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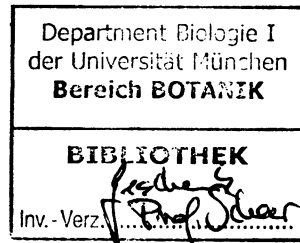
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## CONTENTS

### CONGRESS LECTURE: Japan as a theatre state

*T. Yano*

xxiii

### PHOTOSYNTHESIS

Molecular organization of the photochemical apparatus of oxygenic photosynthesis

*K. Satoh*

3

Photosystem I can control photosystem II in leaves

*U. Heber, E. Katona, G. Schönknecht and K. Asada*

13

Fucoxanthin-chlorophyll *a/c* protein in brown algae: Their molecular assembly and energy transfer

*T. Katoh*

21

Location and relaxation paths of the carotenoid S1 state and its role in energy transfer

*T. Gillbro, P.-O. Andersson, R.S.H. Liu, A.E. Asato and R.J. Cogdell*

25

Phycocyanin: A photoreceptor pigment with two faces

*K.-H. Zhao, Q. Hong, S. Siebzehrübl and H. Scheer*

31

Blue-light regulation of Cab gene expression in the apical buds of peas and the cotyledons of Arabidopsis

*L.S. Kaufman, J. Gao, K. Bhattacharya, J. Tilghman, J. Marsh, K.A. Marrs and K.M.F. Warpeha*

37

Molecular-genetic analysis of Mg-tetrapyrrole biosynthesis in bacteria and algae

*C.E. Bauer, D. Bollivar, J. Dobrowolski and J. Suzuki*

41

Phosphoenolpyruvate carboxylase for C4 photosynthesis in maize

*K. Izui, S. Yanagisawa, A. Morishima and N. Ogawa*

43

### PHOTOPHYSICS, PHOTOCHEMISTRY AND PHOTOBIOCHEMISTRY

#### Photochemistry of nucleic acids

Photooxidation reactions of nucleic acids

*J. Cadet, M. Berger, G. Buchko, J.-L. Ravanat and H. Kasai*

49

Photoinduced reactions of organic and inorganic substrates with DNA

*H. Morrison, W.M. Baird, S. Farrow, T. Mohammad and L. Paredes*

55

Photofootprinting of DNA	
<i>P.E. Nielsen</i>	61
Chemical aspects of DNA-protein cross-linking by UV light	
<i>M.D. Shetlar</i>	67
Photochemistry of 5-halouracil-containing DNA	
<i>H. Sugiyama, Y. Tsutsumi, E. Yamaguchi and I. Saito</i>	73
<b>Furocoumarines</b>	
The solution structures of psoralen cross-linked and monoadducted DNA oligomers by NMR spectroscopy and restrained molecular dynamics	
<i>H.P. Spielmann, T.J. Dwyer, J.E. Hearst and D.E. Wemmer</i>	79
C <sub>4</sub> -cycloaddition reactions between furocoumarins and unsaturated fatty acids or lecithins	
<i>S. Caffieri, Z. Zarebska and F. Dall'Acqua</i>	85
Photochemistry of furocoumarins	
<i>Sang Chul Shim and Mi Hong Yun</i>	91
Psoralen photochemotherapy and its action mechanisms	
<i>K. Danno</i>	97
An animal model and new photosensitizers for extracorporeal photochemotherapy	
<i>H.P. van Iperen and G.M.J. Beijersbergen van Henegouwen</i>	101
<b>Synchrotron-radiation photobiology</b>	
Structural analysis of antigenic variation in <i>Borrelia burgdorferi</i> using ultraviolet synchrotron radiation	
<i>L.L. France, B. McGrath, J.J. Dunn, B.J. Luft, J. Kieleczawa, G. Hind and J.C. Sutherland</i>	107
DNA damage induced by monochromatic vacuum-UV radiation in solids	
<i>K. Hieda</i>	115
<b>Rhodopsins and light receptor molecules</b>	
25 years of bacterial rhodopsins	
<i>W. Stoeckenius</i>	123
Structure changes of bacteriorhodopsin in the L-to-M and M-to-N conversions	
<i>A. Maeda</i>	135

Ring demethylated 6-s locked methano-bacteriorhodopsins <i>M. Groesbeek and J. Lugtenburg</i>	139
Photochemistry and functions of bilirubin <i>A.F. McDonagh</i>	145
Hydrophobic interaction between retinal analogues and aporetinochrome in the pigment formation <i>K. Tsujimoto, K. Iida, M. Miyazaki, T. Kinumi, Y. Shirasaka, M. Ohashi, M. Sheves, R. Hara, T. Hara and K. Ozaki</i>	147
Structure and function of the ciliate photoreceptors <i>Pill-Soon Song</i>	153
<b>Visual pigments and transduction</b>	
Vision in photobiology <i>T. Yoshizawa</i>	159
<sup>19</sup> F-NMR studies of fluorinated visual pigment analogs <i>R.S.H. Liu, L.U. Colmenares and W. Niemczura</i>	171
Excited state dynamics of retinal proteins by FTOA method <i>T. Kakitani, Y. Hatano, Y. Shichida, Y. Imamoto, F. Tokunaga and H. Kakitani</i>	173
Primary processes in rhodopsin and iodopsin <i>Y. Shichida</i>	179
N-terminal heterogeneous acylation of phototransduction proteins <i>J.B. Hurley, T.A. Neubert, A.M. Dizhoor, Ching-Kang Chen, E. Olshevskaya, R.S. Johnson and K.A. Walsh</i>	183
Regulation of signal coupling proteins in octopus photoreceptors <i>M. Tsuda, T. Iwasa, M. Nakagawa, S. Kikkawa and T. Tsuda</i>	189
Roles of lipids linked to $\alpha$ - and $\gamma$ -subunits of photoreceptor G protein <i>Y. Fukada</i>	195
Role of rhodopsin kinase and arrestin in the quenching of phototransduction <i>K. Palczewski</i>	201
<b>Ultrafast reaction by laser light and spectroscopy</b>	
Recombination dynamics of photodissociated CO of myoglobin and its E7 mutants studied by time-resolved resonance Raman spectroscopy <i>T. Kitagawa, Y. Sakan, T. Ogura, F.A. Fraunfelder, R. Mattera and M. Ikeda-Saito</i>	205
Femtosecond spectroscopy of the primary electron transfer in photosynthetic reaction centers <i>C. Lauterwasser, U. Finkeler, A. Struck, H. Scheer and W. Zinth</i>	209

DNA-protein interaction imagery using high-intensity lasers <i>D. Angelov and I. Pashev</i>	215
Recent solid state NMR studies of bacteriorhodopsin <i>J. Herzfeld, M. Auger, M.R. Farrar, K.V. Lakshmi, A.E. McDermott, J. Raap, L.K. Thompson, C.M. van der Wielen, J. Lugtenburg and R.G. Griffin</i>	221
Femtosecond studies of primary photoprocesses in octopus rhodopsin <i>T. Kobayashi, M. Taiji, K. Bryl, M. Nakagawa and M. Tsuda</i>	227
Structure and dynamics of the charge separated state $P^+Q^-$ of photosynthetic reaction centres from transient EPR spectroscopy <i>D. Stehlik, I. Sieckmann and A. van der Est</i>	233

### **Bio- and chemi-luminescence**

Bioluminescence of the $Ca^{2+}$ -binding photoprotein aequorin <i>F.I. Tsuji, S. Inouye, Y. Ohmiya and M. Ohashi</i>	239
Recent advances of chemiluminescent and bioluminescent enzyme immunoassay <i>A. Tsuji, M. Maeda, H. Arakawa, K. Itoh, M. Kitamura and N. Murakami</i>	243
The role of superoxide anion in bioluminescence <i>O. Shimomura</i>	249

## **PHOTOBIOLOGY AND PHOTOIMMUNOLOGY**

### **Chronobiology**

A circadian pacemaker in the suprachiasmatic nucleus and its interaction with light <i>S.-I.T. Inouye, K. Shinohara, K. Tominaga, Y. Otori, C. Fukuhara and J. Yang</i>	257
Circadian organization in birds: Different pacemakers for feeding and locomotor activity rhythms? <i>S. Ebihara and E. Gwinner</i>	263
Circadian photoreception in reptiles and mammals <i>R.G. Foster, S. Argamaso, W.J. DeGrip, J.M. Garcia-Fernandez and I. Provencio</i>	267

## Molecular approaches to plant development

Phytochrome-mediated light signal transduction in plants: Structure function and possible involvement of G-proteins <i>Pill-Soon Song</i>	273
Genetic engineering of phytochrome molecules <i>M. Furuya</i>	279
Control of gene expression by light, nitrate and a plastidic factor <i>H. Mohr, A. Neininger and B. Seith</i>	283
Molecular genetic approaches to plant photomorphogenesis <i>A. Pepper, T. Delaney, P. Nagpal, J. Reed, D. Poole, M. Furuya and J. Chory</i>	285
Cytoskeletal rearrangement during photomorphogenesis of fern protonemata <i>M. Wada</i>	291

## DNA damage, repair and UV mutagenesis

Analysis of DNA excision repair genes in XP <i>K. Tanaka</i>	293
DNA repair genes and proteins of yeast and human <i>S. Prakash and L. Prakash</i>	303
Recent biochemical studies of the xeroderma pigmentosum group A complementing protein involved in nucleotide excision repair of DNA <i>C.J. Jones and R.D. Wood</i>	309
Symposium: Human DNA repair diseases <i>J.E. Cleaver, L.H.F. Mullenders, M. Stefanini, A.R. Lehmann and H. Takebe</i>	315
Isolation of <i>Arabidopsis thaliana</i> mutants hypersensitive to UV-B light or ionizing radiation <i>G.R. Harlow, M.E. Jenkins, C. Davies and D.W. Mount</i>	319
SOS-inducible recombination repair genes: Products of the <i>ruvA</i> , <i>ruvB</i> , and <i>ruvC</i> genes are Holliday junction specific enzymes <i>H. Shinagawa, H. Iwasaki, M. Takahagi, T. Shiba and A. Nakata</i>	323
Regulation of DNA repair genes in <i>Saccharomyces cerevisiae</i> <i>G.B. Sancar and J. Sebastian</i>	329
Two types of photoreactivation enzyme identified in <i>Drosophila melanogaster</i> <i>T. Todo, H. Takemori and H. Ryo</i>	333



Biological role of (6-4) photoproducts and cyclobutane dimers <i>D.L. Mitchell, G.P. Pfeifer, J.-S. Taylor, M.Z. Zdzienicka and O. Nikaido</i>	337
Photoreactivation in human skin in situ <i>B.M. Sutherland, H. Hacham, R.W. Gange and J.C. Sutherland</i>	345
Photoreactivation: Perspectives and dimensions <i>B.M. Sutherland and T. Ohnishi</i>	347
<i>Neurospora crassa</i> photolyase: Diversity in photoreactivation action spectra <i>A.P.M. Eker, H. Yajima and A. Yasui</i>	349
Regulation of photorepair in fish cells <i>H. Mitani, S. Yasuhira, T. Funayama, M. Kondo and A. Shima</i>	351
Functional analysis of <i>Escherichia coli</i> DNA photolyase <i>K. Yamamoto, M. Ihara and T. Ohnishi</i>	353
Primary structures of photolyases from microorganisms <i>A. Yasui</i>	355
Understanding spectra of UV-induced mutations: Studies with individual photoproducts <i>P. Gibbs, M. Horsfall, A. Borden, B.J. Kilbey and C.W. Lawrence</i>	357
Molecular analysis of UV and EMS induced mutations in a human tumor cell line <i>M. Meuth and A. Tachibana</i>	363
Two <i>umuDC</i> -like operons in <i>Salmonella typhimurium</i> : Their roles in UV mutagenesis <i>T. Nohmi, M. Yamada, M. Watanabe, M. Matsui, S.Y. Murayama and T. Sofuni</i>	369
Gene specific DNA repair and molecular mutation spectra <i>A.A. van Zeeland, L.F.H. Mullenders, M.Z. Zdzienicka and H. Vrieling</i>	375
Symposium - Historical background of DNA repair <i>C.S. Rupert, R.B. Setlow, K.C. Smith, J.E. Cleaver, S. Kondo and J. Jagger</i>	379
<b>Photoimmunology</b>	
The role of Interleukin-10 in the induction of systemic immunosuppression following UV exposure <i>S.E. Ullrich and J.M. Rivas</i>	389
Effects of ultraviolet radiation on granuloma formation <i>H. Okamoto, K. Danno, Z.-P. Guo and S. Imamura</i>	395

## PHOTOMEDICINE

### Photocarcinogenesis

- Photocarcinogenesis: Past, present and future  
*F. Urbach* 403
- Sunlight exposure and melanoma - Is timing and character of exposure important?  
*R.P. Gallagher* 415
- Action spectrum for melanoma induction  
*R.B. Setlow and E. Grist* 421

### Advances in photodermatology

- Boundary between UVA and UVB  
*M.J. Peak and J.C. van der Leun* 425
- Human skin photoprotection and advances in sunscreens  
*M.A. Pathak* 429
- Changes of elastic fiber according to ageing process in human skin  
*C.H. Oh* 437
- Oxidative stress in cutaneous photoaging  
*Y. Miyachi* 443
- The pathogenesis of solar urticaria  
*T. Horio* 447
- The porphyrias  
*M. Kondo, Y. Yano, G. Urata and M. Shirataka* 449
- Skin photosensitivity reactions in porphyrias  
*M.A. Pathak* 455
- Biological significance of photosensitized lipid peroxidation in drug-induced phototoxicity  
*I. Matsuo, M. Ohkido, H. Fujita and M. Sasaki* 461
- Recent advances in polymorphous light eruption  
*E. Hölzle* 463
- Chronic actinic dermatitis  
*Y. Funasaka, M. Kondoh, A. Itoh, M. Ueda and M. Ichihashi* 469
- Drug-induced photosensitive skin diseases  
*R. Kamide* 475
- Protective effect of  $1\alpha,25$ -dihydroxyvitamin  $D_3$  against UVB injury - Possible role of the vitamin  $D_3$ -induced metallothionein  
*K. Hanada, T. Sugawara, Y. Ohishi and I. Hashimoto* 479

Photoprotection: Possible role of metallothionein against UVB injury <i>K. Hanada</i>	483
Topical PUVA for psoriasis <i>S. Kawara and T. Hirone</i>	487
<b>Photosensitizers and photodynamic therapy</b>	
Photo-chlorin (ATX-S10) as a new photosensitizer for PDT <i>S. Nakajima, I. Sakata, T. Takemura and H. Hayashi</i>	493
Detection of bronchial dysplasia and carcinoma <i>in-situ</i> using laser induced fluorescence <i>S. Lam, C. MacAulay, J.C. Leriche, J. Hung and B. Palcic</i>	497
Optimizing the photodetection of early cancer <i>G. Wagnières, D. Braichotte, Ph. Monnier, R. Bays, J.-M. Calmes, J.-C. Givel, S. Folli, A. Pèlegrin, J.-P. Mach and H. van den Bergh</i>	499
Modes of biodistribution of photosensitizing agents <i>D. Kessel</i>	501
Mechanism of photodynamic therapy: Exploration by photophysicochemical study <i>T. Takemura, S. Nakajima and I. Sakata</i>	503
Integral laser-photodynamic treatment of refractory multifocal bladder tumors with special reference to carcinoma <i>in situ</i> <i>K. Naito and H. Hisazumi</i>	507
Photodynamic therapy and early response gene induction <i>C.J. Gomer, M. Luna, S. Wong, P. Ziolkowski and A. Ferrario</i>	511

## SOLAR UV LIGHT AND ENVIRONMENT

### Environment and solar UV light

UV-B observation network in the Japan Meteorological Agency <i>T. Ito</i>	515
UV-exposure and ozone monitoring with a dual bandpass solar UVA-UVB meter in Stockholm since 1989 <i>U. Wester</i>	519
UV radiation in the tropics (1979-1989) <i>M. Ilyas</i>	523
UV solar spectral irradiance in New Zealand <i>R.L. McKenzie</i>	527

**Biological and medical consequences of ozone depletion**

Biological consequences of stratospheric ozone depletion <i>T.P. Coohill</i>	531
Immunological effects of UV-B radiation <i>M.L. Kripke and A. Jeevan</i>	537
Effects of elevated ultraviolet-B-radiation, temperature and CO <sub>2</sub> on growth and function of sunflower and corn seedlings <i>M. Tevini and U. Mark</i>	541
UV-B effects on phytoplankton <i>D.-P. Häder</i>	547
<b>Effects of solar UV light on plants</b>	
Harmful and beneficial effects of solar UV light on plant growth <i>T. Hashimoto, N. Kondo and T. Tezuka</i>	551
UV-induced events at plant plasma membranes <i>T.M. Murphy, Y.C. Qian, C.K. Auh and C. Verhoeven</i>	555
Solar UV and oxidative stress in algal-animal symbioses <i>J.M. Shick</i>	561
<b>Index of authors</b>	565

## Femtosecond Spectroscopy of the Primary Electron Transfer in Photosynthetic Reaction Centers

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### INTRODUCTION

The primary photochemical event during photosynthesis of bacteriochlorophyll (BChl) containing organisms is a light induced charge separation within a transmembrane protein called the reaction center (RC). The crystal structures of the RCs from purple bacteria [1-3] show that the chromophores are arranged to two branches (named A and B) forming a pseudo C<sub>2</sub>-symmetry. On the symmetry axis lies the primary electron donor P, a pair of strongly interacting BChl molecules. Along each branch a monomeric BChl molecule (B<sub>A</sub> and B<sub>B</sub>) is located adjacent to P. Each branch is completed by a bacteriopheophytin (H<sub>A</sub> and H<sub>B</sub>) and a quinone (Q<sub>A</sub> and Q<sub>B</sub>). Following excitation of the special pair P an electron is rapidly transferred to the quinone Q<sub>A</sub>. It has been shown that this process occurs predominantly along the A branch. There is general agreement that after 3-4 ps the electron reaches the intermediate acceptor H<sub>A</sub> from where it is transferred to Q<sub>A</sub> within 200 ps. While it is accepted that spectral changes occur on a time scale shorter than P<sup>+</sup>H<sub>A</sub><sup>-</sup> formation [4-10], two different models are discussed for the multiexponential kinetics. In the superexchange electron transfer (ET) model the electron is transferred directly from the special pair P to the bacteriopheophytin H<sub>A</sub> on the A branch. The monomeric BChl is only used as a virtual electron carrier [11-13]. Here the fast kinetic component is related most likely to rapid vibrational motion or relaxation in the excited state of P. In the stepwise ET model the monomeric bacteriochlorophyll B<sub>A</sub> is a real electron carrier and the electron undergoes two reaction steps before it reaches the bacteriopheophytin. This model is suggested by recent experimental results on RCs from *Rhodobacter (Rb.) sphaeroides* which indicate that the electron transfer to B<sub>A</sub> occurs in approximately 3.5 ps while the second transfer step to the bacteriopheophytin H<sub>A</sub> should be faster taking less than one picosecond (0.9 ps) [4, 5].

In this paper we give additional information on the primary ET reaction obtained by transient absorption experiments on native RCs at various temperatures and on RCs where the monomeric bacteriochlorophylls B<sub>A</sub> and B<sub>B</sub> have been modified.

### MATERIAL AND METHODS

Native RCs from *Rb. sphaeroides* R26.1 were prepared as described in Ref. 14. Measurements at low temperatures were performed on quinone depleted RC from *Rb. sphaeroides* strain R26.1 desolved in glycerol (56 % v/v). RCs containing [3-vinyl]-13<sup>2</sup>-hydroxy-bacteriochlorophyll a were prepared after Struck et al. [14, 15]. The BChl a exchange yielded values of 40 ± 5 %. Since the two BChl a-molecules of the primary donor P do not exchange, this value corresponds to an average exchange of 80 % at sites B<sub>A</sub> and B<sub>B</sub>.

The time resolved absorption experiments used the excite-and probe technique. Details of the experimental set-up are described elsewhere [4, 16]. The main features of the experiments are: Excitation beam: short pulses of a duration of about 200 fs at a repetition rate of 10 Hz, excitation wavelength 875 nm, less than 10 % of the RC are excited per laser pulse. Probing pulses: 5-10 nm wide portion of a femtosecond white-light-continuum selected in front of the sample, parallel polarisations of exciting and probing pulses, probe intensities at least 30 times smaller than excitation intensities. The width of the instrumental response function was between 250 and 300 fs.

The signal points (full circles) were modelled (solid and broken curves) by a sum of exponentials convoluted with the instrumental response function (for details see [5]).

## RESULTS

### The Primary Reaction at Room Temperature

Investigations on the light induced kinetics in wild type reaction centers from *Rb. sphaeroides* have been published in detail in Ref. 5. In summary we have found: (i) The excited electronic level P\* of the primary donor P decays with a time constant of about 3.5 ps. (ii) At various wavelengths in the visible and near infrared spectral range an additional faster kinetic component is needed to account for the experimental data. The amplitude of this kinetic is largest in spectral ranges where BChl (Q<sub>x</sub>, Q<sub>y</sub>) or BChl anions (640-670 nm) are known to have a strong absorption. From a series of measurements the time constant was determined to be  $0.9 \pm 0.3$  ps. As an example three measurements are shown in Fig. 1A at probing wavelengths in the Q<sub>y</sub> (B) band. From these data the existence of a fast process is evident.

### Reaction Centers at Low Temperatures

A first set of experiments investigated the decay of the excited state P\* via stimulated emission (not shown). At the low temperature of 25 K the absorbance change can be described by a monoexponential model function with a time constant of  $\tau_1 = 1.4 \pm 0.3$  ps. This transient was followed up to room temperature where the value of 3.5 ps was reached as discussed above. The data are in agreement with previous experimental studies [17, 18]. Most interesting is the investigation of the temperature dependence of the fast kinetic component. To this end we studied the transient absorption changes at 25 K for 30 probing wavelengths ranging from 640 nm to 920 nm. The transient absorption data yielded the following results: One finds a complex time dependence of the absorbance changes which excludes the possibility that there is only one, namely the 1.4 ps kinetic component. The data can be well fit assuming an additional faster kinetic process with a time constant of  $0.3 \pm 0.15$  ps.

Besides this acceleration of the electron transfer processes we find a close similarity in the transient spectral features between low temperature and room temperature data, if we take into account differences due to the narrowing of the absorption bands at low temperatures. Fig. 1B shows kinetic traces at 25 K in the Q<sub>y</sub> (B) band (peak absorption at 802 nm). The qualitative agreement with the room temperature traces (Fig. 1A) is striking. In addition, there appear some weak oscillations at low temperature similar to those reported by Vos et al. [9] (probing wavelength 795 nm, Fig. 1B). In a set of measurements we have recorded the temperature dependence of the fast kinetic. We observe a smooth temperature dependence [16].

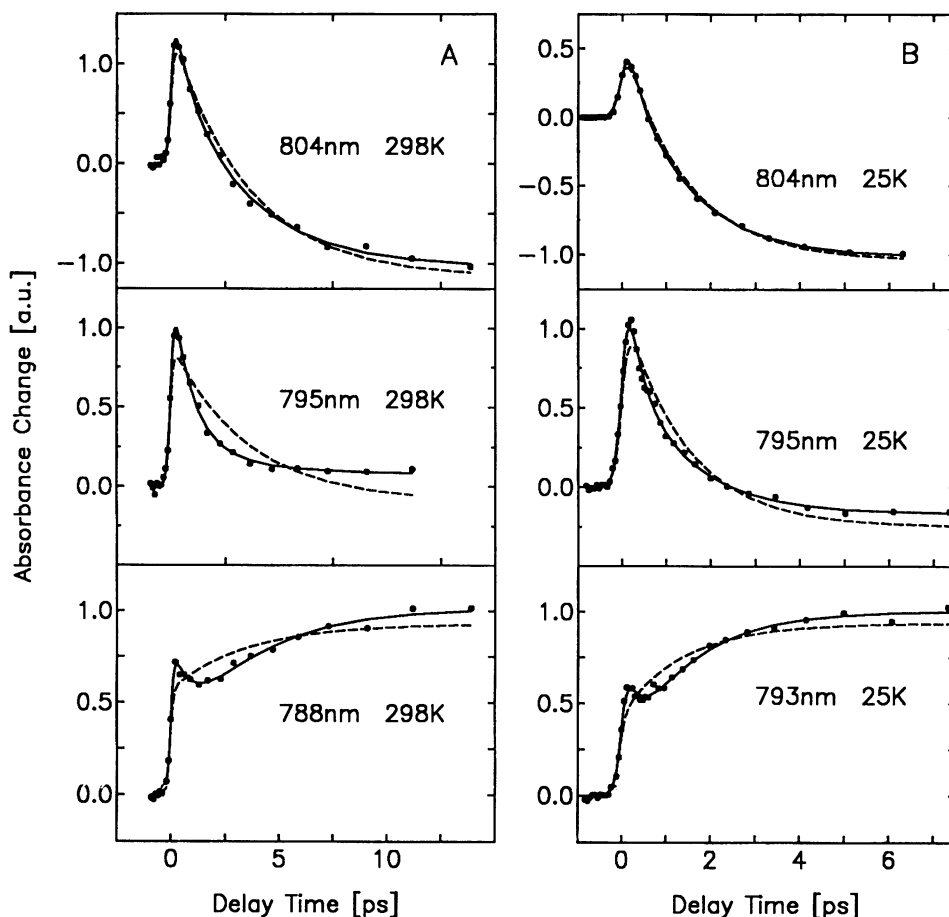


Fig. 1. Transient absorption data for RCs from *Rb. sphaeroides* recorded in the  $Q_y$  absorption band of the monomeric bacteriochlorophylls. A: room temperature data, B: data at 25 K. The solid curves are calculated for a three component (3.5 ps, 0.9 ps,  $\infty$  at 298 K; 1.4 ps, 0.3 ps,  $\infty$  at 25 K), the broken curves for a two component model (3.5,  $\infty$  at 298 K; 1.4 ps,  $\infty$  at 25 K). The data are normalized (peak values of  $\Delta A$  between 0.03 and 0.08).

### Reaction Centers with Exchanged Bacteriochlorophyll a

In another set of experiments, RC of *Rb. sphaeroides* were studied where the bacteriochlorophyll a molecule at the monomeric position  $B_A$  and  $B_B$  were exchanged by [3-vinyl]- $^{13}C_2$ -OH-BChl a molecules [19]. The modification due to the 3-vinyl group is expected to change the redox potential of the BChl and as a consequence the energy of the radical pair state  $P^+B_A^-$ . This change should have pronounced consequences on the ET when the accessory BChl  $B_A$  is involved as an intermediate electron carrier. Indeed, one finds a strong change of the transient absorption data. The experimental data indicate that the RC's containing [3-vinyl]-

$13^2$ -OH-BChl a have a decay time of the excited electronic state  $P^*$  of the special pair of 32 ps. On the other hand a long-lasting bleaching of the special pair absorption band shows that the exchange leads to RC's which are still photochemically active. In the [3-vinyl]- $13^2$ -OH-BChl a containing RC's the 0.9 ps component is not visible. However, there are some indications that a related process exists which would have a longer time constant in the 5 ps domain.

## REACTION MODELS

The structural arrangement of the RC supports the idea that the electron is transferred in several steps from the special pair P via  $B_A$ ,  $H_A$  to  $Q_A$  (Model A of Fig. 2). The transient experimental data presented here do not give any contradiction against this reaction model. In fact, the analysis of the transient data using reaction model A yields the spectra of the intermediates one would expect from in vitro measurements of the chromophores [20, 21].

However, most transient absorption data also fit to the two models B<sub>1</sub> and B<sub>2</sub> where the subpicosecond reaction is assumed to precede the 3.5 ps process: Here the intermediate  $I_2$  is formed very fast. It decays with 3.5 ps in a second step. Calculating the absorption spectrum of  $I_2$  for model B<sub>1</sub> and B<sub>2</sub> leads to the following characteristics:  $I_2$  is similar to the electronically excited state  $P^*$ . It also exhibits gain; thus it should be another excited electronic state of the special pair - we call it  $P^{**}$ . Its further absorption properties differ only slightly from those of  $P^*$ . The most straightforward interpretation of  $P^{**}$  would be that  $P^{**}$  is a vibrationally relaxed  $P^*$  state (Model B<sub>1</sub>). Here the electron will be transferred directly in a superexchange step from the special pair P to  $H_A$ . Somewhat different is the molecular interpretation for Model B<sub>2</sub>, which is related to considerations given by H. Kuhn [22]. Model B<sub>2</sub> is based on the existence of an intermediate state  $I_2 = P^{**}$  where the electron is delocalized over the special pair, the accessory BChl and the BPh. According to the experimental observations state  $I_2 = P^{**}$  must be populated in the first 0.9 ps process. The slower 3.5 ps process is thought to be related to the trapping of the electron at the bacteriopheophytin  $H_A$ . Due to the delocalization of the electron in state  $P^{**}$  there is no need for a long-range superexchange ET in Model B<sub>2</sub>.

The experimental data obtained for RC at low temperatures and with exchanged bacteriochlorophylls allow to restrict further on the number of reaction models: The discussion of the two reaction Models B<sub>1</sub> and B<sub>2</sub> requires a subtle consideration of the experimental observations: In the pure superexchange picture of Model B<sub>1</sub> the fast kinetic component is related to vibrational relaxation in the excited state. From the theory of vibrational relaxation of polyatomic molecules and from a number of experiments (e. g. on amino acids [23]) it is well known that vibrational relaxation slows down at low temperatures. However, the fast reaction observed in our experiment becomes considerably faster at low temperatures. This observation is incompatible with the interpretation of Model B<sub>1</sub>. Additional arguments against vibrational relaxation come from experiments on modified RCs; e. g. on RCs where the monomeric BChl are exchanged by [3 vinyl]- $13^2$  OH-BChl and where the 3.5 ps time constant is increased to 32 ps. The molecular substitution leaves the special pair spectrally unaffected in the singlet and doublet (= radical cation) states [14, 15]; as a consequence a  $P^*$  vibrational process according to Model B<sub>1</sub> should be present and observable. However, the experiments do not exhibit the related 0.9 ps transient component.

The observed transient absorption data alone are not able to eliminate Model B<sub>2</sub>. Additional information comes from hole-burning experiments (Johnson et al., [24]). In these experiments performed at very low temperatures narrow zero phonon holes were observed with a spectral width corresponding to a time constant of approximately 1 ps. From these data one can deduce that the first reaction process starting from the lowest vibrational level of  $P^*$  is the slower, the 1.4 ps process. As the faster 0.3 ps component is not related with vibrational relaxation (see above) it must then be the second process in the reaction scheme. Since the important features of the reaction processes do not change strongly with temperature it is likely that Model B<sub>2</sub> is not operative at room temperature either.



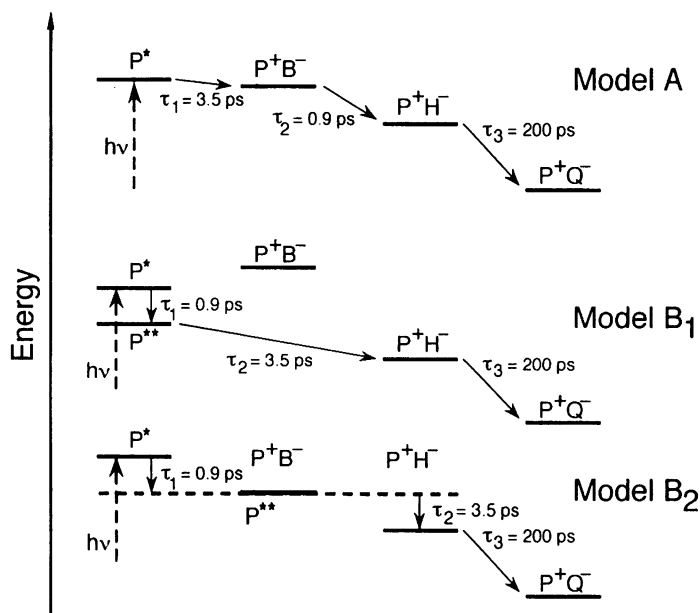


Figure 2. Schematic representation of possible reaction models for the primary photosynthetic ET. The time constants shown in the Figure represent the values for *Rb. sphaeroides* at room temperature.

Oscillatory features in wild type RC have been observed recently under special experimental conditions [9]: at low temperatures and with a spectrally narrow pump pulse. It is not expected that they are relevant under physiological conditions at room temperature. In our view the stepwise reaction Model A with the radical pair state  $P^+B_A^-$  as a real intermediate is compatible with the extensive time resolved absorption data available today. At room temperature the stepwise ET is well described by theoretical studies giving reasonable values for the energetics in the RCs. However, the discussion of ET and absorption at low temperatures within the framework of adiabatic theory remains to be done.

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## Index of Authors

- Andersson, P.-O., 25  
 Angelov, D., 215  
 Arakawa, H., 243  
 Argamaso, S., 267  
 Asada, K., 13  
 Asato, A.E., 25  
 Auger, M., 221  
 Auh, C.K., 555  
  
 Baird, W.M., 55  
 Bauer, C.E., 41  
 Bays, R., 499  
 Beijersbergen van Henegouwen, G.M.J.,  
 101  
 Berger, M., 49  
 Bhattacharya, K., 37  
 Bollivar, D., 41  
 Borden, A., 357  
 Braichotte, D., 499  
 Bryl, K., 227  
 Buchko, G., 49  
  
 Cadet, J., 49  
 Caffieri, S., 85  
 Calmes, J.-M., 499  
 Ching-Kang Chen, 183  
 Chory, J., 285  
 Cleaver, J.E., 315, 379  
 Cogdell, R.J., 25  
 Colmenares, L.U., 171  
 Coohill, T.P., 531  
  
 Dall'Acqua, F., 85  
 Danno, K., 97, 395  
 Davies, C., 319  
 DeGrip, W.J., 267  
 Delaney, T., 285  
 Dizhoor, A.M., 183  
 Dobrowolski, J., 41  
 Dunn, J.J., 107  
 Dwyer, T.J., 79  
  
 Ebihara, S., 263  
 Eker, A.P.M., 349  
  
 Farrar, M.R., 221  
 Farrow, S., 55  
 Ferrario, A., 511  
 Finkele, U., 209  
 Folli, S., 499  
 Foster, R.G., 267  
 France, L.L., 107  
 Fraunfelter, F.A., 205  
 Fujita, H., 461  
 Fukada, Y., 195  
 Fukuhara, C., 257  
 Funasaka, Y., 469  
 Funayama, T., 351  
 Furuya, M., 279, 285  
  
 Gallagher, R.P., 415  
 Gange, R.W., 345  
 Gao, J., 37  
 Garcia-Fernandez, J.M., 267  
 Gibbs, P., 357  
 Gillbro, T., 25  
 Givel, J.-C., 499  
 Gomer, C.J., 511  
 Griffin, R.G., 221  
 Grist, E., 421  
 Groesbeek, M., 139  
 Guo, Z.-P., 395  
 Gwinner, E., 263  
  
 Hacham, H., 345  
 Häder, D.-P., 547  
 Hanada, K., 479, 483  
 Hara, R., 147  
 Hara, T., 147  
 Harlow, G.R., 319  
 Hashimoto, I., 479  
 Hashimoto, T., 551  
 Hatano, Y., 173  
 Hayashi, H., 493  
 Hearst, J.E., 79  
 Heber, U., 13  
 Herzfeld, J., 221  
 Hieda, K., 115  
 Hind, G., 107  
 Hirone, T., 487

- Hisazumi, H., 507  
Hölzle, E., 463  
Hong, Q., 31  
Horio, T., 447  
Horsfall, M., 357  
Hung, J., 497  
Hurley, J.B., 183
- Ichihashi, M., 469  
Ihara, M., 353  
Iida, K., 147  
Ikeda-Saito, M., 205  
Ilyas, M., 523  
Imamoto, Y., 173  
Imamura, S., 395  
Inouye, S., 239  
Inouye, S.-I.T., 257  
Ito, T., 515  
Itoh, A., 469  
Itoh, K., 243  
Iwasa, T., 189  
Iwasaki, H., 323  
Izui, K., 43
- Jagger, J., 379  
Jeevan, A., 537  
Jenkins, M.E., 319  
Johnson, R.S., 183  
Jones, C.J., 309
- Kakitani, H., 173  
Kakitani, T., 173  
Kamide, R., 475  
Kasai, H., 49  
Kato, T., 21  
Katona, E., 13  
Kaufman, L.S., 37  
Kawara, S., 487  
Kessel, D., 501  
Kieleczawa, J., 107  
Kikkawa, S., 189  
Kilbey, B.J., 357  
Kinumi, T., 147  
Kitagawa, T., 205  
Kitamura, M., 243  
Kobayashi, T., 227  
Kondo, M., 351, 449  
Kondo, N., 551  
Kondo, S., 379
- Kondoh, M., 469  
Kripke, M.L., 537
- Lakshmi, K.V., 221  
Lam, S., 497  
Lauterwasser, C., 209  
Lawrence, C.W., 357  
Lehmann, A.R., 315  
Leriche, J.C., 497  
Liu, R.S.H., 25, 171  
Luft, B.J., 107  
Lugtenburg, J., 139, 221  
Luna, M., 511
- MacAulay, C., 497  
Mach, J.-P., 499  
Maeda, A., 135  
Maeda, M., 243  
Mark, U., 541  
Marrs, K.A., 37  
Marsh, J., 37  
Matsui, M., 369  
Matsuo, I., 461  
Mattera, R., 205  
McDermott, A.E., 221  
McDonagh, A.F., 145  
McGrath, B., 107  
McKenzie, R.L., 527  
Meuth, M., 363  
Mi Hong Yun, 91  
Mitani, H., 351  
Mitchell, D.L., 337  
Miyachi, Y., 443  
Miyazaki, M., 147  
Mohammad, T., 55  
Mohr, H., 283  
Monnier, Ph., 499  
Morishima, A., 43  
Morrison, H., 55  
Mount, D.W., 319  
Mullenders, L.F.H., 315, 375  
Murakami, N., 243  
Murayama, S.Y., 369  
Murphy, T.M., 555
- Nagpal, P., 285  
Naito, K., 507  
Nakagawa, M., 189, 227  
Nakajima, S., 493, 503

- Nakata, A., 323  
 Neininger, A., 283  
 Neubert, T.A., 183  
 Nielsen, P.E., 61  
 Niemczura, W., 171  
 Nikaido, O., 337  
 Nohmi, T., 369
- Ogawa, N., 43  
 Ogura, T., 205  
 Oh, C.H., 437  
 Ohashi, M., 147, 239  
 Ohishi, Y., 479  
 Ohkido, M., 461  
 Ohmiya, Y., 239  
 Ohnishi, T., 347, 353  
 Okamoto, H., 395  
 Olshevskaya, E., 183  
 Otori, Y., 257  
 Ozaki, K., 147
- Palcic, B., 497  
 Palczewski, K., 201  
 Paredes, L., 55  
 Pashev, I., 215  
 Pathak, M.A., 429, 455  
 Peak, M.J., 425  
 Pèlerin, A., 499  
 Pepper, A., 285  
 Pfeifer, G.P., 337  
 Pill-Soon Song, 153, 273  
 Poole, D., 285  
 Prakash, L., 303  
 Prakash, S., 303  
 Provencio, I., 267
- Qian, Y.C., 555
- Raap, J., 221  
 Ravanat, J.-L., 49  
 Reed, J., 285  
 Rivas, J.M., 389  
 Rupert, C.S., 379  
 Ryo, H., 333
- Saito, I., 73  
 Sakan, Y., 205  
 Sakata, I., 493, 503  
 Sancar, G.B., 329
- Sang Chul Shim, 91  
 Sasaki, M., 461  
 Satoh, K., 3  
 Scheer, H., 31, 209  
 Schönknecht, G., 13  
 Sebastian, J., 329  
 Seith, B., 283  
 Setlow, R.B., 379, 421  
 Shetlar, M.D., 67  
 Sheves, M., 147  
 Shiba, T., 323  
 Shichida, Y., 173, 179  
 Shick, J.M., 561  
 Shima, A., 351  
 Shimomura, O., 249  
 Shinagawa, H., 323  
 Shinohara, K., 257  
 Shirasaka, Y., 147  
 Shirataka, M., 449  
 Siebzehnriibl, S., 31  
 Sieckmann, I., 233  
 Smith, K.C., 379  
 Sofuni, T., 369  
 Spielmann, H.P., 79  
 Stefanini, M., 315  
 Stehlik, D., 233  
 Stoeckenhuis, W., 123  
 Struck, A., 209  
 Sugawara, T., 479  
 Sugiyama, H., 73  
 Sutherland, B.M., 345, 347  
 Sutherland, J.C., 107, 345  
 Suzuki, J., 41
- Tachibana, A., 363  
 Taiji, M., 227  
 Takahagi, M., 323  
 Takebe, H., 315  
 Takemori, H., 333  
 Takemura, T., 493, 503  
 Tanaka, K., 293  
 Taylor, J.-S., 337  
 Tevini, M., 541  
 Tezuka, T., 551  
 Thompson, L.K., 221  
 Tilghman, J., 37  
 Todo, T., 333  
 Tokunaga, F., 173  
 Tominaga, K., 257

Tsuda, M., 189, 227  
Tsuda, T., 189  
Tsuji, A., 243  
Tsuji, F.I., 239  
Tsujimoto, K., 147  
Tsutsumi, Y., 73

Ueda, M., 469  
Ullrich, S.E., 389  
Urata, G., 449  
Urbach, F., 403

Van den Bergh, H., 499  
Van der Est, A., 233  
Van der Leun, J.C., 425  
Van der Wielen, C.M., 221  
Van Iperen, H.P., 101  
Van Zeeland, A.A., 375  
Verhoeven, C., 555  
Vrieling, H., 375

Wada, M., 291  
Wagnières, G., 499  
Walsh, K.A., 183  
Warpeha, K.M.F., 37  
Watanabe, M., 369  
Wemmer, D.E., 79  
Wester, U., 519  
Wong, S., 511  
Wood, R.D., 309

Yajima, H., 349  
Yamada, M., 369  
Yamaguchi, E., 73  
Yamamoto, K., 353  
Yanagisawa, S., 43  
Yang, J., 257  
Yano, Y., 449  
Yasuhira, S., 351  
Yasui, A., 349, 355  
Yoshizawa, T., 159

Zarebska, Z., 85  
Zdzienicka, M.Z., 337, 375  
Zhao, K. -H., 31  
Zinth, W., 209  
Ziolkowski, P., 511