High Resolution Gel Electrophoresis of Chloroplast Membrane Polypeptides

FERNANDO HENRIQUES, WILLIAM VAUGHAN, AND RODERIC PARK
Department of Botany and Laboratory of Chemical Biodynamics, Lawrence Radiation Laboratory, University of California, Berkeley, California 94720

ABSTRACT

In the present study we extend previous work from this laboratory on the polypeptide composition of photosynthetic lamellae. Using a high resolution sodium dodecyl sulfate gel electrophoresis technique, we show that both grana and stroma lamellae have qualitatively very similar polypeptide compositions although some clear quantitative differences are demonstrated.

Higher plant chloroplasts contain a complex system of internal membranes, usually differentiated into appressed grana lamellae and unpaired stroma lamellae which connect the grana. During the past few years, there has been a great deal of interest in the comparative chemistry of grana and stroma lamellae, mainly as a result of reported differences in the functional capabilities of these two types of membranes (12). Though the lipids of photosynthetic membranes have been thoroughly investigated (1), little progress in the characterization of membrane proteins was achieved until recently. The introduction of SDS¹ for solubilization of these proteins in conjunction with acrylamide gel electrophoresis of the resulting polypeptides provides a powerful analytical technique.

Previous reports from this laboratory on the characterization of chloroplast internal membrane polypeptides using SDS-acrylamide gel electrophoresis were limited in resolution (10, 11). In this paper we have extended the earlier observations using a high resolution system and show that grana and stroma lamellae have qualitatively similar polypeptide composition, although various quantitative differences are apparent.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Fresh market spinach, Spinacia oleracea L., plants were used in this work. The grana and stroma lamellae were prepared by mechanical disruption of class II chloroplasts, as described by Sane et al. (12). A portion of the French press homogenate was pelleted at 160,000g for 1 hr and termed FP fraction; the remaining suspension was subjected to fractional centrifugation to separate the grana stacks from the unappressed stroma lamellae. The fractions were EDTA (1 mM, pH 8) washed for 30 min.

¹ On leave from University of Luanda, Angola, Portugal.
² Abbreviations: SDS: sodium dodecylsulfate; kd: kilodalton; PS II: photosystem II.

The lipids were extracted by repeated washing with chloroform-methanol (1:2, v/v) and the protein pellet, after drying, was dissolved in 0.06 M tris (pH 6.8), 5% (w/v) β-mercaptoethanol, 2% (w/v) SDS, and 5% (w/v) glycerol at a concentration of approximately 1 mg/ml (8).

The electrophoretic method employs a discontinuous SDS buffer system (8) in a thin slab gel apparatus (Hoefer Scientific Instruments, San Francisco). Two glass plates (30 cm long, 18 cm wide) sandwich a 0.75 mm thick slab gel between them. A 5% (w/v) stacking gel and a 9% (w/v) separating gel, as described by Studier (13) and Ames (2) were used. The separating gel was prerun for 8 hr at 300 v and after that the stacking gel was poured. Sixty microliters of sample solution were then carefully layered in the wells. The voltages applied were 50 v for 10 min, 300 v for 10 min, and 650 v for 4 hr.

Gels were stained for protein with Coomassie Brilliant Blue R and destained sequentially (4). Proteins with known molecular weights, run in wells parallel to the samples, provided molecular weight assignments (15).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

SDS-disc gel electrophoresis of chloroplast membrane proteins showed the heterogeneity of polypeptide composition of these membranes. Although variable degrees of resolution have been achieved, resulting in a few or up to 20 components, most studies show a rather consistent pattern for the chloroplast membrane peptides from different plant species (3, 6, 7, 9, 11).

Using high resolution SDS-slab gel electrophoresis, we have shown a far more complicated image of the polypeptide composition of photosynthetic membranes. The original FP electrophoretic profile (Fig. 1) reveals more than 50 clearly discrete bands, dispersed in a relatively large range of molecular weight though not all of them are apparent in the photograph in Figure 1. The additional bands seen in Figure 1 are partially due to resolution of peaks superimposed in disc gel but also to the solubilization procedure used here. In many cases the solubilization conditions produce only partial depolymerization of oligomeric proteins with the consequence that several polypeptide species may be present at the same band and fewer bands are seen. Despite the differences in resolution achieved, it is interesting that the same major bands reported in disc gel are also seen in our results, namely the components with the assigned molecular weights of 60, 56, 30, and 23 kd.

The variety of low molecular weight components shown here is usually seen in a disc gel as one or a few broad bands. Also, the high molecular weight polypeptides (>60 kd) resolved here are, in general, not visible in disc gel preparations.
or also from the comparatively large exposed area of the single membrane available to adsorb these proteins.

The peaks in the 23 kd region have recently been associated with the PS II Chl-protein complex (14). This complex, according to Thornber and coworkers, is the major location for Chl b in higher plants and functions as a light-harvesting center for PS II. Thornber's hypothesis is strengthened by these data which show that the peaks in the 23 kd region are enhanced in the 10 K fraction and depleted in the 160 K fraction. The 10 K fraction possesses both PS II and PS I and a low Chl a:Chl b ratio whereas the 160 K fraction contains only PS I and a much higher Chl a:Chl b ratio (12). Though the fractions differ greatly in pigment composition and electron transport reactions (12), they are qualitatively very similar in polypeptide composition. In this respect our results are at variance with previous studies (7, 10, 11) reporting differences; we attribute this disagreement to the much higher sensitivity of our technique which allows a finer analysis of polypeptide composition.

The complexity of polypeptide composition of the photosynthetic membranes shown here raises several interesting questions. One immediate challenge is the identification of some of these bands with electron carriers known to be present in these membranes. Tentative assignments have already been reported (7, 10) but they are still largely speculative, and more detailed knowledge of the individual polypeptides is necessary before such identification can be done with certainty.

LITERATURE CITED


FIG. 1. Slab gel electrophoretic pattern of subchloroplast fractions FP, grana, and stroma lamellae. Membrane protein was solubilized with sodium dodecysulfate and 60 μg of each sample were subjected to electrophoresis on 9% sodium dodecylsulfate-polyacrylamide as described under "Material and Methods."