Immunoprecipitation as a Tool for Studying Humoral Immunity of Natural and Experimental Hosts of Herpesvirus saimiri

Susanne Modrow, Helga Schmidt, and Hans Wolf

Max von Pettenkofer-Institute, Munich, Pettenkoferstr. 9a, D-8000 Munich 2, Germany

ABSTRACT

Herpesvirus saimiri strain 11 and attenuated H. saimirí strain 11 proteins synthesized during the lytic cycle of virus replication were used for immunoprecipitation with various sera from natural (Saimiri sciureus) and experimental (Saguinus nigricollis, Saguinus fuscicolis, Aotus trivirgatus, New Zealand white rabbits) hosts. The analysis of the precipitates separated in sodium dodecyl sulfate-polyacrylamide gels revealed that in tumor-developing animals a specific set of viral polypeptides were precipitated, which were not precipitated by sera obtained from the natural host Saimiri sciureus. Using labeled proteins from H. saimirí 11 and its attenuated strain, respectively, a difference was shown after precipitation with a serum raised against infected cell proteins of H. saimirí 11.

INTRODUCTION

Marmosets of the genus Saguinus (Saguinus oedipus, Saguinus nigricollis, Saguinus fuscicolis) are highly susceptible to tumor induction by Herpesvirus saimiri and develop a fatal, rapidly growing neoplastic disease (3, 11) following virus infection. Owl monkeys (Aotus trivirgatus) show a similar course of disease. The appearance of tumors in these animals is often delayed, and about 20% of the owl monkeys infected with H. saimirí do not develop tumors (7, 10). H. saimirí-infected NZWR1 show a disease pattern similar to that of primates; the incidence of neoplastic disease after infection with H. saimirí varies between about 20 and 75% in different studies (1, 2, 16). In squirrel monkeys (Saimiri sciureus), the natural hosts of H. saimirí are inapparently infected and are lifelong virus carriers.

In our study, we tested the specificity of antibodies in the various experimental and natural hosts by immunoprecipitation of viral polypeptides obtained from OMK cells infected with H. saimirí strain 11 or an attenuated mutant of H. saimirí 11 (H. saimirí 11 att) (17).
Immunoprecipitation of 0.14 mm and N,N,N',N''-tetraethylmethylenediamine to a final concentration of 0.035%. The stacking gel contained 3% acrylamide, 0.08% diallyltartardimide, 0.1% SDS, and 120 mm Tris-HCl, pH 7.0. The upper and lower buffer tanks contained 25 mm Tris-HCl (pH 8.5), 192 mm glycine, and 0.1% SDS. Electrophoresis was performed at a constant current of 5.3 ma/sq cm until the leading front reached the end of the gel. Gels were fixed and stained in water:acetic acid:isopropyl alcohol (4:1:1), destained in water:acetic acid:isopropyl alcohol (8:1:1), and dried on Whatman No. 2MM filter paper under vacuum. All chemicals were purchased from Bio-Rad (Munich, Germany); high-molecular-weight standards from the same company were used as markers. Gels were exposed to 35-HUtlcofilm (LKB, Gräfelfing, Germany).

RESULTS

Precipitation with Saimiri sciureus Sera. H. saimirí-infected cell proteins were labeled at early (6 to 8 hr p.i.), middle (15 to 17 hr p.i.), and late (24 to 26 hr p.i.) times and in the presence of azetidine (500 μg/ml) with [35S]methionine. The labeled polypeptides were precipitated with 3 different sera of squirrel monkeys (Ss 1, Ss 2, Ss 3). In azetidine-treated cells (Fig. 1) and at early times after infection, only a few viral proteins could be precipitated: p152, p53, p50, and p28 (Fig. 1) and p152, p97, p53, and p45 (Fig. 2). When proteins were labeled at middle (not shown) and late times (Fig. 3) after infection, a subset of viral polypeptides was identified, composed of mostly viral structural proteins (13) produced at the end of the lytic cycle: p195, p152, p146, p135, p127, p123, p106, p97, p88, p67, p61, p53, p50, p28 (12). A serum against virion proteins produced in rabbits (R 1) was used as positive control. All sera were tested with mock-infected cells to rule out unspecific binding (data not shown).

Precipitation with Sera of Experimental Hosts.[35S]Methionine-labeled proteins were precipitated with 3 different owl monkey sera (At 1, At 2, At 3), with one S. nigricollis (Sn 1) serum, and one NZWR (NZWR 1) serum from animals which were dying of neoplastic disease after infection with H. saimirí 11. At middle and late times (Fig. 3) after infection, sera from the experimental hosts precipitated a limited number of viral proteins: p152, p127, p115, p80, p55—p7 (p57 for A. trivirgatus, p57 for S. nigricollis and NZWR), p53, p50, p28. p146 and p135 were precipitated with some owl monkey sera only in very reduced amounts; p195, p123, p106, p97, p88, p67, p61, p53, p50, p28 (12). A serum against virion proteins produced in rabbits (R 1) was used as positive control. All sera were tested with mock-infected cells to rule out unspecific binding (data not shown).

Precipitation with Serum of an Animal Infected with H. saimirí 11 att. H. saimirí 11-infected cell proteins were precipitated with a serum of a S. fuscicollis (Sf 1), which was persistently infected with H. saimirí 11 att. H. saimirí 11-infected cell proteins were precipitated with the sera of Saimirí sciureus, most of the proteins being structural polypeptides (Figs. 1 to 3).

Comparison of H. saimirí 11- and H. saimirí 11 att-infected Cell Proteins. All sera from the natural and experimental hosts showed no difference in the protein profiles of H. saimirí 11- and H. saimirí 11 att-infected cell proteins. By immunoprecipitation with a serum prepared against H. saimirí 11-infected cell proteins in a goat (Fig. 4), one polypeptide was precipitated in H. saimirí 11-infected cells which was not found in H. saimirí 11 att-infected cells; the protein had a molecular weight of about 55,000.

DISCUSSION

In this study, we determined the specificity of antibodies in various experimental (S. nigricollis, S. fuscicollis, A. trivirgatus, NZWR) and natural (Saimirí sciureus) hosts by immunoprecipitation of proteins. These polypeptides were obtained from OMK cells infected with H. saimirí 11 or H. saimirí 11 att in the presence of [35S]methionine at different times after infection. In the natural hosts, most antibodies are directed against late viral polypeptides (Fig. 3), which are mostly structural proteins of the H. saimirí 11 virus (13): p195, p152, p146, p135, p127, p123, p106, p97, p88, p67, p61, p53, p50, p28.

A very similar picture was obtained with a serum from a S. fuscicollis (Sf 1), which was infected with H. saimirí 11 att and developed a lifelong virus carrier status. H. saimirí 11 att (17) is reported to be nononcogenic in different marmoset species, induces a latent or persistent infection, and protects animals against challenge inoculation with H. saimirí 11 (4, 18, 19). Thus, the etiological behavior of H. saimirí 11 att in marmosets is very similar to that of H. saimirí 11 in Saimirí sciureus monkeys. This fact could be demonstrated by the results obtained for the immunoprecipitation experiments. The sera of squirrel monkeys infected with the oncogenic wild type showed the same antibody pattern as that obtained from a marmoset infected with H. saimirí 11 att.

Sera from experimental hosts infected with H. saimirí 11 which had died from a neoplastic disease showed after immunoprecipitation that their antibody specificity was different from that obtained from the natural host but very similar among the different species (NZWR, owl monkey, marmoset). With the sera of all these hosts, 3 proteins were precipitated which were never precipitated with sera from squirrel monkeys: p115, p80, and p55 in owl monkeys; and p57 in S. nigricollis and NZWR, respectively. The slight difference in the molecular weight (p55—p57) may be due to a different modification of the protein in the various hosts with the antibodies directed against the modification. p115 and p55—p57 were synthesized at an early stage after infection (Fig. 2); the synthesis of p115, however, was inhibited by the treatment with azetidine (Fig. 1) and thus may belong to a second group of early proteins.

Since all animals developing a H. saimirí-induced neoplastic disease are reported to have high anti-EA titers (8, 14, 15) which increase with the development of malignant tumors, one might conclude that the 3 proteins p115, p80, and p55—p57 are components of the EA complex. In the natural hosts, the anti-EA titers were found to decline ten months after the primary infection; this is very similar to the serological data for Epstein-Barr virus in humans, where rising anti-EA titers are a prognostically unfavorable sign indicating neoplastic proliferation (5, 6). Between the protein profiles obtained from H. saimirí 11- and H. saimirí 11 att-infected cell proteins precipitated with squirrel monkey, owl monkey, marmoset, and NZWR sera, respectively, no differences could be detected. Precipitation with a goat serum against H. saimirí 11-infected cells produced, however, one protein that could be identified in H. saimirí 11-infected cells which was not synthesized in H. saimirí 11 att-infected cells (Fig. 4). The molecular weight of the protein was found to be 55,000.

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This protein may either be a viral protein, which is deleted in *H. saimiri* 11 att, or a cellular polypeptide the synthesis of which is not induced during infection with *H. saimiri* 11 att. As a third possibility, the differences in the protein patterns may be due to a different protein modification of *H. saimiri* 11- and *H. saimiri* 11 att-induced polypeptides.

The characterization of the polypeptides which present themselves in the various experimental and natural hosts as antigens may be a step towards a better understanding of the regulatory mechanisms involved in the development of the *H. saimiri*-induced malignant disease. At least these experiments show that tests for antibodies directed against specific antigens could be used to discriminate between tumor-bearing and non-tumor-bearing hosts and that antibodies reacting with other antigens are of use for a nondiscriminating diagnosis of the immune status. Although this may be of greatest importance for hosts infected with *H. saimiri*, similar work may prove very useful for the diagnosis of infectious or neoplastic disease caused by Epstein-Barr virus and other herpesviruses in humans.

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**REFERENCES**


Fig. 1. H. saimiri-infected OMK cells treated with azetidine (500 μg/ml), labeled with [35S]methionine (20 μCi/ml) from 24 to 26 hr after infection, and immunoprecipitated with the sera indicated. 11, H. saimiri-11 infected cells; att, H. saimiri 11 infected cells; Ss 1, Ss 2, Ss 3, sera of Saimiri sciureus, infected with H. saimiri 11; At 1, At 2, At 3, sera of A. trivirgatus, infected with H. saimiri 11; Sn 1, serum of S. nigricollis, infected with H. saimiri 11; Sf 1, serum of S. fuscicollis, infected with H. saimiri 11 att; NZWR 1, serum of a NZWR, infected with H. saimiri 11; R1, rabbit serum against structural proteins of H. saimiri 11.

Fig. 2. H. saimiri-infected OMK cells, labeled with [35S]methionine (20 μCi/ml) from 6 to 8 hr after infection, and immunoprecipitated with the sera indicated. For identification of abbreviations, see legend to Fig. 1.
Fig. 3. *H. saimiri*-infected OMK cells, labeled with \[^{35}S\]methionine (20 \(\mu\)Ci/ml) from 24 to 26 hr after infection, and immunoprecipitated with the sera indicated. For identification of abbreviations, see legend to Fig. 1.

Fig. 4. OMK cells infected with *H. saimiri*, labeled at various times after infection with \[^{35}S\]methionine (20 \(\mu\)Ci/ml), and immunoprecipitated with a goat serum directed against *H. saimiri* 11-infected cell proteins. A, mock-infected cells, labeled 24 to 26 hr after mock infection; B, *H. saimiri* 11-infected cells, labeled 8 to 10 hr after infection; C, *H. saimiri* 11-infected cells, labeled 24 to 26 hr after infection; D, *H. saimiri* 11 att-infected cells, labeled 8 to 10 hr after infection; E, *H. saimiri* 11 att-infected cells, labeled 24 to 26 hr after infection.
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