

## Lectin Binding Studies on the Slime Mold, *Physarum polycephalum*

Haruko Kitagaki<sup>1</sup>, Yumiko Hatakeyama<sup>1</sup>, Isamu Matsumoto<sup>1</sup>,  
Nobuko Seno<sup>1</sup>, Machiko Taniguchi<sup>2</sup> and Jiro Ohta<sup>2</sup>

Departments of Chemistry<sup>1</sup> and Biology<sup>2</sup>, Faculty of Science, Ochanomizu  
University, Ohtsuka Bunkyo-ku, Tokyo 112, Japan

**ABSTRACT.** Cell surface glycoconjugate receptors for wheat germ agglutinin, *Ricinus communis* agglutinin, concanavalin A and soybean agglutinin on two strains of myxamoebae of *Physarum polycephalum* with fluorescein isothiocyanate-labelled lectins were observed microscopically, but no receptors for *Dolichos biflorus* agglutinin, *Ulex europeus* agglutinin-I and *Arachis hypogaea* agglutinin were found. These results suggest that the myxamoebae have cell surface glycoproteins with *N*-glycosidically linked hetero-saccharide chains, but not oligosaccharides with blood group A and H determinants. The number of lectin receptor sites and their affinity constants for lectins were obtained for the myxamoebae and microplasmodia of *P. polycephalum* from binding assays with <sup>125</sup>I-lectins. The densities of these lectin receptors and the magnitudes of the affinity constants were similar to those of mammalian cells. Neuraminidase treatment of the myxamoebae and microplasmodia induced neither a decrease in WGA receptors nor an increase in RCA receptors. These results are strong evidence that sialyl residues are absent in glycoconjugates on the surface of the myxamoebae and microplasmodia of *P. polycephalum*.

The slime molds are generally classified into two groups, cellular and acellular slime molds. The lectins on the cell surface of cellular slime molds, which may function in the aggregation of cells to form the pseudoplasmodium (25, 28), have been purified and characterized (26, 27, 28, 30). These lectin receptors have been reported to be glycoconjugates located on the cell membrane (23). But little is known about the surface carbohydrates of the myxamoebae and microplasmodium cells of acellular slime molds, although a galactan phosphosulfate has been found in their nuclei (6, 8) and secreted fluid (5, 15).

We here report on the surface glycoconjugates of two conjugatable, different mating-types of myxamoebae (strains J and F in the haploid vegetative phase of the life cycle) and those of the microplasmodium (multinucleated diploid vegetative phase) studied in binding experiments with various exogenous plant lectins.

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Abbreviations used: WGA, wheat germ agglutinin; RCA, *Ricinus communis* agglutinin; Con A, concanavalin A; SBA, soybean agglutinin; DBA, *Dolichos biflorus* agglutinin; UEA-I, *Ulex europeus* agglutinin-I; AHA, *Arachis hypogaea* agglutinin; SJA, *Sophora japonica* agglutinin; FITC, fluorescein isothiocyanate; PBS, phosphate buffered saline; BSA, bovine serum albumin.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

*Organisms.* Strains J and F of the myxoamoebae from *P. polycephalum* were grown with *Aerobacter aerogenes* on agar medium in the dark at 24°C as reported previously (33). The microplasmidia were grown in an axenic semi-defined culture medium in shaken flasks as previously reported (21). The microplasmidium is multinucleated, but is surrounded by a single cell membrane. Therefore, it can be considered a single cell so far as its surface is concerned, and will be called a cell hereafter.

The cells (myxoamoebae and microplasmidia) were collected by low speed centrifugation and washed 3 times with 0.01 M phosphate buffer (pH 6.0) containing 0.05 M NaCl to remove bacteria and slime.

*Lectins and other chemicals.* The neuraminidase of *Arthrobacter ureafaciens* was obtained from Nakarai Chemicals Ltd., Kyoto, Japan, and Na<sup>125</sup>I (370 mCi/ml) from New England Nuclear, Boston, Mass.

Crude lectin preparations of *Ricinus communis* agglutinin (castor bean agglutinin, specific to  $\beta$ -D-galactosyl residue; RCA) and soybean agglutinin (specific to  $\alpha(\beta)$ -N-acetyl-D-galactosaminyl; SBA) and concanavalin A (specific to  $\alpha$ -D-mannosyl; Con A) were purified by affinity chromatography as described previously (13). Crude *Sophora japonica* agglutinin (specific to  $\beta$ -N-acetyl-D-galactosaminyl; SJA) was purified according to the method of Allen *et al.* (2). Wheat germ agglutinin (specific to  $\alpha$ -sialyl or  $\beta$ -N-acetyl-D-glucosaminyl; WGA) and fluorescein isothiocyanate (FITC)-labelled RCA, SBA, Con A, WGA, *Arachis hypogaea* agglutinin (peanut agglutinin, specific to  $\beta$ -D-galactosyl-(1→3)-N-acetyl-D-galactosaminyl; AHA), *Dolichos biflorus* agglutinin (horse gram agglutinin, specific to  $\alpha$ -N-acetyl-D-galactosaminyl; DBA), and *Ulex europaeus* agglutinin I (gorse seed agglutinin, specific to  $\alpha$ -L-fucosyl; UEA-I) were purchased from Maruzen Sekiyu Ltd., Tokyo, Japan. Iodination of the purified lectins was performed by the chloramine-T method with Na<sup>125</sup>I (14). The specific activities of the iodinated lectins were 10<sup>13</sup> to 10<sup>15</sup> cpm/mole.

*Enzyme treatment of cells.* Cells were suspended at a final concentration of 1–2 × 10<sup>8</sup> cells/ml of 0.02 M phosphate buffered saline (PBS, pH 6.0) for the myxoamoebae and 1.5 × 10<sup>5</sup> cells/ml for the microplasmidia. Each cell suspension was incubated with one unit of neuraminidase for 60 min at 25°C under gentle shaking (4). These treated cells were washed 3 times by centrifugation with PBS containing 0.25% bovine serum albumin (PBS-BSA) then resuspended in the same buffer for the binding assay. As the control, cells were incubated without the enzyme and washed by the same procedure.

*Binding studies with FITC-lectins.* Cells were washed with PBS (pH 7.2) and suspended at a final concentration of 10<sup>5</sup> cells/ml in the same buffer (9). After incubation of 100  $\mu$ l of the cell suspension with 10  $\mu$ g of each FITC-lectin (WGA, RCA, Con A, SBA, DBA, UEA-I or AHA) at room temperature for 15 min, the cells were washed by centrifugation 3 times with PBS. The washed cells were kept at 0°C and examined within 1 h under a Nikon EF fluorescent microscope equipped with a blue excitation filter system (for FITC) and illuminated by a 50 W halogen lamp. Photomicrographs were taken with Kodak Ektachrome 400 (ED-Daylight) and were processed to ASA 400.

*Binding studies with <sup>125</sup>I-lectins.* Binding studies with <sup>125</sup>I-lectins essentially were made according to the method described previously (12). The suspension (100  $\mu$ l) containing 10<sup>6</sup>–10<sup>7</sup> myxoamoebae or 10<sup>4</sup> microplasmidia cells was incubated for 60 min at 0°C with 100  $\mu$ l of a solution of lectins at various concentrations (30–800  $\mu$ g/ml). After the cells had been washed 3 times with PBS-BSA by centrifugation, the amount of bound <sup>125</sup>I-lectin was determined with an Aloka autowell gamma system ARC-500. Corrections were made for the nonspecific binding of lectin and inactivated lectin. Data for the binding studies were plotted

by the method of Steck-Wallach (31).

*Hemagglutination inhibition test with the slime polysaccharide fraction.* Extracellular polysaccharide was precipitated with ethanol from the slime of the microplasmodia then fractionated with cetyl pyridinium chloride. The cetyl pyridinium complex was extracted sequentially with 0.2, 0.4 and 0.7 M NaCl. The major part of the slime polysaccharide was recovered in the 0.4 M NaCl fraction (36%). This fraction was purified further by ethanol precipitation, after which it was used for the inhibition test.

The slime polysaccharide solution (27.9 mg/ml) was diluted serially with PBS, then 50  $\mu$ l of lectin solutions were added to 50  $\mu$ l of each of these solutions. The mixtures were allowed to stand for 1 h at room temperature, after which 50  $\mu$ l of trypsin-treated human erythrocyte suspension was added to each one. After incubation for 30 min at room temperature, the agglutinability of the erythrocytes was observed macroscopically.

*Mixed agglutination test with human erythrocytes.* Cells of strain J or F of the myxoamoeba, or the microplasmodium, were suspended in PBS ( $10^5$  cells/ml). A portion of this suspension was mixed with an equal volume of 5% human erythrocyte suspension and incubated for 30 min at 0°C, then it was observed microscopically.

## RESULTS

*Binding of FITC-lectins.* The lectin-treated cells were often agglutinated, but no morphological changes were observed in them under microscopy.

Results of the binding of FITC-lectins to the myxoamoebae are shown in Fig. 1a-e. Cell-bound fluorescence was seen on both the J and F strains treated with FITC-WGA, -RCA, -Con A or -SBA, but none was seen on cells treated with FITC-AHA, -DBA or -UEA-I.

Of the lectins used, FITC-WGA gave the strongest fluorescence followed by FITC-RCA and -Con A. FITC-RCA showed only localized fluorescence along the cell fringe. No differences were found between strains J and F in their binding abilities for all the lectins used.

Because the microplasmodium has a strong fluorescence (Fig. 1f), the binding of FITC-lectins could not be distinguished from its self-fluorescence.

*Binding of  $^{125}$ I-lectins.* Results of the binding of  $^{125}$ I-lectins to strains J and F of the myxoamoebae and to the microplasmodium were plotted by the method of Steck and Wallach (Fig. 2). In this experiment, four lectins (WGA, RCA, Con A and SBA) which bound with the myxoamoebae in the experiment with FITC-lectins were used. The number of lectin binding sites and the association constants are given in Table 1.

The order for the number of binding sites on the myxoamoebae was WGA > RCA > Con A > SBA (Table 1), which is consistent with the results obtained with FITC-lectins. The number of binding sites on strain F was somewhat larger than the number on strain J, but no other differences were found between these strains.

The order for the number of receptor sites on the microplasmodium, however, differed from that of the myxoamoebae, WGA = RCA > SBA > Con A. The number of receptor sites on the microplasmodium was about three to four orders of magnitude higher than the number on the myxoamoebae. But, given the size of the microplasmodia (100–200  $\mu$ m in diameter) and the myxoamoebae (10  $\mu$ m in diameter), the calculated densities of the lectin binding sites on the myxoamoebae and microplasmodia were almost the same,  $10^{16-17}$  sites/cm<sup>2</sup> on the cell surface.

*Effect of neuraminidase treatment on lectin receptors.* To obtain further details of

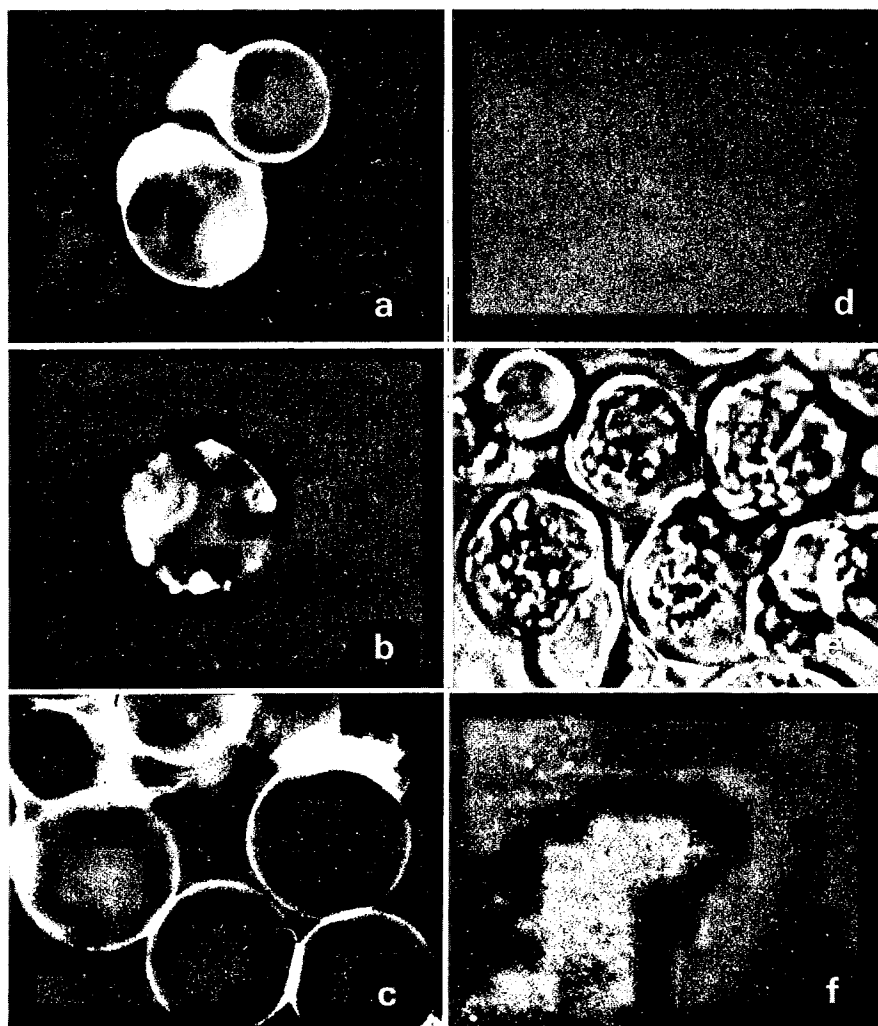


Fig. 1. Photomicrographs of myxoamoebae cells (a–e) and the microplasmidium (f) of *P. polycephalum*. Strain F is labelled with FITC-WGA,  $\times 1000$ , 60 sec exposure (a); strain F is labelled with FITC-RCA (b); strain J is labelled with FITC-Con A (c); strain F is labelled with FITC-AHA (d); the same as (d), but photographed in a light field,  $\times 1000$ , 5 sec exposure (e); and unlabelled microplasmidium,  $\times 100$ , 60 sec exposure (f).

the nature of the lectin receptors, WGA and RCA were bound to cells treated with neuraminidase. This enzyme treatment, however, had practically no effect on the FITC-lectin binding to both strains of myxoamoebae.

Neuraminidase treatment did not change the number of WGA receptor sites on the myxoamoebae nor on the microplasmidium, but it did tend to increase the number of RCA sites slightly. These increases in the RCA receptor sites were not significant, however, nor were the affinity constants changed (Table 1).

*Hemagglutination inhibition test with the slime polysaccharide fraction.* The slime

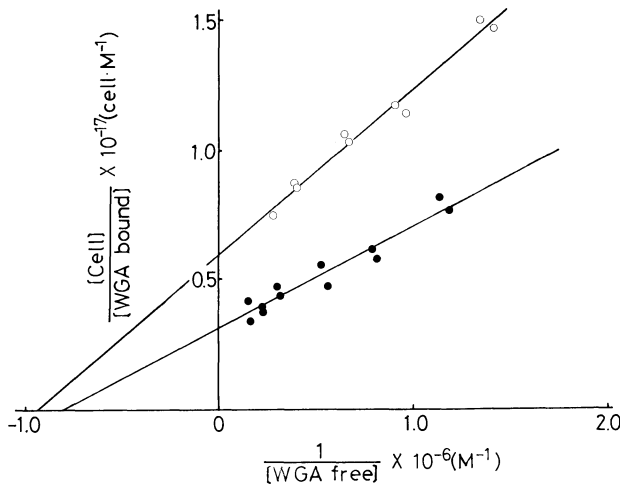


Fig. 2. Binding of <sup>125</sup>I-labelled WGA to strains J (○) and F (●) myxoamoebae cells. Data for the binding studies were plotted by the method of Steck and Wallach (31) with the equation:

$$\frac{[\text{Cell}]}{[\text{WGA bound}]} = \frac{1}{K_a \cdot n} \cdot \frac{1}{[\text{WGA free}]} + \frac{1}{n}$$

in which [WGA free]=the concentration of free WGA (M); [WGA bound]=the concentration of bound WGA (M); [Cell]=the number of cells per liter; n=the number of lectin receptor sites per cell; and K<sub>a</sub>=the affinity constant (M<sup>-1</sup>).

polysaccharide fraction slightly inhibited the agglutination of RCA, but not that of SBA or SJA at the concentrations examined (Table 2).

*Mixed agglutination test with human erythrocytes.* Myxoamoebae and microplasmodia cells did not bind with human erythrocytes (data not shown). No agglutination of these cells was observed under microscopy, which suggests that there is no lectin on the cell surface of *Physarum*.

TABLE 1. LECTIN BINDING ASSAYS FOR MYXOAMOEBAE AND MICROPLASMODIUM CELLS

Cell type	WGA		RCA		Con A		SBA	
	n	K <sub>a</sub>	n	K <sub>a</sub>	n	K <sub>a</sub>	n	K <sub>a</sub>
Myxoamoeba, J	10 × 10 <sup>6</sup>	0.90	6.4 × 10 <sup>6</sup>	0.54	3.7 × 10 <sup>6</sup>	12	0.45 × 10 <sup>6</sup>	3.0
Neuraminidase-treated J	10 × 10 <sup>6</sup>	0.78	7.5 × 10 <sup>6</sup>	0.52	—	—	—	—
Myxoamoeba, F	18 × 10 <sup>6</sup>	0.84	6.9 × 10 <sup>6</sup>	1.2	3.8 × 10 <sup>6</sup>	19	0.94 × 10 <sup>6</sup>	3.2
Neuraminidase-treated F	18 × 10 <sup>6</sup>	0.84	9.0 × 10 <sup>6</sup>	0.74	—	—	—	—
Microplasmodium	6.8 × 10 <sup>9</sup>	0.52	7.0 × 10 <sup>9</sup>	0.53	2 × 10 <sup>9</sup>	0.3	5.2 × 10 <sup>9</sup>	0.04
Neuraminidase-treated microplasmodium	6.6 × 10 <sup>9</sup>	0.41	6.1 × 10 <sup>9</sup>	0.64	—	—	—	—

n: number of lectin receptor sites per cell.

K<sub>a</sub>: affinity constant (× 10<sup>6</sup> M<sup>-1</sup>).

Each value is the average of duplicate or triplicate experiments.

TABLE 2. HEMAGGLUTINATION INHIBITION TEST WITH THE SLIME POLYSACCHARIDE FRACTION

Lectin	Concentration of Inhibitor (mg/ml)				
	0	3.5	7.0	14.0	27.9
RCA	‡‡	‡‡	‡‡	+	—
SBA	‡‡	‡‡	‡‡	‡‡	‡‡
SJA	‡‡	‡‡	‡‡	‡‡	‡‡

The 0.4 M NaCl fraction from the slime polysaccharide fraction was used in the hemagglutination inhibition test as described in Methods. The degree of agglutination of the erythrocytes was determined macroscopically after centrifugation at  $500 \times g$  for 1 min.

### DISCUSSION

Plant lectins have been widely used to detect certain structures of glycoconjugates on the cell membranes of mammals (1, 12) and invertebrates (22, 24). In our study, the combined use of fluorescein-conjugated lectin and  $^{125}\text{I}$ -labelled lectin enabled us to determine some characters of the cell surface glycoconjugates with small amounts of material.

Two major findings were made: strains J and F of the myxoamoebae and the microplasmidium of *P. polycephalum* have glycoconjugate receptors for the plant lectins WGA, RCA, Con A and SBA, but do not have receptors for DBA, UEA-I and AHA, and the WGA receptors on these cells are resistant to neuraminidase treatment.

The order of the number of receptor sites for each lectin (WGA > RCA > Con A, SBA) was similar to that for mammalian cells (1, 12). The numbers of lectin receptor sites per unit area on the cell surface of *Physarum* were an order of magnitude lower than those of rat ascites hepatoma cells (12), but were the same order as those of human erythrocytes (1, 11). The affinity constants were almost the same in all cases.

RCA, SBA and Con A, respectively, are known to be specific for Gal $\beta$ GlcNAc structure, Gal $\beta$ GlcNAc $\alpha$ Man structure and mannosyl cores of the *N*-glycoside-linked hetero-saccharide chains of glycoprotein (10, 20). Therefore, cells of the myxoamoebae and microplasmidium were assumed to have glycoproteins with *N*-glycoside-linked hetero-saccharide chains on their surfaces.

We found the polygalactan phosphosulfate excreted from *Physarum* to be a very weak inhibitor of RCA, as reported by Horisberger *et al.* (8); whereas, the affinity constant of RCA to the microplasmidium was relatively high ( $0.5 \times 10^6 \text{ M}^{-1}$ ). These results rule out the possibility that the polygalactan phosphosulfate is an RCA receptor on the microplasmidial surface.

The WGA receptors on *Physarum* differed from those of mammalian cells. These receptors on mammalian cells decrease remarkably with neuraminidase treatment because they are composed of both *N*-acetyl- $\beta$ -D-glucosaminyl residues and  $\alpha$ -sialyl residues (16, 3). In many cases (12, 19, 29), the decrease in WGA receptors that is caused by neuraminidase treatment is accompanied by a marked increase in RCA receptors because most of the sialyl residues are linked to  $\beta$ -D-galactosyl residues. But, neither a decrease in WGA receptors nor a significant increase in RCA receptors was found when *Physarum* cells were treated with neuraminidase.

These results are a strong indication that cells of *Physarum* have no sialyl residues on their surface, as has been reported for mosquito cells tested by the lectin binding

assay (4) and chemical analysis (32). The absence of DBA and UEA-1 receptors on the myxoamoebae of *Physarum* that is shown by the FITC-lectin binding studies suggests that these cells have no oligosaccharides with blood group A and H determinants.

Recently, cell surface glycoconjugates have been considered to function in cell to cell recognition and adhesion (7). The cellular slime mold provides a good example of this because the formation of pseudoplasmodia is due to the glycoprotein called contact site A (17, 18) and/or the specific interaction between endogenous lectins and the cell surface receptors of the glycoconjugates. These lectins, the discoidin from *Dictyostelium discoideum* (26, 30) and the pallidin from *Polysphondylium pallidum* (27, 28), as well as their glycoconjugate receptors (23), have been studied extensively.

In contrast, the acellular slime mold develops a multinucleated plasmodium without a cell-aggregation process. Therefore, the lectin that functions in the aggregation of cells may be unnecessary to acellular slime molds. But, the presence of glycoconjugate receptors for exogenous lectins was demonstrated in this study.

Strains J and F of the myxoamoebae conjugate with each other, but there is no conjugation within each strain. Glycoconjugates also may participate in this recognition system although no remarkable differences in lectin receptors were found between the two strains of myxoamoebae used.

The cell surface receptors for each lectin on the myxoamoebae seem to be heterogeneous because each lectin can bind with a limited number of, but different, glycoconjugates that have a particular sugar structure. Therefore, the possibility that only part of a lectin receptor participates in the recognition mechanism of the myxoamoebae can not be excluded. This possibility is being investigated with lectins used as the blocking agent in the conjugation of these cells.

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