Binding mode of 1,4-naphthoquinones at the $Q_A$-site of the reaction centre from *Rhodobacter sphaeroides* investigated by light-induced FTIR difference spectroscopy

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Keywords: reaction centre, $Q_A$, naphthoquinone, FTIR

Introduction

The reaction centre (RC) from the photosynthetic purple bacterium *Rhodobacter sphaeroides* (*R. sphaeroides*) is an integral membrane protein-pigment complex that catalyses the conversion of light energy into chemical energy. The primary steps of light-induced electron transfer include the rapid electron transfer from the primary excited donor D, a bacteriochlorophyll dimer, to the primary electron acceptor $Q_A$, a ubiquinone-10 (UQ-10) molecule, and further to the secondary ubiquinone $Q_B$.

Recently, methyl substituted 1,4-naphthoquinone compounds have gained substantial interest as artificial primary quinones since they bind tightly to the $Q_A$ site of the reaction centre enabling its functional reconstitution while retaining the native ubiquinone at $Q_B$ (see Labahn *et al.* 1995, Graige *et al.* 1996). Schmid *et al.* (1999) reported the synthesis of naphthoquinone derivatives containing different numbers of methyl groups in various positions of the ring system and, in some cases, an additional undecyl-tail in position 3 (Fig. 1).

In this work we have applied FTIR difference spectroscopy to investigate the binding mode of 6- or 7-methylated naphthoquinone compounds at the $Q_A$ binding site. In the presence of an external reductant of the primary donor, the $Q_A^{-}/Q_A$ difference spectra exclusively show the absorbance changes of both the quinone and its environment in the RC upon reduction of the primary quinone. The spectra were interpreted in the light of results obtained for ubiquinone and vitamin K$_1$ (Breton *et al.* 1992, 1994a, 1994b, Brudler *et al.* 1994).

Materials and methods

*Quinones.* 2,3,6-Trimethyl-1,4-naphthoquinone (236TMNQ), 2,6-dimethyl-3-undecyl-1,4-naphthoquinone (26DM3UNQ) and 2,7-dimethyl-3-undecyl-1,4-naphthoquinone (27DM3UNQ) were synthesized according to published procedures (Schmid *et al.* 1999). Vitamin K$_1$ (2-methyl-3-phytyl-1,4-naphthoquinone) was purchased from Aldrich.
Reaction centres. Reaction centres were isolated from photosynthetically grown cells of the *Rhodobacter sphaeroides* strain R-26 as described (Feher et al., 1978). The ubiquinones bound at QA and QB were removed by incubating the RCs with 1,10-phenanthroline (Okamura et al., 1975). The residual quinone content was less than 0.1 ubiquinone/RC.

Quinone reconstitution and FTIR sample preparation. Reconstitution of the QA-site with the naphthoquinone compounds was done by adding an ethanolic solution of the corresponding quinone (~70 µM) to quinone-depleted RCs (120 nM) suspended in MKM-buffer (10 mM MOPS (3-[N-morpholino] propanesulfonic acid), 50 mM KCl, 0.04 % dodecyl-β-D-maltoside, pH 7.2). After equilibrating the system for at least 2 h at 20 °C, the reconstituted RCs were concentrated to a volume of 50 µl, using Microcon YM-100 centrifugal filter devices (Millipore Corp.). To avoid harmful salt and detergent concentrations, the solution was diluted with 450 µl MK-buffer containing no detergent and reduced salt concentration (1 mM MOPS, 5 mM KCl, pH 7.2) prior to a second concentration step, yielding a volume of 10 µl. This sample was deposited onto the depression of a special CaF₂ window. After addition of 5 µl of an aqueous solution of the redox mediator diaminodurene (DAD, 2.5 mM) and sodium ascorbate (1.25 mM) as reductant for the primary donor, the droplet was further concentrated under a smooth stream of nitrogen. Before complete dryness, the RC film was sealed with a second CaF₂ window, yielding the FTIR sample with a thickness of a few microns.

FTIR spectroscopy. Light-minus-dark QA⁻/QA⁺ difference spectra were measured at 2 ± 0.2 °C on a Bruker IFS 66v/S spectrometer equipped with a MCT-detector. Interferograms were recorded before and during continuous illumination (λ=590 nm). Twenty illumination cycles, separated by a dark time of 7 minutes to ensure full relaxation of the RCs to the ground state were averaged, resulting in ~40000 interferograms/spectrum. The difference spectra were normalized with respect to the spectral regions between 1500 and 1560 cm⁻¹ and between 1670 and 1750 cm⁻¹ by applying the vector normalisation method. The absorption spectra of the quinones were measured in *n*-heptane (2 mM) at 20 °C.

Results

The absorption spectra of the 6- or 7-methylated naphthoquinone compounds are very similar to the spectrum of vitamin K₁ (Fig. 2) which has been characterised by Breton and coworkers (Breton et al., 1994a). In the region of the CO stretch vibration and the CC ring vibrations (1700-1550 cm⁻¹), the absorption spectra of 236TMNQ, 26DM3UNQ and 27DM3UNQ are almost identical. Within the accuracy of the method, the positions of the CO modes and of the quinonic CC modes are identical with those of vitamin K₁. However, a 6 cm⁻¹ frequency upshift of the aromatic ring vibrational mode was found.

Breton et al. (1994a) showed that different regions in the QA⁻/QA⁺ difference spectrum of RCs from *Rhodobacter sphaeroides* with vitamin K₁ as QA can be distinguished (Fig.3): In the range of 1750-1670 cm⁻¹ and 1560-1500 cm⁻¹ the spectrum is dominated by non-quinonic contributions resulting from the response of the RC upon QA reduction. Below 1500 cm⁻¹, the spectrum is indicative for the absorption bands of the semiquinone anion radical whereas the signals of vitamin K₁ in its neutral state are located between 1670 and 1560 cm⁻¹. They are superimposed with strong contributions of the protein and possibly of other cofactors. In the non-quinonic regions, the difference spectra of 6/7-methylated compounds show a high similarity in terms of the shape and the characteristic frequencies of the absorption bands compared to those of vitamin K₁ (Fig. 3). Only small differences in the intensities of the signals were observed.
At 1444 cm\(^{-1}\) a strong signal was found for all three compounds. Shapes and intensities of these absorption bands coincide with that of vitamin K\(_1\) observed at the same frequency. The latter observation was assigned by Breton et al. (1994a) to a CO vibrational mode of the vitamin K\(_1\) semiquinone anion radical. A close analogy between the bands peaking at 1480-1482 cm\(^{-1}\) and the signal at 1478 cm\(^{-1}\) of vitamin K\(_1\) was observed. However, the two additional bands of the CC modes at 1394/1388 cm\(^{-1}\) in the vitamin K\(_1\) spectrum are absent in those of the methyl substituted naphthoquinones. A signal of comparable intensity close to this frequency was found at 1372 cm\(^{-1}\). Furthermore, as a clear distinction to the vitamin K\(_1\) difference spectrum, the spectra of 236TMNQ, 26DM3UNQ and 27DM3UNQ show an additional peak at 1466, 1468 and 1469 cm\(^{-1}\), respectively.

**Discussion**

Differences in the non-quinonic regions of the QA\(^{-}/\)QA difference spectra of vitamin K\(_1\) and the different naphthoquinones would indicate that quinone binding leads to structural changes of the QA binding site, depending on the structure of the corresponding quinone compound. The high similarity of these spectral regions in the difference spectra of 236TMNQ, 26DM3UNQ and 27DM3UNQ compared to that of vitamin K\(_1\) (Fig. 3) therefore supports the assumption of a common binding mechanism for all functionally binding quinones to a rigid QA site. This, together with the good agreement of the corresponding CO stretch and the CC ring vibrations in the FTIR absorption spectra of the pure compounds.
justifies the use of the vitamin K$_1$ difference spectrum as a basis for the interpretation of the difference spectra of the 6/7-methylated naphthoquinones: Based on these findings one would expect similar in vivo quinone signals for vitamin K$_1$ and the methylated naphthoquinones in the Q$_A$/Q$_A^*$ difference spectra as well.

The bands in the difference spectra peaking at 1444 cm$^{-1}$ and 1480-1482 cm$^{-1}$ coincide well with the signals of the vitamin K$_1$ difference spectrum (Fig. 3). Therefore, they are assigned to the CO mode and a CC mode of the semiquinone radical anion, respectively. In contrast, for the vibrations at 1466-1469 cm$^{-1}$ no equivalent was found in the vitamin K$_1$ spectrum. In case of ubiquinone, EPR/ENDOR measurements (Lubitz and Feher, 1999) and FTIR difference spectroscopy (Breton et al., 1994a; Brudler et al., 1994) revealed asymmetrical hydrogen bonds between the protein and the two carbonyl groups in the charge separated state D$^+$QA$^*$. Thus, the FTIR difference spectrum exhibited two distinct CO stretching modes for the semiquinone anion as opposed to vitamin K$_1$ where only one such mode was found. In the light of these results, the additional signal at 1466-1469 cm$^{-1}$ was attributed to a second CO vibrational mode. Based on this preliminary assignment we conclude that the methyl group in position 6 or 7 of the aromatic naphthoquinone ring (Fig. 1) breaks the symmetry of the two hydrogen bonds between the carbonyl groups of these quinones and the protein in the charge separated state D$^+$QA$^*$. This symmetry was found to be characteristic for vitamin K$_1$ and menaquinone K$_9$ (Breton et al. 1994a).

Work is in progress to verify the assignments by means of isotopically labelled naphthoquinone compounds. A detailed knowledge of the quinone spectral contributions is a prerequisite for using these naphthoquinones to elucidate the complex coupling mechanism of electron transfer, proton transfer and conformational changes in the RC protein.

**Acknowledgments**

We thank P. Gräber for continuous support which made this work possible. Our work was supported by a grant from the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (La 816/3-3). M.J.B. gratefully acknowledges a Ph.D. scholarship from the Graduiertenkolleg ‘Ungepaarte Elektronen’ of the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft.

**References**


