Secretion of Saccharomyces cerevisiae killer toxin: processing of the glycosylated precursor

H. Bussey  
*McGill University*

D. Saville  
*McGill University*

D. Greene  
*McGill University*

See next page for additional authors

Follow this and additional works at: [https://escholarship.umassmed.edu/maps_pubs](https://escholarship.umassmed.edu/maps_pubs)

earable Commons, Cellular and Molecular Physiology Commons, Microbiology Commons, and the Molecular Biology Commons

Repository Citation

[https://escholarship.umassmed.edu/maps_pubs/50](https://escholarship.umassmed.edu/maps_pubs/50)

This material is brought to you by eScholarship@UMMS. It has been accepted for inclusion in Microbiology and Physiological Systems Publications and Presentations by an authorized administrator of eScholarship@UMMS. For more information, please contact Lisa.Palmer@umassmed.edu.
Secretion of Saccharomyces cerevisiae killer toxin: processing of the glycosylated precursor

Authors
H. Bussey, D. Saville, D. Greene, Donald J. Tipper, and Keith A. Bostian

Keywords
Saccharomyces cerevisiae cells, protein secretion, killer toxin secretion

Rights and Permissions
Copyright © 1983, American Society for Microbiology. Publisher PDF posted as allowed by the publisher’s copyright policy at https://journals.asm.org/content/copyright-transfer-and-supplemental-material-license-agreement-2017.

This article is available at eScholarship@UMMS: https://escholarship.umassmed.edu/maps_pubs/50
Secretion of *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* Killer Toxin: Processing of the Glycosylated Precursor

H. BUSSEY, D. SAVILLE, D. GREENE, J. TIPPER, and K. A. BOSTIAN

Department of Biology, McGill University, Montreal, Canada H3A IB1; Department of Molecular Genetics and Microbiology, University of Massachusetts Medical School, Worcester, Massachusetts 01605; and Division of Biology and Medicine, Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island 02912

Received 25 February 1983/Accepted 16 May 1983

Killer toxin secretion was blocked at the restrictive temperature in *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* sec mutants with conditional defects in the *S. cerevisiae* secretory pathway leading to accumulation of endoplasmic reticulum (sec18), Golgi (sec7), or secretory vesicles (sec1). A 43,000-molecular-weight (43K) glycosylated protoxin was found by pulse-labeling in all sec mutants at the restrictive temperature. In sec18 the protoxin was stable after a chase; but in sec7 and sec1 the protoxin was unstable, and in sec1 11K toxin was detected in cell lysates. The chymotrypsin inhibitor tosyl-L-phenylalanyl chloromethyl ketone (TPCK) blocked toxin secretion in vivo in wild-type cells by inhibiting protoxin cleavage. The unstable protoxin in wild-type and in sec7 and sec1 cells at the restrictive temperature was stabilized by TPCK, suggesting that the protoxin cleavage was post-sec18 and was mediated by a TPCK-inhibitable protease. Protoxin glycosylation was inhibited by tunicamycin, and a 36K protoxin was detected in inhibited cells. This 36K protoxin was processed, but toxin secretion was reduced 10-fold. We examined two kex mutants defective in toxin secretion; both synthesized a 43K protoxin, which was stable in kex1 but unstable in kex2. Protoxin stability in kex1 kex2 double mutants indicated the order kex1 → kex2 in the protoxin processing pathway. TPCK did not block protoxin instability in kex2 mutants. This suggested that the *KEX1*- and *KEX2*-dependent steps preceded the sec7 Golgi block. We attempted to localize the protoxin in *S. cerevisiae* cells. Use of an in vitro rabbit reticulocyte-dog pancreas microsomal membrane system indicated that protoxin synthesized in vitro could be inserted into and glycosylated by the microsomal membranes. This membrane-associated protoxin was protected from trypsin proteolysis. Pulse-chased cells or spheroplasts, with or without TPCK, failed to secrete protoxin. The protoxin may not be secreted into the lumen of the endoplasmic reticulum, but may remain membrane associated and may require endoproteolytic cleavage for toxin secretion.

Type 1 killer *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* cells contain M1 double-stranded RNA (dsRNA), a cytoplasmic plasmid encapsulated in virus-like particles. The virus-like plasmid contains genes coding for a secreted 11,000-molecular-weight (11K) protein toxin and an unidentified immunity protein determining resistance to this toxin, which confer the killer (K1+), immune (R1+) phenotype of killer strains (see references 3 and 18 for recent reviews).

The system allows a genetic approach to be taken toward understanding protein secretion in this simple eucaryote. The toxin resembles many secreted proteins in that it is made as a larger precursor. The primary translation product in vitro is a 32 to 36K preprotoxin. This precursor is processed cotranslationally in vitro by dog pancreas microsomal membranes to a 43K glycoprotein, a protoxin with a 1.6K aminoterminal signal sequence removed (1, 2). A 43K glycoprotein protoxin is also found in vivo in pulse-labeled killer cells (2, 4), and the protoxin has a precursor-product relationship to the secreted toxin in a pulse-chase experiment. M1 dsRNA killer plasmid mutants which are defective in protoxin processing and are unable to secrete toxin have been described (4).

In this paper we examine processing and secretion of toxin in mutants defective in nuclear genes that control secretion, and we show toxin secretion to be on a pathway defined by the secretory sec mutants of Novick and Schekman (11) and the kex mutants of Wickner and Leibowitz (9, 19). In addition, we examine the
effect of tunicamycin and protease inhibitors on toxin processing and attempt to localize the protoxin in producing cells.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Yeast strains and media. The diploid *S. cerevisiae* T158C/S14a (ATCC 46427) was used as a typical K₁ killer strain (4). The secretory mutant strains HMSF₁ sec₁⁻, HMSF₆ sec₇⁻, and HMSF₁76 sec₁₈⁻ were obtained from R. Schekman. These temperature-sensitive, nonkiller sec mutants were crossed with a killer strain, AB207B [KIL-k₁] × his₄C-864; the killer diploid sporulated, and the asc dissected. All spores were killer (K⁺ R⁺), two per tetrad were temperature-sensitive mutants, and one temperature-sensitive K⁺ R⁺ mutant was taken from each cross for use. All four spores from a sec₁⁻ cross gave a 43K protoxin when cell lysates were immunoprecipitated with antitoxin antiserum after pulse-labeling with [³⁵S]sulfate for 20 min at 24°C.

The following *kex* mutant strains were used and all were [KIL-k₁]; a kex₂⁻ ura³ ade² ; a kex₁⁻ 3 ade² ; S90 a kex₂ ade² ural; S91 a kex₁⁻ argl thr¹; 3413-10B a kex₁⁻ kex₂⁻ ural thr¹; 3413-8A a kex₁⁻ kex₂⁻ ade² his⁷ argl thr¹. All but the first two strains were from the laboratory of Reed Wickner.

Growth medium was the minimal medium described previously (4) supplemented as appropriate with 0.5% yeast extract–0.5% peptone–2% glucose. For some pulse-labeling experiments, a sulfate-free minimal medium (4) was used plus 0.25 mM homocysteine thiolactone as a sulfur source (11).

dsRNA isolation and in vitro translation. M₁ dsRNA was isolated from killer strain T158C/S14a and denatured and translated in a rabbit reticulocyte lysate system as described previously (4). EDTA-stripped, micrococcal nuclease-treated dog pancreas microsomal membranes, prepared by the Shields and Blobel (15) procedure, were obtained from Gordon Shore. Tetra-caine was obtained as Pontocaine from Winthrop Laboratories; trypsin was obtained from Boehringer Mannheim Corp.

dsRNA and translation of toxin and toxin precursor. Cultures were labeled with [³⁵S]sulfate (carrier-free, New England Nuclear Corp.) or [³⁸S]methionine (Amersham Corp.), and cells and medium were obtained by centrifugation. Growth medium was concentrated with ultrafiltration cones (CF-25; Amicon Corp.). Cells were lysed with glass beads, and the lysates and medium concentrates were immunoreacted with antitoxin antiserum and protein A-Sepharose as described previously (4).

Immunoreactants were subjected to sodium dodecyl sulfate (SDS)-polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis and fluorography as described previously (4). To estimate the intensity of protoxin and toxin bands, films were scanned with a densitometer (Ortec), and the areas under the peaks were estimated by weighing. To correct for sample variability in gel lanes, protoxin levels were normalized relative to a stable, nonspecific protein migrating at approximately 48K on the gels. To determine protoxin half-lives in mutants, decay curves from at least two pulse-chase experiments were plotted, and half-lives were estimated and averaged.

Protease inhibitors were tosyl-L-phenylalanyl chloromethyl ketone (TPCK), N-carbobenzyloxy-L-phenylalan- lanyl chloromethyl ketone, phenylmethylsulfonyl fluoride, tosyl-L-lysyl chloromethyl ketone, tosyl-L-arginyl-methylester, and chymostatin. They were obtained from Sigma Chemical Co. Inhibitors insoluble in water were dissolved in dimethyl sulfoxide before use as described previously (5).

RESULTS

Killer toxin processing and secretion in *sec* mutants. Novick and Schekman have isolated and characterized a series of conditional-lethal mutants defective in protein secretion and cell surface growth (11). At the restrictive temperature, these mutants accumulate secretory organelles and can be ordered into a pathway that is remarkably similar to that seen in mammalian cells (10).

We studied killer toxin processing and secretion in three such mutants that accumulate endoplasmic reticulum (*sec*₁₈), Golgi (*sec*₇), or secretory vesicles (*sec*₁) at the restrictive temperature. To examine toxin processing and secretion in *sec* mutants, we constructed sec [KIL-k₁] strains by standard genetic techniques. The strains had normal K⁺ R⁺ killer phenotypes at 24°C but failed to grow at 37°C.

The sec *killer* strains were grown at 24°C, switched to 37°C for 1 to 1.5 h, pulse-labeled for 10 min, chased, and the label in toxin and precursors examined (Fig. 1 and 2). No detectable toxin was secreted at 37°C in the sec₁ strain (Fig. 1A, lanes d, e, and f), although a wild-type strain (T158C/S14a) secreted toxin under similar growth and labeling conditions (Fig. 1A, lanes a, b, and c). A similar blockage of toxin secretion at 37°C was found in sec7 and sec₁₈ strains (data not shown). We examined toxin precursors that had accumulated at the sec blocks by immunoreaction of cell lysates with antitoxin serum. In all cases, a 43K protoxin was detected after a pulse (see Fig. 1B, lane a for sec₁; Fig. 2, lanes b and f for sec7 and sec₁₈, respectively). The protoxin was identical in size to that seen in these mutants at 24°C and to the protoxin from a wild-type strain (data not shown). Pulse-chase experiments indicated that in sec₁₈ the protoxin was stable after a 60-min chase at 37°C (Fig. 2, lanes g and h), whereas for sec7 the protoxin was unstable with a half-life of approximately 45 min (Fig. 2, lanes c and d). In the sec₁ strain, the protoxin was more labile, with a half-life of approximately 15 min (Fig. 1B, lanes b and c). In sec₁, but not sec₁₈ or sec₇, cell lysates 11K toxin was also found (see Fig. 1B), although no toxin or protoxin was secreted. Protoxin in a wild-type strain at 37°C was less stable than in the sec₁ strain. Protoxin was not detectable after a 30-min chase (data not shown), indicating a half-life of less than 10 min. By 30 min at 37°C,
 secreted after lowering the culture temperature from 37°C to the permissive temperature of 24°C and in the absence of further protein synthesis. In a similar experiment, a sec1 killer strain was grown at 37°C and pulse-labeled with [35S]sulfate. After the pulse, protein synthesis was inhibited with cycloheximide, the culture was transferred to 24°C, and toxin synthesis was examined (Fig. 3). Protoxin made at 37°C decreased with time at 24°C (Fig. 3A) and, in contrast to the situation at 37°C, this decrease in protoxin coincided with an increase in the amount of secreted 11K toxin (Fig. 3B). Note also that several other secreted proteins made at 37°C were chased out at 24°C under these conditions.

Effect of tunicamycin on protoxin glycosylation and toxin secretion. Glycosylation of protoxin was previously identified in vitro by endoglycosidase H susceptibility (2). To determine the importance of glycosylation for toxin maturation, we examined the effect of tunicamycin (7) on in vivo protoxin synthesis and processing. A culture of killer strain (T158C/S14a) was incubated with tunicamycin, pulse-chased with [35S]sulfate, and samples of cell lysate and growth medium taken for analysis of protoxin and secreted toxin. The results (Fig. 4) showed that tunicamycin inhibited synthesis of the 43K protoxin, whereas a 36K species, immunoreactive with antitoxin serum, was detected in cell lysates in the presence of the drug (Fig. 4A, lane d). This 36K precursor, presumably devoid of any N-asparaginyl-linked polysaccharide, was similar in size to the preprotoxin synthesized in

FIG. 1. Synthesis of protoxin and secretion of killer toxin in SEC1 and sec1 killer strains of 37°C. Strains were grown at 24°C, switched to 37°C for 1 h, labeled with [35S]sulfate for 10 min, and chased with cold sulfate for up to 1 h at 37°C. (A) Secreted proteins were obtained from the growth medium, and after concentration they were applied to an SDS-polyacrylamide gel, electrophoresed, and a fluorogram of the gel obtained. Lanes a through c (in SEC1) chase duration: lane a, 0 min; lane b, 30 min; lane c, 60 min. Toxin is seen in lanes b and c as the band just below the 13K marker. Lanes d through f (in sec1) chase duration: lane d, 0 min; lane e, 30 min; lane f, 60 min. (B) Cells were lysed and proteins immunoreacted with antitoxin antiserum. The immunoreactive species were electrophoresed on an SDS-polyacrylamide gel, and a fluorogram was made. Lanes a through c, sec1; lanes d through f, sec1 treated with TPCK during labeling. Chase duration: lanes a and d, 0 min; lanes b and e, 30 min; lanes c and f, 60 min. The protoxin band migrated at 43K.

Novick and Schekman (11) showed that acid phosphatase and invertase, accumulated in the secretory vesicles in a sec1 mutant at 37°C, were secreted 11K toxin was clearly visible in the growth medium (Fig. 1A, lane b).
of tunicamycin could result from instability of the unglycosylated protoxin. However, in a pulse-chase experiment, the kinetics of unglycosylated protoxin decay were measured and found to be identical to those of the glycosylated

vitro (Fig. 4A, lane c). Although no 43K protoxin was detected in the presence of tunicamycin, a small amount of 11K toxin was secreted (Fig. 4B, lanes a and c) which was approximately 10% of that produced in the absence of tunicamycin (Fig. 4B, lanes b and d). Immunoreaction of secreted proteins showed that the 11K toxin was the only secreted cross-reactive component (Fig. 4B, lanes a and b).

Decreased secretion of toxin in the presence
precursor (data not shown). In a further experiment based on the procedure of Katz et al. (6), the 43K protoxin was shown to be a glycoprotein, as it was retained by a concanavalin A-Sepharose column, whereas the 36K preprotoxin was not (data not shown). Retention of the 43K protoxin was blocked by 0.2 M α-methyl-D-mannoside, but not by 0.2 M β-galactose.

**Protoxin cleavage is blocked by TPCK.** To try to prevent cleavage of toxin from the protoxin, protease inhibitors were added to the growth medium of a killer strain, and secreted toxin was measured after a pulse with [35S]sulfate and a chase of variable duration. The chymotrypsin inhibitor, TPCK (14), prevented toxin secretion (Fig. 5A, lane a) as did N-carbobenzoxy-L-phenylalanyl chloromethyl ketone, although toxin was secreted in the presence of phenylmethylsulfonyl fluoride, tosyl-L-arginyl-methyl ester, tosyl-L-lysyl chloromethyl ketone or chymostatin (data not shown). Although TPCK blocked toxin secretion, it did not prevent secretion of many medium proteins (Fig. 5A, compare lanes a and b). Examination of cell lysates from pulse-labeled TPCK-treated cells, after a chase period sufficient for labeled protoxin to have disappeared from untreated cells, showed that the protoxin persisted and remained cell-associated, which is consistent with TPCK blockage of protoxin cleavage and nonsecretion of protoxin (Fig. 5B, compare lanes b and c). Toxin-sized material was also found in TPCK-inhibited cells. This material may arise from degradation of protoxin on extraction or may imply a more complex mode of action of TPCK.

At the restrictive temperature, the sec1 mutant had an unstable toxin precursor in a pulse-chase experiment. The sec1 precursor was considerably more stable in the presence of TPCK (Fig. 5B, lanes d, e, and f), with approximately 77% of precursor still present after 60 min, compared with approximately 8% remaining in the uninhibited sec1 cells. The sec7 precursor was also more stable in the presence of TPCK, with no significant decay after 60 min, compared with some 40% remaining in the uninhibited sec7 cells (results not shown).

**Protoxin synthesis in kex mutants.** The products of two nuclear genes, *KEX1* and *KEX2*, appear essential for protoxin processing. Mutations in these genes lead to loss of ability to secrete toxin while retaining normal M dsRNA plasmids (9, 12, 19). We examined *kex1* and *kex2* mutants for toxin precursors in a pulse-chase experiment. The result (Fig. 6, lanes a and c) indicated that both mutants were able to make a 43K protoxin. In *kex1*, the protoxin was relatively stable after a chase, with 42% remaining after a 40-min chase. In *kex2*, the protoxin was unstable, with less than 10% remaining after a 40-min chase. In neither case was secreted toxin or precursor detected, although in *kex1* a very diffuse band of lower molecular weight than the toxin was detectable by immunoreaction with antitoxin antiserum.

To order these mutations in the protoxin processing pathway, we used two *kex1 kex2* double mutants in an experiment similar to that seen in Fig. 6. In both experiments, the same result was obtained, the protoxin was stable after a chase, with greater than 60% remaining after 60 min (data not shown) which suggested the order *kex1 → kex2*. In a further experiment, we tested whether the unstable protoxin in *kex2* mutants
could be stabilized with TPCK in a pulse-chase experiment. The protoxin remained unstable in two kex2 alleles under these conditions and implied that the kex mutations act before the TPCK-inhibitable step.

Localization of protoxin synthesized in vitro. A series of experiments was aimed at determining whether the protoxin is a secreted protein or an integral membrane glycoprotein. In vitro translation of denatured M1 dsRNA in a reticulocyte lysate in the presence of dog pancreas microsomal membranes gave a 36K preprotoxin and a glycosylated 43K protoxin (2) (Fig. 7, lane a). Appearance of the 43K protoxin was dependent upon the cotranslational presence of dog pancreas microsomal membranes; only the 36K species was found if the membranes were added posttranslationally (Fig. 7, lane g). Treatment of the precursors synthesized in vitro with trypsin showed that the 43K protoxin was relatively resistant to trypsin digestion, although the 36K species was fully degraded (Fig. 7, lanes a, b, and c). One interesting additional feature seen in some trypsin digestion experiments was the appearance of a diffuse immunoreactive 11K band (see Fig. 7, lanes e and f). This band, with the size and antigenic determinants of toxin, presumably results from cleavage of the protoxin at approximately the normal processing site for toxin production. The product, like toxin itself, is relatively resistant to further trypsin proteoly-

FIG. 6. Protoxin stability in killer expression mutants kex1 and kex2. Cultures were grown at 30°C, pulse-labeled with [35S]methionine for 10 min, and chased with unlabeled methionine (10^{-3} M) for a further 40 min. Cell lysates and growth medium were immunoreacted with antitoxin antiserum, electrophoresed, and fluorographed. Lanes a, b, and e (in kex1) lane a, 10-min pulse; lanes b and e, 40-min chase of cell lysate and medium, respectively; lanes c, d and f (in kex2) lane c, 10-min pulse; lanes d and f, 40-min chase of cell lysate and medium, respectively.

FIG. 7. Stability of glycosylated protoxin to trypsin digestion in an in vitro translation system with dog pancreas microsomal vesicles. Denatured dsRNA was translated in an in vitro system with dog pancreas microsomal vesicles. Translation was stopped with cycloheximide (110 μg/ml), and tetracaine (3 mM) was added and incubated for 5 min at room temperature. Trypsin was added at the indicated concentration and incubated for a further 10 min at room temperature. Incubation was terminated by the addition of SDS (0.25%), and soybean trypsin inhibitor (170 μg/ml). Samples were immunoreacted with antitoxin antibody, electrophoresed, and a fluorogram prepared. Lane a, complete system, no trypsin; lane b, 20 μg of trypsin per ml; lane c, 30 μg of trypsin per ml; lane d, no tetracaine, 30 μg of trypsin per ml; lane e, 30 μg of trypsin per ml; lane f, Triton X-100 (1%) added posttranslationally, plus 30 μg of trypsin per ml; lane g, dog pancreas microsomal vesicles added posttranslationally, no trypsin.
that were pulse-chased with $[^{35}S]$methionine. The results (Fig. 8B) indicated that the 11K toxin appeared as a secreted protein in spheroplasts, but the protoxin did not. The protoxin remained associated with the spheroplast pellet (Fig. 8A). In spheroplasts where protoxin cleavage was inhibited by TPCK, an identical pulse-chase experiment gave the same result: the protoxin did not decay (compare Fig. 5B) and remained associated with the spheroplast pellet. No protoxin was detectable in the spheroplast medium (data not shown).

We attempted to demonstrate directly the cell surface location of protoxin blocked in cleavage by mutation or by TPCK and chased to the membrane-associated site. Spheroplasts of TPCK-inhibited cells or of mutant N1 that accumulates a stable protoxin (4) were pulse-labeled and chased, and the stability of the protoxin was challenged with externally added pepsin. In neither case was protoxin degraded by the protease. Control experiments indicated that the protoxin in spheroplasts was susceptible to pepsin cleavage after solubilization with SDS.

**DISCUSSION**

The use of temperature-sensitive sec mutants has defined a secretory pathway in *S. cerevisiae* that is similar, in at least major respects, to that in mammals (10). Use of sec mutants containing the killer plasmid clearly demonstrates that killer toxin secretion occurs along this pathway. At the restrictive temperature, toxin secretion is blocked in mutants defective in transfer from the endoplasmic reticulum, Golgi, or secretory vesicles.

Glycosylation of the protoxin appears to be complete by the endoplasmic reticulum stage, as protoxin taken from sec18 at the restrictive temperature is identical in size (as judged by electrophoretic mobility in SDS) to that in sec18 at the permissive temperature or in a wild-type strain. This suggests that major extension of the core glycosides added at this early stage does not occur during subsequent events in secretion of toxin, which is in contrast to that which occurs with invertase (10). This finding was strengthened by results of in vitro processing by dog pancreas microsomal membranes capable of effecting core glycosylation (2) (see above). The protoxin synthesized was again apparently identical in size to that seen in vivo. Much of the in vivo modification of the protoxin is by di-N-acetylatedibiaryl N-glycosidic bonding to asparagine residues, as it is sensitive to endoglycosidase H and inhibited in vivo by tunicamycin, which blocks N-acetyl glucosamine addition to dolichol phosphate (2). However, two observations suggest that this does not account for all of the protoxin modification seen in vivo. The unglycosylated proprotoxin synthesized in vitro and still containing the amino-terminal signal sequence is similar in size to the precursor produced in vivo in the presence of tunicamycin which presumably lacks this signal sequence. It
is also similar in size to the product of endoglycosidase H treatment of the in vivo protoxin (2). Perhaps a non-\(N\)-glycosidic-linked polysaccharide or other component may be added to the protoxin during secretion, accounting for the size difference seen. The \(N\)-glycosidic-linked polysaccharide moiety of the protoxin seems to be necessary for efficient toxin secretion, as severe (90\%) inhibition of toxin secretion was found in the presence of tunicamycin.

The sec mutants also define when proteolytic cleavage of the toxin precursor occurs in the secretory pathway. In sec18, the endoplasmic reticulum-blocked mutant, the precursor was stable after a 60-min chase at the restrictive temperature. In sec7 and sec1, which accumulate Golgi and secretory vesicles, respectively, the precursor was unstable although more stable in sec7 than in sec1. In sec1, 11K toxin was detected in cell lysates at the restrictive temperature. The precursor instability in sec7 and sec1 can be prevented by the addition of TPCK to the culture. This protease inhibitor was also shown to prevent cleavage of protoxin in vivo in a wild-type strain. These results strongly suggest that protoxin cleavage by a TPCK-inhibitable protease does not occur until after the sec18 block but can occur with low efficiency before the sec7 Golgi step. The proteolytic processing of proinsulin is thought to occur within the secretion granules formed within the Golgi and to continue as they move to the cytosol (16, 17). This decrease in stability from sec7- to sec1-blocked mutants would fit this pattern, with only partial activation of protease activity occurring before the sec7 Golgi block. In principle, examination of other Golgi- and secretory vesicle-blocked sec mutants for ability to cleave protoxin may resolve more closely the stage of onset of proteolytic cleavage in the pathway. M dsRNA plasmid mutant N1, which fails to secrete toxin (4), has a phenotype similar to that seen in TPCK-inhibited cells; a stable nonsecreted protoxin is found in pulse-labeled cells. The N1 mutant protoxin may well be a poor substrate for the TPCK-inhibitable endoprotease.

Mutants harboring kex1 or kex2 lesions give further information on the protoxin processing pathway. The moderate stability of protoxin in kex1 mutants and marked instability in kex2 mutants permits an ordering of these gene products; kex1 kex2 double mutants have a stable protoxin, suggesting the order kex1 \(\rightarrow\) kex2 in the pathway. We can tentatively order the KEX-dependent steps in the secretion pathway defined by the sec mutants. The finding that TPCK does not stabilize protoxin in kex2 mutants indicates that instability in kex2 mutants involves a TPCK-resistant system that fails to act on the protoxin of wild-type or kex1 cells and suggests that TPCK acts after the kex2 step. The kex1 and kex2 steps occur after synthesis of the 43K protoxin in the endoplasmic reticulum but before the sec7 Golgi block when the TPCK-inhibitable protease is active. A more definitive ordering of kex mutants awaits the results of appropriate sec kex double mutant experiments. The nature of the KEX-dependent steps is unknown, but they are essential for toxin secretion. The instability of protoxin in kex2 mutants may result from susceptibility of the protoxin to degradation by proteases not inhibitable by TPCK. The processing pathway outlined above implies that protoxin regains a TPCK-dependent stability after the KEX2 step. This could come about through change in the structure or conformation of the protoxin or from its altered location and exposure to proteases in the secretory organelles. One possible defect would be that in kex2 mutants, protoxin is rerouted to the vacuole instead of to the Golgi, with subsequent degradation by vacuolar proteases. Wild-type cells with correct routing of the protoxin to Golgi would retain a stable protoxin if the TPCK-inhibitable processing protease were prevented from acting.

Neither the kex1 nor the kex2 mutation is lethal, so these gene products are not essential for all secreted proteins and may define a secretory subpathway. Mutants in kex2 secrete an altered set of proteins; some proteins such as killer toxin and \(\alpha\)-factor are missing (9, 12, 19), whereas others are secreted as species that are altered in isoelectric point and are of apparent higher molecular weight, as if incompletely processed. The \(\alpha\)-factor sex pheromone is also thought to be synthesized as a precursor (8), and presumably both protoxin and pro-\(\alpha\)-factor have a common, essential KEX2-dependent step.

Two general pathways for toxin secretion are possible. First, the protoxin is secreted into the lumen of the endoplasmic reticulum, and this secreted precursor is cleaved after the sec18 block into an amino-terminal toxin and a carboxy-terminal remnant which is also secreted or degraded. Second, the protoxin is an integral membrane protein with an amino-terminal portion extending into the lumen of the endoplasmic reticulum and with hydrophilic glycosylated and hydrophobic membrane-inserted regions distal to the toxin sequence. The precursor would be cleaved with the cleavage step necessary for toxin secretion. The remnant carboxy-terminal glycoprotein would remain as an integral membrane protein, probably located on the exterior of the cytoplasmic membrane after vesicle fusion with the membrane (2).

In vitro trypsin protection experiments with microsomal membrane vesicles, although demonstrating protection, did not resolve these pos-
sibilities. Analysis of protoxin location in cytoplasmic mutants that accumulate protoxin (4) in TPCK-inhibited killer cultures and in pulse-labeled cells and spheroplasts gave the same result; the protoxin did not behave as a conventional secreted or periplasmic glycoprotein. Protoxin always remained associated with the cell or spheroplast pellet fraction. The precise location of the protoxin is unknown, but irrespective of its exact location, cleavage of protoxin appears necessary for toxin secretion. Cleavage of proproteins destined for secretion to generate mature, active proteins is of widespread occurrence in eucaryotes (17). Such processed proproteins are thought to be secreted into the lumen of the endoplasmic reticulum. We know of no other example resembling killer protoxin maturation in which cleavage of an apparently membrane-associated proprotein generates a secreted protein.

The possible role of the remnant carboxy-terminal, membrane-associated portion of the protoxin remains unknown. It has been speculated that it may be the immunity component (1, 2), and this remains an attractive possibility.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We thank Randy Schekman, Steven Sommer, and Reed Wickner for mutant strains, Randy Schekman for advice, and Margaret Ahmad for discussions on processing pathways. This work was supported by the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada and the National Cancer Institute of Canada, and, in part, by grant GM20755 to D.J.T. from the National Institute of General Medical Sciences, Department of Health and Human Services.

LITERATURE CITED