Interaction of Vaccinia Virus with the Actin Cytoskeleton*

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ABSTRACT. Vaccinia virus infection results in large rearrangements of the host actin cytoskeleton including the formation of actin tails that are strikingly similar to those seen in *Listeria, Shigella* and *Rickettsia* infections. Using actin polymerization as the driving force the intracellular enveloped form of the vaccinia virus (IEV) is propelled on the tip of actin tails at a speed of 2.8 µm/min, both intra- and intercellularly The similarities between the actin-based motility of the vaccinia virus, *Listeria, Shigella* and *Rickettsia* suggest that intracellular pathogens have developed a common strategy to exploit the actin cytoskeleton of the host to facilitate their intercellular spread. This review focuses on our current understanding of the interactions between the vaccinia virus and the actin cytoskeleton.

CONTENTS

- 1 Introduction 305
- 2 Vaccinia virus morphogenesis 306
- 3 Vaccinia-actin interactions 306
- 4 An iActA homologue in vaccinia virus? 307
- 5 Vaccinia-encoded actin-binding proteins 308
 - 5.1 The vaccinia F17R protein is an actin-bundling protein 308
 - 5.2 The vaccinia A42R gene encodes a viral profilin 308
 - 5.3 Vaccinia encodes a family of kelch like proteins 309

6 Concluding remarks 309

References 309

1 INTRODUCTION

It has long been recognized that viral transformation results in disruption of the actin cytoskeleton and the loss of actin stress fibers (Pollack et al. 1975; Verderame et al. 1980). In addition a number of observations also suggest that viruses are able to interact with or modify the actin cytoskeleton of the host during their life cycle (reviewed by Cudmore et al. 1997). For example, the formation of actin bundles or microvillilike projections at the plasma membrane is a common theme during the release of many enveloped viruses. Virus-tipped microvilli have been observed for frog virus 3 (Murti et al. 1985; Murti and Goorha 1983), measles (Bohn et al. 1986), murine mammary tumor virus and other C-type retroviruses (Damsky et al. 1977; Iwasaki and Tsuchida 1978; Mortara and Koch 1986, 1989). Herpes simplex has also been shown to induce actin microvilli but the presence of a viral particle at their tip has not been demonstrated (Krempien et al. 1984). The role of the actin cytoskeleton during the viral budding process has been addressed by the disruption of the cytoskeleton with cytochalasin D. Disruption of actin filaments inhibits release of frog virus 3 (Murti et al. 1985), measles (Stallcup et al. 1983) as well as partially inhibiting HIV 1 release (Sasaki et al. 1995). Not all viruses induce the formation of actin projections late in infection. Epstein-Barr virus (EBV) induces rapid actin polymerization within a few minutes of infection while disruption of the actin cytoskeleton with cytochalasin D inhibits EBV-induced proliferation (Melamed et al. 1994; Mosialos et al. 1994). Cytochalasin D also inhibits the production of infectious baculovirus. Baculovirus infection also induces a rapid and dramatic effect on the actin cytoskeleton which results in the formation of virus-tipped actin cables in the cytoplasm immediately after viral entry (Charlton and Volkman 1991, 1993; Hess et al. 1989; Volkman 1988). Of all the viruses that interact with the host actin cytoskeleton the vaccinia virus is the most extensively studied and best characterized (Cudmore et al. 1995, 1996; Hiller et al. 1979, 1981; Hiller and Weber 1982; Krempien et al. 1981; Meyer et al. 1981; Payne and Kristensson 1982; Reckmann et al. 1997; Stokes 1976).

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2 VACCINIA VIRUS MORPHOGENESIS

Vaccinia virus, the prototype member of the Orthopoxviridae and a close relative of smallpox virus, is one of the largest and most complex viruses known with a genome of 191 kbp encoding over 260 potential proteins (Johnson et al. 1993). The mechanism by which vaccinia virus enters the host is currently unknown, although recent data suggest that it is an actin dependent process (Moreau and Way, unpublished results). Once in the cell, the virus rapidly begins its replication cycle in specialized cytoplasmic viral factories in the host (Moss 1990). In contrast to most other viruses, vaccinia virus is able to replicate in the cytoplasm as it encodes its own transcriptional machinery. Assembly and maturation of vaccinia virus is a complex process which is still largely not understood. An intriguing characteristic of the vaccinia virus assembly process is that it results in two different infectious forms. The first of these, the intracellular mature virus (IMV), is surrounded by a membrane cisterna derived from the intermediate compartment (Sodeik et al. 1993). IMV begin to appear about 4 h post infection and are released when the cell lyses due to the cytotoxic effects of infection. Additionally, a proportion of IMV, which varies according to virus strain and cell type, can undergo a second wrapping step by a cisternal domain derived from the trans Golgi network to form the intracellular enveloped virus (IEV; Payne 1980; Payne and Kristensson 1985; Schmelz et al. 1994). IEV are first seen 5-6 h post infection and are released from the cell by fusion of the outer viral membrane with the plasma membrane of the host, thereby liberating the second infectious form of vaccinia called the extracellular enveloped virus (EEV; Blasco and Moss 1991; Dales 1971; Morgan 1976; Payne 1980). EEV are responsible for the long-range dissemination of the virus in vivo (Payne 1980). During the fusion of IEV with the plasma membrane, a small proportion of EEV particles are not released into the medium but remain associated with the cell surface. These particles are refereed to as cell-associated enveloped virus (CEV) and are responsible for the cell-to-cell spread of the virus (Blasco and Moss 1992).

3 VACCINIA-ACTIN INTERACTIONS

The first indication of interactions between vaccinia virus and the actin cytoskeleton came from high-voltage electron microscopy studies which revealed single viral particles on the tip of large microvillilike projections in infected cells (Stokes 1976). Subsequent immunofluorescence observations demonstrated that the formation of these large microvilli-like projections, which appear late in infection, was dependent on viral assembly (Hiller et al. 1979; Krempien et al. 1981). The same studies also showed that these virus-tipped structures contained actin as well as the actin cross-linking proteins α-actinin, fimbrin and filamin but not tropomyosin or myosin (Hiller et al. 1979; Krempien et al. 1981). While addition of cytochalasin D did not inhibit virus assembly it did prevent the release of the intracellular enveloped form of vaccinia virus (Payne and Kristensson 1982). More recently the earlier morphological studies on the effects of vaccinia on the actin cytoskeleton have been ascribed a function by the discovery that vaccinia virus uses actin polymerization as the driving force to move intra- and intercellularly (Cudmore et al. 1995). Vaccinia virus achieves this by promoting the polymerization of actin filaments directly behind the virus particle, in a manner reminiscent of the pathogenic bacteria Listeria, Shigella and Rickettsia (reviewed by Cossart 1995; Theriot 1995; Tilney and Tilney 1993; Fig. 1). In this way, the polymerization of actin is sufficient to propel the virus at a rate of 2.8 µm/min through the cytoplasm of the host cell and on the tips of extending microvilli-like projections that form when the virus particle reaches the cell surface (Cudmore et al. 1995, 1996).

Examination of vaccinia infected cells reveals that only a proportion of viral particles are able to induce the formation of actin tails, suggesting that this property is not universal for all forms of the virus (Fig. 1). Studies using a mutant virus which cannot form IEV, as well as infection with wild-type virus in the presence of a drug which prevents IEV formation, confirmed this suggestion and demonstrated that only the IEV is capable of inducing actin tails (Cudmore *et al.* 1995). Examination of the organization of actin filaments in the vaccinia tail in electron micrographs reveals that they show unidirectional polarity with their preferred end for assembly pointing toward the surface of the virus particle (Cudmore *et al.* 1996). This orientation is consistent with the motility of the virus being driven purely by actin polymerization and not by myosin motors. Rhodamine-actin incorporation experiments show that the first stage of actin tail assembly involves a polarized recruitment of G-actin, rather then preformed actin filaments, to the membrane surrounding the IEV (Cudmore *et al.* 1996). Furthermore, incorporation of actin into the tail occurs only from the viral surface, suggesting that filament ends in the tail are blocked against further actin addition and that actin tail formation is nucleated by one or more proteins on the IEV. In contrast to bacterial systems the protein(s) required for the nucleation of vaccinia actin tails, as well as the host proteins involved in the process, have not yet been identified. The vaccinia system is fundamentally different from bacterial systems

as the actin tail nucleating IEV surface is derived from the *trans*-Golgi of the host cell (Payne 1980; Payne and Kristensson 1985; Schmelz *et al.* 1994). Consequently the nature of the nucleation complex may reflect a situation closer to the events at the leading edge of cells than is found in bacterial systems. This hypothesis is supported by the observation that as virus particles fuse with the plasma membrane during the extension of projections, actin nucleation sites previously associated with the viral membrane now become localized to the plasma membrane where they are still able to nucleate actin polymerization (Cudmore *et al.* 1996). Thus vaccinia virus provides a model system to dissect actin-membrane interactions both within and at the leading edge of cells.



Fig. 1. Overall appearance of the actin cytoskeleton in a HeLa cell (8 h after infection with vaccinia virus, figure width corresponds to $150 \mu m$) Virus particles are labeled with an antibody against the viral core protein P14 (*red*) while actin filaments are labeled with Bodipy phallacidin (*green*). Virus infection has resulted in the loss of actin stress fibers and the induction of actin tails directly from viral particles (*insert*)

4 AN iActA HOMOLOGUE IN VACCINIA VIRUS?

The bacterial surface protein iActA of *Listeria ivanovii* is responsible for recruiting host factors required to induce actin tails by this pathogenic bacterium (Gerstel *et al.* 1996; Gouin *et al.* 1995). The sequence of iActA contains seven copies of a proline-rich repeat of 47 amino acids that plays a critical role in initiating actin tail assembly (Gerstel *et al.* 1996; Gouin *et al.* 1995). Analysis of the vaccinia genome shows that the 65-amino-acid sequence of F8L vaccinia protein has a 38 % identity and a 53 % similarity with the proline-rich repeat of iActA (Gouin *et al.* 1995). Given this level of homology and the fact that proline-rich sequences have been shown to play an important role in actin tail assembly in both *Listeria* and *Shigella* (Higley and Way 1997*a*), we have characterized the product of the F8L gene to examine its possible role in vaccinia-induced rearrangements of the host actin cytoskeleton (Higley and Way 1997*b*). F8L is a 8-kDa protein that is expressed early during vaccinia infection and is found throughout the cytoplasm, with no association with viral particles, actin tails or any other discernible cellular structure. While the lack of F8L association with IEV or actin tails suggested that it plays no role in vaccinia actin tail formation it does not rule out the possibility that the protein is involved in actin stress-fiber disassembly prior to tail formation. To

address this question we deleted the F8L gene from the vaccinia genome (Higley and Way 1997b). The F8L deletion strain, WR Δ FBL, is still able to form viral particles as well as actin tails that are indistinguishable from those seen in control vaccinia infections. Furthermore, the kinetics of actin stress-fiber disassembly early during infection are identical for WR Δ FBL and controls. While the function of F8L during vaccinia infection remains to be established it is clear that it is not necessary for viral morphogenesis or actin rearrangements which occur during infection.

5 VACCINIA-ENCODED ACTIN-BINDING PROTEINS

5.1 The vaccinia F17R protein is an actin-bundling protein

During the initial characterization of the interaction of vaccinia virus with the actin cytoskeleton, a basic phosphorylated 11-kDa viral protein was identified that associated with viral induced microvilli and with the actin cytoskeleton when virus assembly was inhibited (Hiller and Weber 1982). Through a combination of studies involving immunoprecipitation, mapping and sequencing, p11 was finally identified as the product of the vaccinia F17R gene (Bertholet *et al.* 1985; Goebel *et al.* 1990; Johnson *et al.* 1993; Wittek *et al.* 1984). Given that F17R associates with the actin cytoskeleton we have recently examined its possible role in vaccinia actin-based motility (Reckmann *et al.* 1997). Not only is F17R associated with vaccinia actin tails in infected cells but it is also able to associate with the actin cytoskeleton in the absence of additional viral factors when transfected into non infected cells. Although F17R is able to associate with the actin cytoskeleton in the actin cytoskeleton if plays no role in vaccinia actin tail formation as the recombinant vaccinia strain vRO11k is still able to induce actin tails that are indistinguishable from controls in the absence of F17R expression. Given that earlier work suggested that the primary function of F17R is in viral particle morphogenesis, the exact nature of which remains to be established (Zhang and Moss 1991*a,b*), why does this protein associate with the actin cytoskeleton?

Recently, it has been shown that basic polypeptides are able to induce the formation of actin bundles in vitro by virtue of their polyelectrolyte nature in an analogous manner to DNA condensation (Tang and Janmey 1996). We believe that the association of F17R with the actin cytoskeleton can be explained by a similar mechanism (Reckmann et al. 1997). Transfection of vaccinia F17R deletion constructs identified an extremely basic region of 50 amino acids in the N-terminal half of the molecule that is essential for its association with the actin cytoskeleton. This basic region is also conserved in the divergent myxoma virus F17R which is also able to associate with the actin cytoskeleton. Finally, in vitro a peptide corresponding to this basic region induces actin bundles at a peptide-to-actin concentration ratio comparable to the values for other positively charged peptides and not to functional actin-bundling proteins, such as of villin and fimbrin (Matsudaira 1991; Tang and Janmey 1996). The fact that F17R-induced actin bundles are not ordered reflects a lack of specific contact sites and filament packing constraints that are normally seen with functional actin-bundling proteins. F17R is not the first protein to have actin binding as a property in addition to its primary role. Elongation factor EF1- α , which is also basic with a pl of \approx 9.0, bundles actin and associates with the actin cytoskeleton although it is critically required for translation (Liu et al. 1996). Our observations with F17R highlight the difficulty in distinguishing functional actin binding proteins from those that associate purely by virtue of their basic nature and may explain why so many actin-binding proteins have been identified.

5.2 The vaccinia A42R gene encodes a viral profilin

Another potential vaccinia actin-binding protein is a viral profilin homologue that displays $\approx 32 \%$ identity to the actin-monomer-binding protein, profilin, in mammalian cells (Blasco *et al.* 1991). Interestingly, host profilin is recruited to the site of actin tail nucleation in *Listeria* although its role in the actinbased motility of this bacterium is controversial (Marchand *et al.* 1995; Smith *et al.* 1996; Theriot *et al.* 1994). Vaccinia profilin is expressed late during infection and its deletion does not affect the formation of virally induced microvilli, actin tails or the number of infectious viral particles (Blasco *et al.* 1991; Cudmore *et al.* 1995). This is not surprising given that vaccinia profilin has a considerably lower affinity for actin than mammalian profilin (Machesky *et al.* 1994), and endogenous profilins may be able to play a functionally equivalent role. A better understanding may be achieved when a profilin-deficient host is infected with the recombinant vaccinia virus strain lacking the A42R gene.

5.3 Vaccinia encodes a family of kelch-like proteins

In addition to profilin, the vaccinia genome encodes four other proteins, the products of the A55R, F3L, C2L and B10R gene, that show significant sequence homologies to the actin-bundling protein, scruin, which is found in the acrosomal process of the horseshoe crab *Limulus* (Way *et al.* 1995). All sequence homologies between the proteins are restricted to the ca. 50 amino acid residue motifs that are termed kelch repeats after their identification in the *Drosophila* protein kelch (Xue and Cooley 1993). Kelch is a structural component of actin rich ring canals that provide the intercellular conduits connecting nurse cells to the oocyte in *Drosophila* egg chambers. Although it has been suggested that kelch is an actin binding protein, the six tandem kelch repeats alone are able to localize to ring canals *in vivo*, it has not been demonstrated that the protein can bind directly to actin filaments *in vitro* (Robinson and Cooley 1997). While it is not clear whether kelch binds actin directly, recent data has localized one of the actin binding sites of scruin to the six kelch repeats in the C-terminal half of the molecule (Sun *et al.* 1997). Whether the vaccinia proteins A55R, F3L, C2L and B10R are able to interact with actin and play a possible role in the actin-based motility of vaccinia virus remains to be established.

6 CONCLUDING REMARKS

While the effects of vaccinia virus on the actin cytoskeleton were originally described more than 20 years ago, we have only recently begun to understand their purpose in viral infection. The task ahead is now to identify the viral and host components responsible for initiating the cascade of events that lead to vaccinia actin tail formation and motility.

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