

Mechanistic Investigation of a Non-Heme Iron Enzyme Catalyzed Epoxidation in (–)-4'-Methoxycyclopenin Biosynthesis

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S Supporting Information

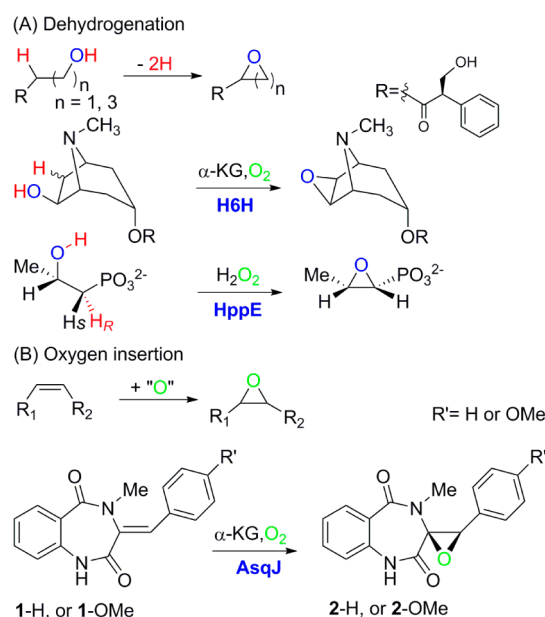
ABSTRACT: Mechanisms have been proposed for α -KG-dependent non-heme iron enzyme catalyzed oxygen atom insertion into an olefinic moiety in various natural products, but they have not been examined in detail. Using a combination of methods including transient kinetics, Mössbauer spectroscopy, and mass spectrometry, we demonstrate that AsqJ-catalyzed (–)-4'-methoxycyclopenin formation uses a high-spin Fe(IV)-oxo intermediate to carry out epoxidation. Furthermore, product analysis on ¹⁶O/¹⁸O isotope incorporation from the reactions using the native substrate, 4'-methoxydehydrocyclopeptin, and a mechanistic probe, dehydrocyclopeptin, reveals evidence supporting oxo \leftrightarrow hydroxo tautomerism of the Fe(IV)-oxo species in the non-heme iron enzyme catalysis.

The biological activities of natural products are often conveyed by structural modifications involving heteroatoms. Among various modifications, the epoxide moiety, with a strained C–O–C three-membered ring structure, is widely distributed.¹ In nature, an epoxide, also called an oxirane, is typically installed via oxidative approaches by highly reactive intermediates that are derived from different cofactors such as flavin,¹ thiolate-heme,^{2e,f} or non-heme iron.^{1,2a–d} The majority of epoxide formations require molecular oxygen (O₂), which is used as an oxygen source for the epoxide, an oxidant, or both.^{1,2} In some cases, instead of O₂, H₂O₂ can be utilized.³

Non-heme iron-dependent epoxidases have been reported in various biosynthetic pathways, e.g., H6H (hyoscyamine 6 β -hydroxylase) in scopolamine,⁴ HppE (2-hydroxyl propyl phosphonate epoxidase) in fosfomycin,⁵ DdaC in *N* β -epoxy-succinamoyl-DAP-Val,⁶ PenD (PntD) in pentalenolactone,⁷ and the recently discovered AsqJ in quinolone alkaloid biosyntheses.⁸

Two fundamentally different approaches to construct an epoxide group are utilized by non-heme iron enzymes. First, in HppE and H6H,^{3d,9} despite using different oxidants (O₂ in H6H and H₂O₂ in HppE), the epoxide formation is a formal dehydrogenation process (–2H) where consecutive cleavages of C–H and O–H bonds occur (Scheme 1A). Second, in DdaC, PenD, and AsqJ,^{6–8} the reactions proceed through an oxygen atom insertion into a double bond moiety of the substrate (Scheme 1B). In the first case, the dehydrogenation mechanism has been characterized in HppE, where a ferryl

Scheme 1. Examples of Epoxidation Catalyzed by Non-Heme Iron Enzymes via (A) Dehydrogenation and (B) Oxygen Insertion

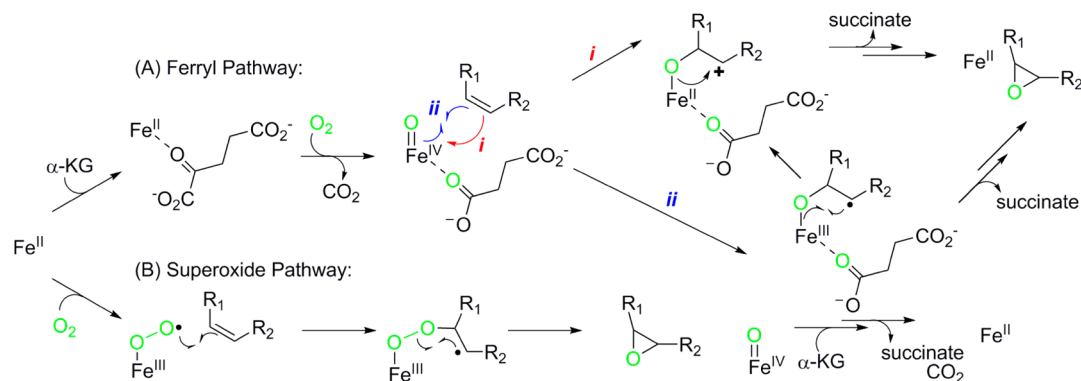


(Fe(IV)-oxo) species is proposed to trigger unactivated C–H bond cleavage to initiate the reaction.^{3d,10} In the second case, although an epoxide intermediate has been suggested and observed when a mechanistic probe was used in phenylalanine hydroxylase, and an Fe(IV)-oxo species has been established in its native hydroxylation reaction,¹¹ no direct mechanistic investigation on epoxidation has been reported. Herein, we provide experimental evidence for a plausible oxygen insertion reaction mechanism in the formation of (–)-4'-methoxycyclopenin (2-OMe) and (–)-cyclopenin (2-H) catalyzed by AsqJ, using 4'-methoxydehydrocyclopeptin (1-OMe) and dehydrocyclopeptin (1-H) as substrates (Scheme 1B). In addition to the epoxidase activity, AsqJ also catalyzes a desaturation reaction.⁸ AsqJ was discovered by Ishikawa et al.⁸ and structurally characterized by Bräuer et al.¹²

AsqJ belongs to the α -keto-glutarate (α -KG)-dependent iron (Fe/ α -KG) enzyme family, a subclass of non-heme iron

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Scheme 2. Mechanistic Consideration of AsqJ-Catalyzed Epoxidation^a

^a(A) In the ferryl pathway, an Fe(IV)-oxo species is used to react with a double bond followed by (i) carbocation intermediate or (ii) substrate radical formation. (B) In the superoxide pathway, an Fe(III)-superoxide is used as the reactive intermediate to trigger the oxygen insertion; subsequently, the resulting Fe(IV)-oxo species is reduced to Fe(II) by an α -KG.

enzymes that use α -KG and O_2 as co-substrates to catalyze a broad array of transformations, including hydroxylation, halogenation, desaturation, stereoinversion, endoperoxide formation, and epoxidation.^{13,14} For all the reactions involving a C–H bond activation step, a reactive Fe(IV)-oxo species has been demonstrated as the key intermediate.¹⁵ However, oxygen addition to a C=C double bond does not involve C–H bond activation. Thus, reaction mechanism(s) may differ from the canonical pathway, and different reactive species may be involved. Herein, two mechanistic possibilities are considered (Scheme 2). First, in a ferryl pathway, an Fe(IV)-oxo species is proposed to trigger the C_{sp^2} – C_{sp^2} bond cleavage. Based on the nature of the resulting species, a mechanistic branching point can be envisioned. On the one hand, a substrate carbocation intermediate can be generated through a polar mechanism, which then undergoes epoxide formation (Scheme 2A, pathway i). On the other hand, a radical mechanism can be utilized to generate a carbon-centered radical species, followed by the C–O bond formation to form an epoxide (Scheme 2A, pathway ii). Alternatively, a carbocation species can also be produced via an electron-transfer step from the substrate radical to the Fe(III) species. Second, owing to the highly reactive nature of C=C bonds, an Fe(III)-superoxide pathway also needs to be considered. Due to the relatively weak electrophilicity of the Fe(III)-superoxo species, the reaction is likely to proceed through a radical mechanism (Scheme 2B). In this pathway, α -KG plays the role of a scavenger for “quenching” the Fe(IV)-oxo species formed after the epoxidation step, rather than a co-substrate used to generate Fe(IV)-oxo species.¹⁶ Although both the superoxo pathway and the Fe(IV)-oxo species reduction by an α -KG have no literature precedent in the Fe/ α -KG enzymes, in other non-heme iron enzymes, depending on the nature of the reactions, utilization of Fe(III)-superoxide has been suggested in, e.g., hydroxyl-ethylphosphonate dioxygenase¹⁷ and ethylphosphonate synthase.^{18,19}

To distinguish among the mechanistic possibilities, we synthesized the substrate 1-OMe and a mechanistic probe 1-H according to known methods²⁰ with minor modification as described in the Supporting Information (SI). *Aspergillus nidulans* AsqJ (AsqJ) was obtained by heterologous over-expression in *Escherichia coli* and purified as N-His₆-tagged fusion (SI). We first carried out a stopped-flow optical absorption (SF-Abs) experiment by rapidly mixing an anaerobic solution containing the AsqJ-Fe(II)- α -KG complex with O_2 -

saturated buffer in the presence or absence of substrates (1-OMe or 1-H). An optical absorption feature centered at ~ 470 nm, assigned as a metal-to-ligand charge-transfer (MLCT) band between Fe(II) and α -KG,^{21,22} decays rapidly to a minimum at a reaction time of ~ 1 s in the presence of either 1-OMe or 1-H. In the absence of substrate, no obvious decay of this feature was detected (Figure 1). This activation effect

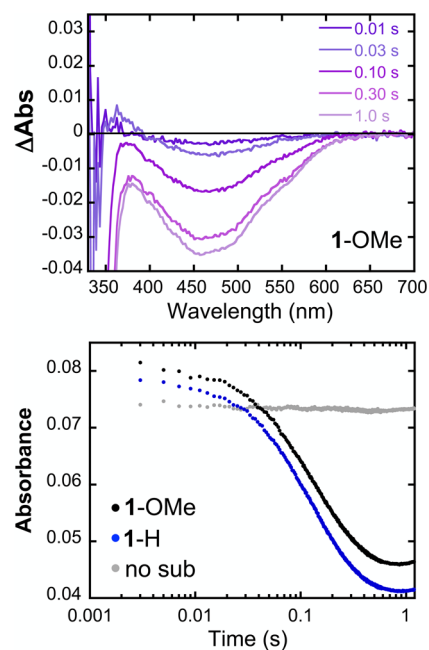


Figure 1. SF-Abs kinetics of the decay of Fe(II)- α -KG MLCT band. Top: Change centered at 470 nm at the indicated reaction times after mixing the AsqJ-Fe(II)- α -KG-1-OMe complex with O_2 . Bottom: Kinetics of the absorbance at 470 nm in the reactions of the AsqJ-Fe(II)- α -KG complex and O_2 with substrate (1-OMe, black; or 1-H, blue) or without substrate (no sub, gray).

caused by substrate (“substrate triggering”) is a common theme in the Fe/ α -KG enzymes and other Fe/oxygenases.^{14,15} Furthermore, the similar “substrate triggering” effect observed in the presence of 1-H or 1-OMe suggests that 1-H and 1-OMe have similar efficacy in triggering α -KG consumption. In other characterized Fe/ α -KG enzymes, a transient 318 nm absorption feature has been observed and assigned as originating from the

Fe(IV)-oxo intermediate.¹⁶ However, such a feature could not be deconvoluted here due to the strong absorptions of 1-OMe and 1-H in the similar near-UV region.

To test whether an Fe(IV)-oxo species is also involved in the AsqJ-catalyzed epoxidation, we carried out a freeze-quench (FQ) experiment by rapidly mixing the anaerobic AsqJ·Fe(II)· α -KG·1-OMe (or 1-H) complex with O₂-saturated buffer and quenching the reaction at various time points. At 0.01 s, the shortest time that can be achieved on our apparatus, a new quadrupole doublet is developed to ~22% and ~31% of the total iron in the sample for substrates 1-OMe and 1-H, respectively (Figures 2 and S6). This doublet has parameters

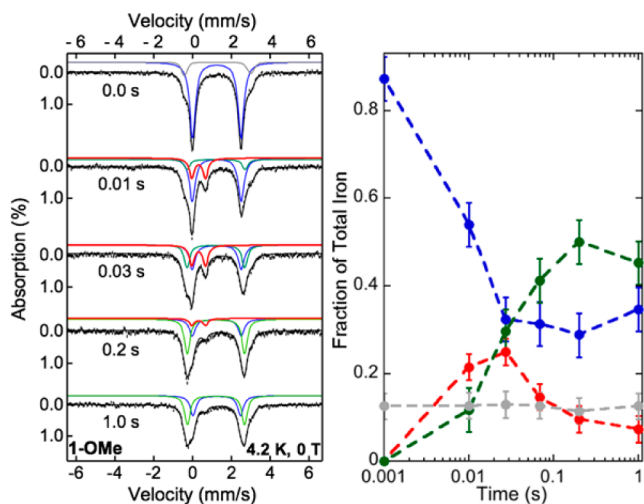


Figure 2. Left: 4.2 K zero-field Mössbauer spectra of the reaction of the AsqJ·⁵⁷Fe(II)· α -KG·1-OMe complex with O₂ at different times. Right: Iron speciation determined by the spectral simulations. Black vertical bars mark experimental spectra; black line, overall spectral simulations (parameters are listed in Table S1); blue line, AsqJ·⁵⁷Fe(II)· α -KG·1-OMe complex; gray line, inactive enzyme; red line, Fe(IV)-oxo intermediate; green line, Fe(II) product complex.

typical of a high-spin Fe(IV)-oxo species ($\delta = 0.31$ mm/s, $|\Delta E_Q| = 0.68$ mm/s) (Table S2).¹⁵ In the case of 1-H, this Fe(IV)-oxo species decays to 26%, 19%, and 8% at 0.03, 0.07, and 0.2 s, and further decays to $\leq 5\%$ at 1 s (Figure S6). In contrast, in the case of 1-OMe, the same Fe(IV)-oxo species increases slightly to ~25% at 0.03 s and then decays to 15%, 10%, and $\leq 6\%$ at 0.07, 0.2, and 1 s, respectively (Figure 2). Nonetheless, for both substrates, the decay of the Fe(IV)-oxo intermediate is followed by the formation of a new Fe(II) species ($\delta = 1.20$ mm/s, $|\Delta E_Q| = 2.95$ mm/s), which may originate from the enzyme–product complex and is clearly distinguishable from the AsqJ·Fe(II)· α -KG-substrate complex ($\delta = 1.24$ mm/s, $|\Delta E_Q| = 2.52$ mm/s). There is another minority Fe(II) species shown in the anaerobic control sample ($\delta = 1.29$ mm/s, $|\Delta E_Q| = 3.46$ mm/s), representing ~12% of the total iron. Based on its steady presence throughout the reaction, this Fe(II) species can be attributed to the “inactive” form of AsqJ (Figures 2 and S6).

The observation of an Fe(IV)-oxo species in the reactions of AsqJ with both 1-OMe and 1-H indicates that such a reactive intermediate is also operative in the AsqJ epoxidation. Although literature suggests no obvious difference between the reactions using either 1-OMe or 1-H under multiple turnover conditions,¹² the observed earlier onset and higher accumulation of such a species in the reaction of 1-H clearly suggests

that *para* substitution of the substrate (OMe vs -H) results in the perturbation of the overall kinetics of the Fe(IV)-oxo species.

To demonstrate that the observed Fe(IV)-oxo species is the committed intermediate for the AsqJ epoxidation, we carried out a chemical-quench experiment. Liquid chromatography–mass spectrometry (LC-MS) analysis of the reaction sample quenched at 0.05 s after the mixing of the AsqJ·Fe(II)· α -KG·1-OMe complex with O₂-saturated buffer revealed the formation of a peak at 4.2 min elution time corresponding to the product peak (2-OMe) with a mass/charge ratio (m/z) of 325.1. The same peak with lower intensity (~30% peak area) was detected at an earlier quench time, 0.01 s, when the Fe(IV)-oxo was still in its formation phase, as shown in the Mössbauer results. As expected, the chromatogram of a reaction mixture sample without exposure to O₂ contains no desired product (Figure 3A, bottom trace). This result implies that the Fe(IV)-oxo

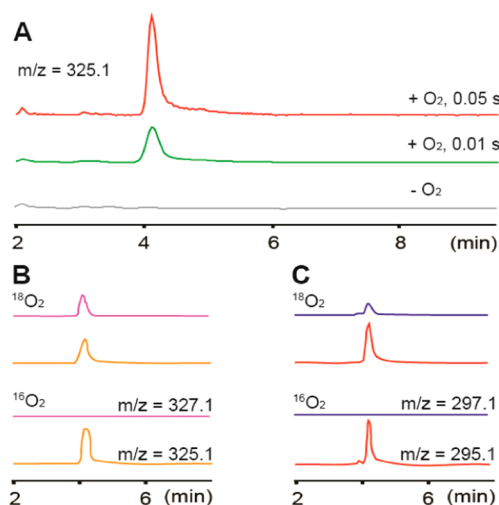


Figure 3. LC-MS chromatogram of the AsqJ-catalyzed reactions. (A) Chemical quench of the reaction of AsqJ·Fe(II)· α -KG·1-OMe complex with O₂-saturated buffer at various time points. (B,C) ¹⁶O₂ and ¹⁸O₂ treatment of the AsqJ reactions with 1-OMe and 1-H, respectively.

species is generated prior to the epoxide formation and used to react with the C=C bond, which is consistent with the ferryl pathway in Scheme 2A. Next, parallel experiments were carried out by exposing the reaction mixture to ¹⁶O₂ and ¹⁸O₂, separately. Under ¹⁸O₂ environment, formation of a product peak is observed, which has a retention time identical to that of the product peak in the reaction with ¹⁶O₂, but with m/z shifted from 325.1 to 327.1 (Figure 3B, purple trace). This observation suggests that the epoxide oxygen is derived from molecular oxygen. In addition, a peak with m/z 325.1 was also detected. A significant amount of ¹⁶O incorporation under ¹⁸O₂ environment—an ¹⁸O/¹⁶O ratio of $\sim 0.79 \pm 0.03$ —could be attributed to ¹⁶O₂ contamination during the experiment. However, it may also result from an “oxygen exchange” event at or prior to the Fe(IV)-oxo formation. If the latter scenario operates, we anticipate a greater level of ¹⁸O/¹⁶O exchange in the reaction using 1-H in place of 1-OMe, as suggested by Mössbauer analysis, which shows that the overall accumulation of the Fe(IV)-oxo species is higher when 1-H is used instead of 1-OMe. Indeed, the chromatogram of the reaction using 1-H under an ¹⁸O₂ environment reveals an ¹⁸O/¹⁶O (297.1/295.1)

ratio of $\sim 0.21 \pm 0.01$, indicating ~ 3 – 4 -fold less ^{18}O incorporation than in the reaction using 1-OMe. Furthermore, a competition experiment was conducted, where equal amounts of 1-H and 1-OMe were incubated with AsqJ and then exposed to $^{18}\text{O}_2$. A similar result was detected, in which 2-H has ~ 3 – 4 -fold less ^{18}O incorporation than 2-OMe. Thus, FQ-Mössbauer and LC-MS results suggest that the oxygen atom exchange most likely happens on the Fe(IV)-oxo species.

In summary, this study reveals that an Fe(IV)-oxo species is the key intermediate responsible for the epoxide formation in the AsqJ-catalyzed epoxidation. Our results also suggest that *para* substitution on the substrate (-OMe vs -H) affects the kinetics of the Fe(IV)-oxo intermediate. By using pre-steady-state kinetics coupled with spectroscopic analysis and $^{16}\text{O}_2/^{18}\text{O}_2$ isotopic substitution experiment, our study provides direct experimental evidence to support a fast oxo \leftrightarrow hydroxo tautomerism of the Fe(IV)-oxo species, which has been indicated in heme and non-heme model complexes and enzyme systems.^{23,24}

■ ASSOCIATED CONTENT

● Supporting Information

The Supporting Information is available free of charge on the ACS Publications website at DOI: 10.1021/jacs.6b05400.

Experimental details and data, including Figures S1–S6 and Tables S1 and S2 (PDF)

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Notes

The authors declare no competing financial interest.

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