model 5700 gas chromatograph, equipped with a flame ionization detector.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Determination of the steady state concentration of $O_2^-$ in the reaction with $H_2O_2$

Under the experimental conditions used, after the attainment of the steady state, assuming constant volume of the reaction system and constant concentration of  $H_2O_2$  which is present in large excess, it results as:

$$\begin{aligned} d[O_2^-]/dt &= [O_2^-]_0 u/v - k_2 [O_2^-] [HO_2^\cdot] \\ &- k_1 [O_2^-] [H_2O_2] \simeq 0 \end{aligned} \quad (3)$$

where  $[O_2^-]_0$  is the concentration of superoxide in the continuously added alkaline solution,  $u$  is the rate (liters  $\times s^{-1}$ ) of superoxide addition to the system of volume  $v$ . In eq. (3) and following all the reactions of the protonated superoxide have been neglected.

Since from the data in the literature it appears that  $k_2 [O_2^-] [HO_2^\cdot] \gg k_1 [O_2^-] [H_2O_2]$  the steady state  $O_2^-$  concentration is

$$[O_2^-]_{ss} \simeq \left( [O_2^-]_0 u/v \cdot K_a/k_2 [H^+] \right)^{1/2} \quad (4)$$

where  $K_a = 1.58 \times 10^{-5}$  is the acidic dissociation constant of  $HO_2^\cdot$ .

The steady state concentration of  $O_2^-$ , calculated according to eq. (4) was checked by quenching the reaction system with  $2 \times 10^{-5}$  M tetranitromethane (TNM), after addition of catalase, (TNM reacts rapidly with  $H_2O_2$ ). Under these conditions  $O_2^-$  reacts quantitatively with a  $k = 1.9 \times 10^9 M^{-1} s^{-1}$  and gives the nitro form with  $A_{350} = 1.46 \times 10^{-4} M^{-1} cm^{-1}$  [11].

Table 1 reports the results obtained, which show that the calculated values are in the same order of magnitude as the experimental ones.

#### 3.2. Revaluation of the rate constant of the Haber-Weiss reaction through the reaction of PNDA and benzene with $\cdot OH$ radicals

At sufficiently high concentrations of scavenger all  $\cdot OH$  radicals react with it and, as a consequence, the amount of scavenger reacted is equal to the amount of  $O_2^-$  reacted with  $H_2O_2$ . The ratio between  $O_2^-$  reacted in reactions (1) and (2) is thus:

$$\begin{aligned} \frac{\text{moles } O_2^- \text{ dismuted}}{\text{moles of scavenger reacted with } \cdot OH} &= \frac{k_2 [O_2^-]_{ss} [HO_2^\cdot]}{k_1 [O_2^-]_{ss} [H_2O_2]} \\ &= \frac{\frac{k_2}{K_a} [H^+] [O_2^-]_{ss}}{k_1 [H_2O_2]} \end{aligned} \quad (5)$$

Since  $k_2$  is known [12] the value of  $k_1$  can be calculated from the amount of scavenger reacted with  $\cdot OH$ . For this purpose PNDA and benzene were used as scavengers. PNDA is a good  $\cdot OH$  trapping agent because of its high rate constant ( $1.07 \times 10^{10} M^{-1} s^{-1}$ ) and high extinction coefficient of its absorption band ( $A_{440} = 3.4 \times 10^4 M^{-1} cm^{-1}$ ) which disappears upon reaction with  $\cdot OH$  [13].

We checked also its specificity by reacting it with  $H_2O_2$  and  $O_2^-$ . The reactivity with  $O_2^-$  was tested

Table 1

Steady state concentration of  $O_2^-$  in the reaction with  $H_2O_2$ 

pH	$O_2^-$ concentration at steady state ( $M \times 10^{-4}$ )	
	Calculated according to eq. (4)	Found by reaction with TNM
5.4	0.04	not measured
7.5	0.45	0.26
8.4	1.28	0.5
9.4	4.0	2.1

2 ml of a 2 M aqueous  $O_2^-$  solution and 0.5 ml 60%  $H_3PO_4$  were continuously and separately added to 20 ml 0.1 M phosphate buffer containing 0.16 M  $H_2O_2$  and  $1.4 \times 10^{-4}$  M EDTA, under vigorous stirring at 25°C.

by addition of concentrated  $O_2^-$  — crown complex in dimethylsulfoxide [14]. Neither  $H_2O_2$  nor  $O_2^-$  affected the PNDA absorption. This indicated that also singlet oxygen which arises from the spontaneous dismutation of  $O_2^-$  [15] does not react with PNDA. The reaction with  $\cdot OH$  was tested by measuring the decrease of PNDA absorption at 440 nm upon reaction with  $\cdot OH$  radicals produced through  $H_2O_2$  photolysis. Under our conditions, the lower limit of detection of  $\cdot OH$  by this procedure is approximately  $2 \times 10^{-4}$  M. When the Haber-Weiss reaction was tested under the conditions of table 1 and in the presence of  $7 \times 10^{-3}$  M PNDA, the results were negative even at the highest steady state concentration of  $O_2^-$  (pH 9.4). The limit value of  $k_1$  was thus calculated from eq. (5) to be  $\leq 5 \times 10^{-3} M^{-1} s^{-1}$ .

$\cdot OH$  adds quantitatively to the benzene ring with a rate of  $3 \times 10^9 M^{-1} s^{-1}$  [10] to form hydroxycyclohexadienyl radical, which in the presence of  $O_2$  gives phenol and small amount of biphenyl [16,17]. Under our conditions the lower limit of detecting phenol by gas chromatography is  $1 \times 10^{-5}$  M. We were not able to detect phenol in experiments carried out with benzene under conditions analogous to those used for PNDA. From these experiments the limit value of  $k_1$  was found to be lower than  $10^{-4} M^{-1} s^{-1}$ .

#### 4. Discussion

Our results permit us to conclude that the Haber-Weiss reaction can not occur under most biological conditions. In fact with a  $k_1$  value of the order of  $10^{-4} M^{-1} s^{-1}$ , even assuming  $H_2O_2$  as high as  $10^{-3}$  M and  $O_2^-$  as low as  $10^{-10}$  M, reaction (1) can not compete with reaction (2). Since considerable evidence has been accumulated during recent years that  $O_2^-$  and  $H_2O_2$  gives  $\cdot OH$  radicals in some biological systems (see [7] and the references therein), a catalytic mechanism by which reaction (1) occurs should be operating. Work is in progress to detect such a mechanism.

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