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250 (1:10 dilution; rat IgG2a; Sera-Lab). Secondary antibodies to mouse IgG1 and IgG2b or rat IgG were conjugated to fluorescein isothiocyanate (FITC) or tetramethyl rhodamine isothiocyanate and used at 1:100 dilution in 3% BSA in phosphate-buffered saline (Southern Biotechnology Associates). When BrdU mAb was used, the sections were treated for 15 min in 4 M HCl before the blocking step. Images were captured digitally on a BioRad confocal microscope.

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## Crystal Structure of the $V_{\alpha}$ Domain of a T Cell Antigen Receptor

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The crystal structure of the V<sub>α</sub> domain of a T cell antigen receptor (TCR) was determined at a resolution of 2.2 angstroms. This structure represents an immunoglobulin topology set different from those previously described. A switch in a polypeptide strand from one  $\beta$  sheet to the other enables a pair of V<sub>α</sub> homodimers to pack together to form a tetramer, such that the homodimers are parallel to each other and all hypervariable loops face in one direction. On the basis of the observed mode of V<sub>α</sub> association, a model of an (αβ)<sub>2</sub> TCR tetramer can be positioned relative to the major histocompatibility complex class II (αβ)<sub>2</sub> tetramer with the third hypervariable loop of V<sub>α</sub> over the amino-terminal portion of the antigenic peptide and the corresponding loop of V<sub>β</sub> over its carboxyl-terminal residues. TCR dimerization that is mediated by the α chain may contribute to the coupling of antigen recognition to signal transduction during T cell activation.

T lymphocytes recognize a wide variety of antigens through highly diverse cell-surface glycoproteins known as TCRs. These molecules are composed of  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  (or  $\gamma$  and  $\delta$ ) chains that have variable (V) and constant (C) regions homologous to those of antibodies (1). However, antibodies recognize antigen in intact form, whereas TCRs recognize antigen only as peptide fragments bound to molecules of the major histocompatibility complex (MHC) (2). The threedimensional structure of the extracellular portion of the  $\beta$  chain of a murine TCR ( $V_{\alpha}4.1\text{-}J_{\alpha}2B4,~V_{\beta}8.2\text{-}J_{\beta}2.1)$  specific for a hemagglutinin peptide of influenza virus (HA-110-120) in the context of the MHC class II I-E<sup>d</sup> molecule has been solved (3). A TCR designated 1934.4, which is specific for the NH2-terminal nonapeptide of myelin basic protein (Ac1-9) in association with I-A<sup>u</sup> (4), is encoded by the closely related  $V_{\alpha}4.2$ -J<sub> $\alpha$ </sub>4.0,  $V_{\beta}8.2$ -J<sub> $\beta$ </sub>2.3 gene combination (5). Injection into mice of the T cell clone from which the 1934.4 TCR was isolated induces experimental autoimmune encephalomyelitis, a model for human multiple sclerosis (6). The  $V_{\alpha}$  domain of this pathogenic TCR has been produced and crystallized (7, 8); here, we describe its crystal structure at 2.2 Å resolution (9).

The  $V_{\alpha}$  domain exists as a homodimer both in solution (8) and in the crystal structure (Fig. 1A). The relative orientation of the two chains in the homodimer is almost identical to that in antibody  $V_L V_H$ dimers, with peptide loops homologous to the complementarity-determining regions (CDRs) of antibodies disposed to form part of the antigen-binding site. Fourteen residues from each  $V_{\alpha}$  domain contribute numerous van der Waals contacts and 10 hydrogen bonds across the homodimer interface. Of these, residues Tyr<sup>35</sup>, Gln<sup>37</sup>, Pro<sup>43</sup>, Tyr<sup>87</sup>, and Phe<sup>106</sup> [numbered as in (10)] are equivalent by homology to those involved in  $V_L V_H$  association (11, 12). These residues are also highly conserved in  $V_{\beta}$  regions (excluding Pro<sup>43</sup>, which is most commonly substituted by Leu), which indicates that the geometry of TCR



 $V_{\alpha}V_{\beta}$  association is likely to be similar to that of  $V_LV_H.$ 

The structural framework of the  $V_{\alpha}$ domain shows significant similarities to immunoglobulin (Ig) V domains [rootmean-square deviations (RMSDs) from superposition onto nine  $V_L$  and nine  $V_H$ domains are 1.3 and 1.7 Å, respectively] and to  $V_\beta$  (RMSD, 1.2 Å) (Fig. 1B). However, a switch in a polypeptide strand from one  $\boldsymbol{\beta}$  sheet to the other (Fig. 2) distinguishes the  $\beta$  strand topology of  $V_{\alpha}$  from that of other members of the Ig superfamily (11, 13). In antibody V domains, as well as in TCR  $V_\beta$  (3), the  $c^{\prime\prime}$  strand is hydrogen-bonded to the  $c^\prime$  strand in the same  $\beta$  sheet. In  $V_{\alpha}$ , the c'' strand is associated with the d strand of the adjacent sheet through six backbone-backbone hydrogen bonds (Fig. 3). The previously defined Ig topology sets have been classified as V (variable; for example, Ig V domains, CD4 domains 1 and 3), C (constant; for example, Ig constant domains), S (switched; for example, CD4 domains 2 and 4), H (hybrid; for example, the cellulase NH<sub>2</sub>terminal domain), and I (intermediate; for example, telokin) (11, 13). We propose that the Ig topology set corresponding to the  $V_{\alpha}$ domain be designated the A set.

The conformation of CDR1 of  $V_{a}4.2$ appears to be stabilized predominantly by hydrophobic interactions, not by intraloop hydrogen bonding as was observed for  $V_{\beta}8.2$  (3); however, Tyr<sup>65</sup>, like Arg<sup>69</sup> of the known  $V_{\beta}$  structure, forms a hydrogen bond to the backbone of CDR1 (Fig. 4A). Residues Tyr<sup>24</sup> and Leu<sup>32</sup>, which are highly conserved in mouse and human  $\alpha$  chain sequences (10), pack against each other in the loop. The most common substitution at both positions is Phe, which should preserve or enhance the hydrophobic packing interactions. Residues Ala<sup>26</sup> and Pro<sup>30</sup> also contribute to the hydrophobic stabilization, although these positions are more variable. In contrast, CDR1 of both the  $V_L$  and  $V_{\mathsf{H}}$  domains is mainly stabilized by the hydrophobic side chain of residue 29, which intercalates between two  $\beta$ -pleated sheets. The CDR1 loops in  $V_{\alpha}$  sequences vary in length by up to three amino acids; the 11-residue loop of  $V_{\alpha}$ 4.2 is the most frequently observed length (10). Together with the conservation of hydro-



**Fig. 2.** Folding topology of (**A**) the V<sub> $\alpha$ </sub> domain and (**B**) a typical V domain.

phobic residues at positions 24 and 32, this suggests that the CDR1 conformation described here may be common to many other  $\alpha$  chains.

The CDR2 loops of  $V_{\alpha}4.2$  and  $V_{\beta}8.2$ have the same conformation and superpose with an RMSD of 0.50 Å for six  $\alpha$  carbon positions (Fig. 1B). The  $V_{\alpha}$  CDR2 (Fig. 4B) appears to be stabilized by one intraloop backbone-backbone hydrogen bond (Arg<sup>51</sup> O··· N Glu<sup>54</sup>) and by four additional backbone-backbone bonds with neighboring residues (Ala<sup>49</sup> N··· O Leu<sup>32</sup>, Ala<sup>49</sup> O··· N



**Fig. 3.**  $2F_{o} - F_{c}$  electron density map contoured at 1 $\sigma$  for the c'' (left) and d (right) strands. Carbon, nitrogen, and oxygen atoms are colored yellow, blue, and red, respectively.

Leu32, Lys53 N···O Tyr65, and Glu54  $O \cdots N$  Tyr<sup>65</sup>). Four consecutive amino acids of CDR3 (Asn<sup>94</sup>, Tyr<sup>95</sup>, Gly<sup>96</sup>, and Asn<sup>97</sup>) had negligible electron density throughout the refinement. The atoms of these residues have been modeled in the structure, but because they were assigned zero occupancy, they were effectively excluded from the x-ray calculations. We conclude that CDR3 is disordered and that the two CDR3 loops in the homodimer are unable to pack together in a stable conformation. Such disorder may not be present in the intact  $\alpha\beta$  heterodimer. The loop comprising residues 67 to 72, which is analogous to the fourth hypervariable region of  $V_{\beta}$  (3), is one residue longer in  $V_{\alpha}$  and folds away from CDR1. Because this loop forms part of a relatively flat continuous surface with the CDRs, it could potentially be involved in interactions with the peptide-MHC complex.

There is considerable evidence that TCRs must undergo dimerization (or oligomerization) for signal transduction to occur (14), as is the case for other cell-surface receptors (15). The structure and crystal packing of the  $V_{\alpha}$  domain provide evidence that  $\alpha\beta$  TCRs can undergo dimerization, largely mediated through their  $\alpha$  chains. Specifically, the  $\beta$  strand switch observed for  $V_{\alpha}$  results in the removal of a surface



Fig. 4.  $V_{\alpha}$  hypervariable loops. (A) CDR1; (B) CDR2. Hydrogen bonds are black lines; atoms are colored as in Fig. 3.

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protrusion, which enables the homodimers to pack in a translational fashion along the crystallographic z axis, such that the peptide-MHC binding loops form a continuous patch on one face of the linear array (Fig. 5, A and B). Immunoglobulin V domains or  $V_{\beta}$  would be unable to pack in an analogous way because of steric hindrance. This raises the question of whether the TCR can dimerize in a way that is consistent with the  $V_{\alpha}$  packing observed in this structure. A plausible model can indeed be constructed directly from the  $V_{\alpha}$  crystal packing and the known structure of  $V_{\beta}8.2$ , in which the V domains of a TCR  $\alpha\beta$  heterodimer are packed as a tetramer and where most of the contacts in the  $(V_{\alpha}V_{\beta})_2$  dimer-dimer interface are formed between the two  $V_{\alpha}$  domains (Fig. 5C).

Several observations suggest that the organization of  $V_{\alpha}$  homodimers found in the crystal structure may represent a biologically relevant mode of association and is not simply a crystallization artifact. First, this particular packing arrangement is made possible by a unique strand switch not present in Ig V regions or in  $V_{\beta}$ . Second, a  $(V_{\alpha}V_{\beta})_2$  tetramer modeled on the basis of the observed mode of  $V_{\alpha}$  association has all its CDR loops facing in one direction and disposed in essentially a single plane (Fig. 6), as might be expected for TCRs on a membrane surface. Third, the distribution

Fig. 5.  $V_{\alpha}$  tetramer and model of a  $(V_{\alpha}V_{\beta})_2$  tetramer. (A) Packing of two  $V_{\alpha}$  dimers as observed in the crystal structure, with the CDR loops at the top of the aggregate. The packing arises from a crystallographic translation of homodimers along the z axis (horizontal here). (B) View of two  $V_{\alpha}$ dimers looking down on the CDR loops. (C) Model of a  $(V_{\alpha}V_{\beta})_2$  tetramer oriented as in (B), with potential N-linked glycosylation sites shown as spheres.  $V_{\alpha}$  and  $V_{\beta}$  are colored yellow and blue, respectively. The model of the 1934.4  $V_{\scriptscriptstyle B}$  domain was made by replacing CDR3 of the known structure of the 14.3.d  $V_\beta$  domain (3) with the backbone of the V<sub>L</sub> CDR3 loop of the catalytic antibody 17E8 (PDB accession number 1EAP) (23); this CDR3 loop has the same length as that of the 1934.4  $V_{\rm \tiny R}$ domain. The 1934.4 and 14.3.d TCRs use the same  $V_\beta$  gene segment (V\_\beta 8.2) and closely related  $J_{\scriptscriptstyle B}$  segments. Amino acid substitutions in CDR3 and subsequent energy minimization resulted in a plausible model for the 1934.4  $V_{B}$  domain. The  $V_{\alpha}V_{\beta}$  heterodimer was constructed by superposing the  $V_{\beta}$  model onto a  $V_{\alpha}$  domain of the V<sub>a</sub> homodimer. The heterodimer-heterodimer interface in the tetramer is made of contacts predominantly between the V<sub>a</sub> domains in the vicinity of the c'' strand switch. Higher degrees of translational aggregation would be prevented by steric hindrance between  $V_\beta$  domains arising from the position of the V\_{\beta} c'' strand. The N-linked glycosylation sites at  $V_{\beta}$  positions 57, 60, 62, and 85 are colored purple; analogous sites are absent in V<sub>a</sub> chains. Two glycosylation sites at the base of the  $(V_{\alpha}V_{\beta})_{2}$  tetramer that are not implicated in the heterodimer-heterodimer interface are shown in gray.

of potential N-linked glycosylation sites on  $V_{\alpha}$  and  $V_{\beta}$  domains is consistent with the idea that  $V_{\alpha}\text{-}V_{\alpha}$  interactions are functionally important. An examination of  $V_{\alpha}$  and  $V_{\beta}$  sequences (10) reveals 14 and 12 such sites, respectively; their location in the crystal structures of  $V_{\alpha}4.2$  and  $V_{\beta}8.2$  is shown in Fig. 5C. None of these sites occurs in the putative interface between the two  $V_{\alpha}V_{\beta}$ heterodimers in the tetramer model. Note that  $\mathsf{V}_\alpha$  domains lack N-linked glycosylation sites at positions corresponding to  $V_{\beta}$ residues 57, 60, 62, and 85. Glycosylation at the corresponding positions of  $V_{\alpha}$  would be expected to interfere with tetramer formation (Fig. 5C).

If the parallel dimers observed in crystals of the  $V_{\alpha}$  domain are assumed to reflect a physiological interaction, a mechanism that helps to explain signal transduction in T cells can be inferred. According to this mechanism,  $\alpha$  chainmediated TCR dimerization drives the formation of a homogeneous peptide-MHC class II dimer; binding of the class II dimer in turn stabilizes the weak TCR dimer sufficiently to result in receptor activation. In the absence of cognate peptide-MHC complexes, however, these putative TCR dimers exist only transiently on the cell surface, thus preventing T cells from triggering spontaneously. This cooperative mechanism, whereby weak TCR dimers



interact with weak class II dimers to form stable  $TCR_2$ -MHC<sub>2</sub> signaling complexes, differs from that previously proposed (16, 17) in that it assigns a central role to the TCR in driving the assembly of the signaling complex. Such a mechanism could explain how homogeneous peptide-MHC dimers can form on the surface of an antigen-presenting cell bearing hundreds of different peptide-MHC complexes.

Our model of a  $(V_{\alpha}V_{\beta})_2$  tetramer, based on the crystal packing of  $V_{\alpha}$  homodimers, has obvious parallels to the human leukocyte antigen (HLA) class II dimer of dimers (16). In the orientation shown in Fig. 6A, the two sets of CDR3 loops (one set from each  $\alpha\beta$  heterodimer) are well positioned to bind the two peptides in the crystal structure of the class II tetramer, such that  $V_{\alpha}$  CDR3 would contact the  $NH_2\text{-}terminal$  portion of the peptide and  $V_{\beta}$  CDR3 would contact the COOH-terminal portion. The CDR1 and CDR2 loops of  $\tilde{V}_\alpha$  would then interact primarily with the  $\beta 1$  domain of the class II molecule, and CDR1 and CDR2 of  $V_{\beta}$ would interact primarily with the  $\alpha 1$  domain. This overall orientation best fulfills the criteria that  $V_{\alpha}$  and  $V_{\beta}$  CDR3s interact mainly with bound peptide [as suggested by numerous mutagenesis and sequencing studies of TCRs of defined specificity (2)] and that, to the extent possible, each  $\alpha\beta$  heterodimer in the TCR tetramer contacts only one class II molecule in the MHC tetramer. The positioning of  $V_{\alpha}$ CDR3 over the NH<sub>2</sub>-terminal portion of the antigenic peptide and of  $V_{\beta}$  CDR3 over the COOH-terminal residues in our structural model is in agreement with the orientation proposed by Jorgensen et al. (18) on the basis of amino acid changes in transgenic TCR  $\alpha$  or  $\beta$  chains elicited by charge substitutions in the peptide.

An important difference in TCR-MHC tetramer-tetramer complementarity is also evident. Viewed from the side, the HLA class II dimer of dimers shows the two bound peptides at an angle of  $\sim 100^{\circ}$  to each other, which precludes extensive interactions of both peptides with the relatively flat surface of the putative TCR tetramer (Fig. 6B). A conformational change in the MHC class II dimer of dimers or the TCR dimer of dimers, or both, would be necessary to achieve a TCR-MHC tetramer-tetramer interface in which most or all of the residues in the two peptides are in contact with the TCR. With respect to possible conformational changes in the HLA-DR1 dimer of dimers, Goodman et al. (19) tested the effects on T cell activation of mutations at residues Glu<sup>88</sup> and Lys<sup>111</sup> of the DRa chain, which form two reciprocal salt bridges in the crystal structure (16). Although substitu-



tions at position 88 were found to abolish antigen presentation, mutations at position 111 had no obvious effect. One interpretation of these results is that although the interaction between DRa residues 88 and 111 is present in the crystal structure of the unliganded HLA-DR1 tetramer, this interaction is not preserved in the putative TCR2-MHC2 complex because of a rearrangement in the MHC dimer-dimer interface upon TCR binding. Thus, T cell signaling may involve conformational changes in the TCR or MHC moieties, or both, associated with receptor dimerization.

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- Orthorhombic crystals, space group P21212, were grown in 1.9 M Li<sub>2</sub>SO<sub>4</sub> at pH 8, as described (8). Unit cell dimensions were a = 97.7 Å, b = 79.6 Å, and c =30.5 Å, with one  $V_{\alpha}$  homodimer in the asymmetric unit. A total of five crystals were used for x-ray data collection at room temperature. Data from three crystals were collected on a Siemens area detector and processed with the program XENGEN (20); the resulting 71,748 observations to 2.04 Å resolution were merged to give 14,353 unique reflections (Rmerge = 0.125, where  $R_{\text{merge}} = \Sigma |I - \langle I \rangle | / \Sigma \langle I \rangle$  and I is the reflection intensity). Values of  $R_{\text{merge}}$  for the individual data sets were 0.067, 0.084, and 0.097. Data from two crystals were collected on a MAR image plate instrument; the resulting 50,330 observations to 1.90 Å resolution were merged to give 15,428 unique reflections ( $R_{merge} = 0.120$ ). Individual  $R_{merge}$  values were 0.080 and 0.102. The Siemens and MAR data sets were merged without rejection to give 16,604 unique reflections ( $R_{merge} = 0.144$ ), with structure factor amplitude F > 0, to 1.9 Å resolution. Data completeness is 95.6% in the range 10.0 to 2.2 Å and 88.2% in the range 2.3 to 2.2 Å. The structure was solved by the molecular replacement method with the

use of the program AMoRe (21). The search model comprised the N, C, O, Ca, and CB atoms of both chains of the Bence-Jones dimer REI [Brookhaven Protein Data Bank (PDB) accession number 1REI] [O Epp et al., Eur. J. Biochem. 45, 513 (1974); O. Epp et al., Biochemistry 14, 4943 (1975)]. The translationfunction peak with the highest correlation coefficient corresponded to the 17th highest peak in the crossrotation function. Rigid body refinement of this solution with 8 to 4 Å data resulted in a reduction of R from 0.542 to 0.525 (where  $R = \Sigma |F_o - F_c| / \Sigma F_c$ ,  $F_o$  is the observed F, and Fc is the calculated F) and an increase of 22.6% in the correlation coefficient. Several other potential solutions did not show such favorable behavior. The solution made packing sense and was also consistent with the presence of a large self-Patterson peak at (0.50, 0.47, 0.00). The noncrystallographic twofold axis relating the two monomers in the dimer is almost coincident with the crystallographic a axis, and this combination of crystallographic and noncrystallographic symmetry can be shown algebraically to give rise to the self-Patterson peak near (0.5, 0.5, 0.0). Refinement with X-PLOR (22) and the merged Siemens data gave Rwork (the R for reflections used in the refinement) = 0.200 for 6.0 to 2.3 Å data (8054 reflections) and  $R_{\rm free}$  (the R for 10% of the reflections in the data set excluded from refinement) = 0.287 for the 782 reflections excluded from the refinement until the final cycles. At this stage the MAR data became available, and although they were of only slightly higher effective resolution, they did prove useful for cross validation, thus enabling an independent calculation of Rtree. The R factor (Rtree) calculated with the Siemens refined coordinates and the new MAR data was 0.238 for 6.0 to 2.2 Å data with  $F > 2\sigma F$ . Inclusion of data beyond 2.2 Å resolution did not result in improved maps or enable the location of additional solvent sites, presumably because of the weakness of these data. The final R for the structure refined against the merged Siemens and MAR data is 0.205 for the 9682 reflections with  $F > 2\sigma F$  in the range 6.0 to 2.2 Å. Data completeness corresponding to these reflections is 80.7% for the range 6.0 to 2.2 Å and 57.5% for the 2.3 to 2.2 Å shell. RMSDs of the geometry parameters from standard values are 0.012 Å for bond lengths and 2.02° for bond angles. The model includes 40 water molecules. A Ramachandran plot shows that no residues lie in disallowed regions.

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