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Secondary alcohols act as better nucleophiles than primary alcohols in the lipase-catalyzed regioselective deacylation of dihydroxybenzenes acylated at both phenolic hydroxyls

Toshifumi Miyazawa,* Manabu Hamada, Ryohei Morimoto, Takashi Murashima and Takashi Yamada

Department of Chemistry, Faculty of Science and Engineering, Konan University, Higashinada-ku, Kobe 658-8501, Japan

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Abstract—*Candida antarctica* lipase B (CAL-B) was found to be highly regioselective as well as active in the deacylation of resorcinols and hydroquinones acylated at both phenolic hydroxyls. Contrary to expectation, secondary alcohols acted as better nucleophiles than primary alcohols in these enzymatic deacylations.

Lipases have been recognized as very attractive catalysts for organic syntheses because of their stability, usability and broad substrate tolerance.[1] Moreover, since they are easily available from a variety of sources, especially bacteria and fungi, there must be a fair chance of finding a suitable enzyme for a transformation of interest in terms of catalytic activity and/or selectivity. They have been employed mainly for the preparation of homochiral compounds related to pharmaceuticals and agrochemicals through stereoselective hydrolysis, esterification or transesterification. Besides lipases' stereoselectivity, their regioselective properties have also been exploited for the preparation of compounds, which are not easily obtainable by chemical methodologies. For example, the lipase-catalyzed acylation or deacylation procedure has been applied to the synthesis of selectively protected derivatives of polyhydroxy compounds such as carbohydrates. Compared to such studies on alcoholic hydroxyls, there have been much less studies on phenolic hydroxyls. The ability of lipases to discriminate between hydroxy groups of this type should deserve further attention because of its importance in organic synthesis. Parmar and co-workers have reported on the lipase-catalyzed deacylation of peracetylated polyhydroxy acetophenones and related aromatic ketones.[2,3] When they were subjected to transesterification with 1-butanol as a nucleophile in the presence of porcine pancreatic lipase (PPL) or *Candida cylindracea* (*rugosa*) lipase (CRL) in organic solvents, it was found that deacylation took place predominantly at positions other than *ortho* to the ketonic group, generally the acetoxy group at the *para* position being preferentially cleaved over the one at the *meta* position. The authors concluded that the carbonyl group attached to the benzene ring plays an important role in the recognition of acetoxy groups in polyphenolic peracetates, and they postulated the formation of a transient Schiff's base-type complex with the lysine residue in the active site of PPL.[2d] Nicolosi and co-workers have reported on the regioselectivity observed in the *Pseudomonas cepacia* lipase (PCL)-catalyzed deacylation with 1-butanol of peracetylated flavonoids, which contain a carbonyl group attached to the benzene ring.[4] It is worth while to examine how substituents other than the carbonyl can affect the regioselectivity in the lipase-catalyzed deacylation of peracylated polyphenols. In this regard, Klibanov and co-workers have investigated the lipase-catalyzed deacylation of octylhydroquinone butanoylated at both phenolic hydroxyls using 1-butanol, and they even found the reversion of PCL's regioselectivity upon a change from toluene to acetonitrile as the reaction medium.[5]

These studies have prompted us to investigate the lipase-catalyzed deacylation of diacylated dihydroxybenzenes,

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* Corresponding author. Tel.: +81 78 431 4341; fax: +81 78 435 2539; e-mail: miyazawa@konan-u.ac.jp

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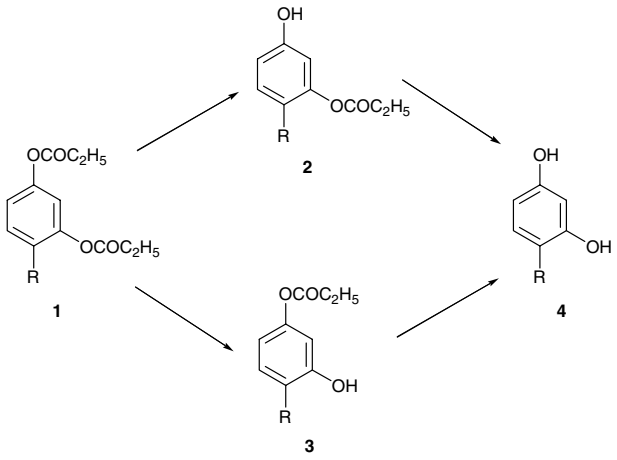
that is, resorcinols and hydroquinones, carrying several substituents other than the carbonyl. We found that in these deacylations, *Candida antarctica* lipase B (CAL-B) was more active than other lipases so far employed and moreover highly regioselective and, unexpectedly, that secondary alcohols acted as better nucleophiles than primary alcohols.

Initially, 4-substituted 1,3-di-*O*-propanoylresorcinols[6] (**1**) were subjected to deacylation with alcohols as nucleophiles in the presence of immobilized CAL-B[7] (Scheme 1).[8] These esters (**1**) can undergo enzymatic transesterification through two pathways to form either 3-*O*-propanoylresorcinols (**2**) or 1-*O*-propanoylresorcinols (**3**),[9] and finally to afford the parent resorcinols (**4**). The product distributions obtained after the incubation of **1** with 2-propanol (3 mol equiv) in diisopropyl ether at 45 °C are shown in Table 1. With resorcinol derivatives carrying alkyl or aralkyl substituents (**1a**–**c**), 3-*O*-propanoylresorcinols (**2a**–**c**) were obtained as the sole products of deacylation after 60 min of incubation, at the end of which 93–100% conversions were reached (entries 1, 4 and 5). The formation of neither the isomeric 1-*O*-propanoylresorcinols (**3a**–**c**) nor the parent resorcinols (**4a**–**c**) was detected. Thus, CAL-B was found to be active enough toward these diacylated dihydroxybenzenes and its activity seemed to be much higher than those of other lipases so far employed, taking it into consideration that the PPL or CRL-catalyzed deacylation of peracetylated polyhydroxy acetophenones and related aromatic ketones required several hours to even several days in order to reach a reasonable conversion.[2,10] Moreover, this lipase showed a complete regiospecificity in the deacylation of these compounds bearing no carbonyl group in diisopropyl ether. The deacylation of the resorcinol derivatives carrying halogen substituents (**1d** and **1e**) proceeded more smoothly, reaching completion after 15 min (entries 6 and 7). Although 3-*O*-propanoylresorcinols (**2d** and **2e**) were the major products (in 88–92% yield), the parent resorcinols (**4d** and **4e**) were also produced, while the isomeric 1-propanoylresorcinols (**3d** and **3e**) were not detected. These results indicate that of the two acyloxy groups the one remote from the substituent R and hence sterically less hindered was preferentially deacylated in the CAL-B-catalyzed deacylation of resorcinol derivatives. When the solvent was changed from diisopropyl ether to a more polar solvent, acetonitrile (entry 2), or to a more hydrophobic solvent, toluene (entry 3), regioselectivity was diminished to some extent in either case, but its reversal was never observed as in the PCL-catalyzed deacylation of the hydroquinone derivative mentioned above, as shown in Table 1 for the case of **1a**.



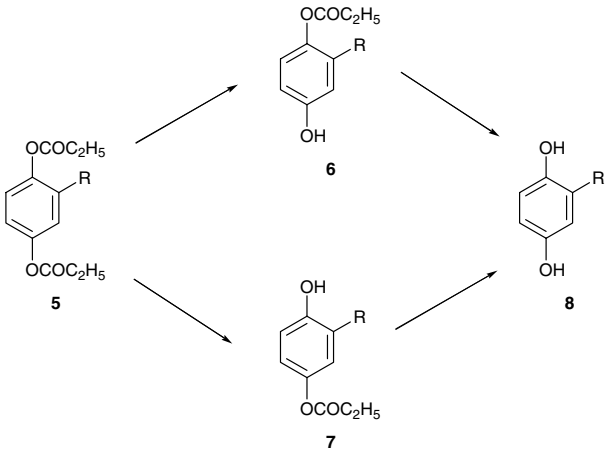
Scheme 1. CAL-B-catalyzed regioselective deacylation of 4-substituted 1,3-di-*O*-propanoylresorcinols (**1**). R: a, Et; b, $(CH_3)_3CCH_2C(CH_3)_2$-; c, Bn; d, Cl; e, Br.

Next, 2-substituted 1,4-di-*O*-propanoylhydroquinones (**5**) were subjected to deacylation with 2-propanol in the presence of CAL-B under the same reaction conditions (Scheme 2). The product distributions obtained from the substrates bearing an alkyl substituent (**5a**–**d**) are shown in Table 2, entries 1–4. After the incubation time of 60 min there remained (almost) no starting diacylated hydroquinones. With these hydroquinones acylated at both phenolic hydroxyls, loosened regioselectivity was observed, but the acyloxy group remote from the substituent R was preferentially deacylated to afford 1-*O*-propanoylhydroquinones (**6a**–**d**) as major products, as with the above-mentioned resorcinol derivatives. The steric demand of the R group seems to be greatly responsible for the regioselectivity observed. Thus, with methyl- and ethyllhydroquinone derivatives (**5a** and **5b**) the isomeric 4-*O*-propanoylhydroquinones (**7a** and **7b**) and the parent hydroquinones (**8a** and **8b**) were also produced in small amounts (entries 1 and 2).

Table 1. CAL-B-catalyzed deacylation of 4-substituted 1,3-di-*O*-propanoylresorcinols (**1**) with 2-propanol in diisopropyl ether[a]

Entry	Substrate	R	Time (min)	Products (%)		
				2	**3**	**4**
1	**1a**	CH_3CH_2	60	100	0	0
2	**1a**[b]		60	91.7	1.8	4.6
3	**1a**[c]		60	30.9	3.4	0
4	**1b**	$(CH_3)_3CCH_2C(CH_3)_2$	60	92.6	0	0
5	**1c**	$C_6H_5CH_2$	60	100	0	0
6	**1d**	Cl	15	87.7	0	12.3
7	**1e**	Br	15	91.7	0	8.3

[a] Reaction conditions: 0.1 mmol of **1**, 0.3 mmol of 2-propanol and 40 mg of CAL-B in 240 μl of anhydrous diisopropyl ether at 45 °C.
[b] In acetonitrile.
[c] In toluene.



Scheme 2. CAL-B-catalyzed regioselective deacylation of 2-substituted 1,4-di-*O*-propanoylhydroquinones (**5**). R: a, Me; b, Et; c, *i*-Pr; d, *t*-Bu; e, MeO.

Table 2. CAL-B-catalyzed deacylation of 2-substituted 1,4-di-*O*-propanoylhydroquinones (**5**) with 2-propanol[a]

Entry	Substrate	R	Time (min)	Products (%)		
				6	**7**	**8**
1	**5a**	CH_3	60	81.6	4.5	13.9
2	**5b**	CH_3CH_2	60	87.7	2.6	9.7
3	**5c**	$(CH_3)_2CH$	60	94.0	0	6.0
4	**5d**	$(CH_3)_3C$	60	96.8	0	0
5	**5e**	CH_3O	20	55.4	8.5	8.3
6	**5e**		50	37.5	0.3	62.2

[a] Reaction conditions: 0.1 mmol of **5**, 0.3 mmol of 2-propanol and 40 mg of CAL-B in 240 μl of anhydrous diisopropyl ether at 45 °C.

On the other hand, with the substrates bearing larger substituents regioselectivity became stricter: with the isopropylhydroquinone derivative (**5c**) a small amount of the parent hydroquinone (**8c**) was detected (entry 3), while with *t*-butylhydroquinone derivative (**5d**) 1-*O*-propanoylhydroquinone (**6d**) was the sole product (entry 4). The result with the methoxyhydroquinone derivative (**5e**) also included in Table 2 shows that the regioselectivity was poor with **5e**: 1-*O*-propanoylhydroquinone (**6e**) was the main product after 20 min (entry 5), while the parent hydroquinone (**8e**) became the main product after 50 min (entry 6).

During the course of investigation, we found that 2-propanol acted as a better nucleophile than such primary alcohols as 1-propanol or 1-butanol usually used in the enzymatic alcoholysis.[2,4,5] Stimulated by this unexpected result, we intended to investigate extensively the reactivity of alcohols as nucleophiles in the CAL-B-catalyzed deacylation of resorcinol and hydroquinone derivatives. Table 3 summarizes the effect of alcohols on the deacylation of 4-ethyl-1,3-di-*O*-propanoylresorcinol (**1a**) in diisopropyl ether. Irrespective of the alcoholic nucleophiles employed, 4-ethyl-3-*O*-propanoylresorcinol (**2a**) was obtained as the sole product of deacylation. From the comparison of product yields after a certain reaction time, it is obvious that all the secondary alcohols examined acted as better neucleophiles

Table 3. CAL-B-catalyzed deacylation of 4-ethyl-1,3-di-*O*-propanoylresorcinol (**1a**) with various alcohols[a]

Entry	Alcohol	Time (min)	Yield (%) of **2a**
1	$CH_3CH_2CH_2OH$	60	76.0
2	$CH_3CH(OH)CH_3$	60	100
3	$CH_3CH_2CH_2CH_2OH$	60	64.2
4	$CH_3CH(OH)CH_2CH_3$	60	100
5	$CH_3CH_2CH_2CH_2CH_2OH$	30	63.6
6	$CH_3CH_2CH_2CH(OH)CH_3$	30	92.4
7	$CH_3CH_2CH(OH)CH_2CH_3$	30	100
8	$CH_3CH_2CH_2CH_2CH_2CH_2OH$	30	69.9
9	$CH_3CH_2CH_2CH_2CH(OH)CH_3$	30	82.9
10	$CH_3CH_2CH_2CH(OH)CH_2CH_3$	30	82.9
11	$(CH_3)_3COH$	60	54.3
12	$CH_3CH_2C(CH_3)_2OH$	60	49.5

[a] Reaction conditions: 0.05 mmol of **1a**, 0.15 mmol of an alcohol and 25 mg of CAL-B in 240 μl of anhydrous diisopropyl ether at 45 °C.

than the isomeric primary alcohols. For example, the use of 2-propanol resulted in the production of **2a** in 100% yield after 60 min (entry 2), while with 1-propanol the yield was lower (76%) after the same incubation time (entry 1). The same tendency was observe between each pair of another secondary alcohol and its primary counterpart. By contrast, the activities of tertiary alcohols (entries 11 and 12) were far lower than those of the primary alcohols as well as the secondary alcohols. Table 4 summarizes the results obtained with the methoxyhydroquinone derivative (**5e**). As expected, 2-propanol and 3-pentanol acted as better nucleophiles than their respective primary counterparts (entry 2 vs entry 1; entry 4 vs entry 3), as judged by the conversion after a certain period of time (20 min). On the other hand, the reactivity of 4-heptanol (entry 6) bearing two *n*-propyl substituents was as low as that of 1,5-dimethyl-3-pentanol (entry 7) having two isopropyl substituents and it was much lower than that of the primary counterpart.

The fact that secondary alcohols bearing at least one methyl or ethyl substituent acted as better nucleophiles may be rationalized by taking into consideration that alcohols must be accommodated in the alcohol binding site of the enzyme in order for the hydroxyl to reach the reaction center, as in the enzymatic kinetic resolution of secondary alcohols through enantioselective acylation

Table 4. CAL-B-catalyzed deacylation of 2-methoxy-1,4-di-*O*-propanoylhydroquinone (**5e**) with various alcohols[a]

Entry	ROH	Yield (%) of **6e**	Conversion (%)
1	$CH_3CH_2CH_2OH$	32.1	42.6
2	$CH_3CH(OH)CH_3$	50.7	66.1
3	$CH_3CH_2CH_2CH_2CH_2OH$	27.4	38.0
4	$CH_3CH_2CH(OH)CH_2CH_3$	39.9	64.4
5	$CH_3CH_2CH_2CH_2CH_2CH_2CH_2OH$	30.2	41.7
6	$CH_3CH_2CH_2CH(OH)CH_2CH_2CH_3$	17.3	26.5
7	$(CH_3)_2CHCH(OH)CH(CH_3)_2$	17.0	23.7

[a] Reaction conditions: 0.18 mmol of **5e**, 0.54 mmol of an alcohol and 75 mg of CAL-B in 450 μl of anhydrous diisopropyl ether at 45 °C for 20 min.

where CAL-B is known to be an excellent enantioselective biocatalyst.[11] In contrast, this lipase has no measurable activity on reactions with tertiary alcohols or secondary alcohols bearing two large or bulky groups. Such a salient substituent size limitation has been explained by the existence in the lipase's alcohol binding site of the stereospecificity pocket,[12] which practically can accept a substituent shorter than *n*-propyl.

In conclusion, CAL-B has sufficient activity and high regioselectivity in the deacylation of peracylated phenolic hydroxyls. In the CAL-B-catalyzed reactions, secondary alcohols can act as better nucleophiles than primary alcohols.

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6. The substrates were prepared through the acylation of the parent dihydroxybenzenes with propanoyl chloride (3 mol equiv) in dry pyridine at ambient temperature and purified by column chromatography on silica gel using toluene–ethyl acetate as an eluent. Selected data for **1a**: oil; ^{1}H NMR (500 MHz, DMSO-d_6): δ 1.11 (3H, t, $J = 7.5$ Hz, $ArCH_2CH_3$), 1.12 (3H, t, $J = 7.5$ Hz, $COCH_2CH_3$), 1.16 (3H, t, $J = 7.5$ Hz, $COCH_2CH_3$), 2.47 (2H, q, $J = 7.5$ Hz, $ArCH_2CH_3$), 2.58 (2H, q, $J = 7.5$ Hz, $COCH_2CH_3$), 2.63 (2H, q, $J = 7.5$ Hz, $COCH_2CH_3$), 6.92 (1H, d, $J = 2.5$ Hz, H-2), 6.98 (1H, dd, $J = 8.5$ and 2.5 Hz, H-6), 7.33 (1H, d, $J = 8.5$ Hz, H-5).
7. Boehringer Mannheim Chirazyme L-2, which had a specific activity of 3.2 U/mg lyo. with tributyrin at 25 °C.
8. *Typical experimental procedure:* A solution of 4-ethyl-1,3-di-*O*-propanoylresorcinol (**1a**) (0.05 mmol) and 2-propanol (0.15 mmol) in anhydrous diisopropyl ether (240 μl) was stirred with a lipase preparation (25 mg) at 45 °C (in a thermostated incubator). After a certain period of time, the reaction mixture was filtered through a glass filter and evaporated to dryness under reduced pressure. The residual oil was dissolved in DMSO-d_6 and subjected to ^{1}H NMR (500 MHz) analysis for the quantification of the reaction products. The proton signals in the aromatic region were mainly employed for the purpose. The whole content of the reaction mixture was used up for one analysis, and several discrete reaction mixtures were used at different reaction times.
9. The authentic samples of isomeric monoesters of each dihydroxybenzene were prepared by enzymatic methods. For example, both the monopropanoates of 4-ethylresorcinol (**4a**) were prepared as follows: 4-Ethyl-3-*O*-propanoylresorcinol (**2a**) was prepared as the main product of the lipase-catalyzed deacylation of 4-ethyl-1,3-di-*O*-propanoylresorcinol (**1a**) (0.5 mmol) as described in Ref. 8 and purified by preparative TLC on silica gel using toluene–ethyl acetate (9:1, v/v) as a developing solvent. On the other hand, the isomer of **2a**, that is, 4-ethyl-1-*O*-propanoylresorcinol (**3a**), was prepared as the main product of the lipase-catalyzed direct acylation of 4-ethylresorcinol (**4a**) (1.5 mmol) with vinyl propanoate in diisopropyl ether at 45 °C and purified in the same manner as above. The structure of these isomeric monoesters was unambiguously determined by ^{1}H NMR (500 MHz), ^{13}C NMR, and 2D NMR. Thus, for example, cross-peaks of the proton of 1-OH with the carbons at C-1, C-2, and C-6 appeared in the HMBC spectrum of **2a**. Selected data for **2a**: oil; ^{1}H NMR (500 MHz, DMSO-d_6): δ 1.05 (3H, t, $J = 7.5$ Hz, $ArCH_2CH_3$), 1.14 (3H, t, $J = 7.5$ Hz, $COCH_2CH_3$), 2.34 (2H, q, $J = 7.5$ Hz, $ArCH_2CH_3$), 2.59 (2H, q, $J = 7.5$ Hz, $COCH_2CH_3$), 6.43 (1H, d, $J = 2.5$ Hz, H-2), 6.61 (1H, dd, $J = 8.5$ and 2.5 Hz, H-6), 7.06 (1H, d, $J = 8.5$ Hz, H-5), 9.45 (1H, s, OH). For compound **3a**: oil; ^{1}H NMR (DMSO-d_6): δ 1.11 (3H, t, $J = 7.5$ Hz, $COCH_2CH_3$), 1.12 (3H, t, $J = 7.5$ Hz, $ArCH_2CH_3$), 2.51 (2H, q, $J = 7.5$ Hz, $COCH_2CH_3$), 2.55 (2H, q, $J = 7.5$ Hz, $ArCH_2CH_3$), 6.46 (1H, dd, $J = 8.5$ and 2.5 Hz, H-6), 6.52 (1H, d, $J = 2.5$ Hz, H-2), 7.05 (1H, d, $J = 8.5$ Hz, H-5), 9.55 (1H, s, OH).
10. The reaction time for the PCL-catalyzed deacylation of peracetylated flavonoids was 24 h: see, Ref. 4.
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