

AurF from *Streptomyces thioluteus* and a Possible New Family of Manganese/Iron Oxygenases[†]

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Received May 31, 2007; Revised Manuscript Received June 27, 2007

ABSTRACT: We recently reported that the R2 subunit of class Ic ribonucleotide reductase from *Chlamydia trachomatis* contains a heterodinuclear Mn/Fe redox cofactor [Jiang, W., Yun, D., Saleh, L., Barr, E. W., Xing, G., Hoffart, L. M., Maslak, M.-A., Krebs, C., and Bollinger, J. M., Jr. (2007) *Science* 316, 1188–1191]. The *N*-oxygenase, AurF, from *Streptomyces thioluteus* catalyzes the six-electron oxidation of *p*-aminobenzoate to *p*-nitrobenzoate and contains the EX₂HX_{60–180}EX₂H sequence motif previously used to identify proteins with non-heme diiron clusters. Two research groups independently obtained evidence for the presence of iron and manganese in preparations of AurF. The electron paramagnetic resonance (EPR) spectrum of purified, resting AurF presented in one of these studies is markedly similar to the spectrum of the Mn^{III}/Fe^{III} form of *C. trachomatis* R2. We propose that *S. thioluteus* AurF also may harbor a heterodinuclear Mn/Fe cofactor, which it may use to activate O₂ for oxidation of the aryl amine to the nitro compound. Hypothetical proteins encoded in the genomes of several other bacteria have similar sequences and may also be members of this nascent family of oxygen-activating Mn/Fe proteins.

Carboxylate-bridged diiron clusters are employed as enzyme cofactors for a wide variety of oxidative transformations. For example, the Fe₂^{II/II} clusters in the hydroxylase components of bacterial multicomponent monooxygenases (e.g., soluble methane monooxygenase or sMMO¹) activate O₂ for hydroxylation of unactivated carbon centers (1, 2), and the structurally similar cofactors in plant fatty acyl desaturases (e.g., stearoyl acyl carrier protein Δ⁹ desaturase (3)) activate O₂ for dehydrogenation reactions. A particularly well-studied member of this group of proteins is the sMMO hydroxylase (sMMOH), which forms the Fe₂^{III/III}(μ-O₂²⁻) and Fe₂^{IV/IV}(μ-O²⁻)₂ intermediates, **P** and **Q** (1, 2) (Scheme 1F), during its reaction with O₂. **Q** initiates hydroxylation of methane by abstracting hydrogen (1, 2). Subsequent or concomitant transfer of a hydroxyl radical equivalent from the diiron center to the methyl group completes the hydroxy-

lation and generates a stable Fe₂^{III/III} form of the cofactor. The catalytic cycle is completed by reduction of the cofactor by the enzyme's reductase component (sMMOR) with two electrons harvested from NADH.

The R2 subunit of a conventional class I ribonucleotide reductase (RNR) (e.g., from *Escherichia coli*) becomes catalytically active when its carboxylate-bridged Fe₂^{II/II} cluster activates O₂ to oxidize a nearby tyrosine residue by one electron to a stable tyrosyl radical (4). An extensively characterized Fe₂^{III/IV} intermediate, **X** (5, 6), oxidizes the tyrosine as it converts to a stable Fe₂^{III/III}(μ-O²⁻) cluster (Scheme 1C) (5). In the RNR catalytic reaction, the tyrosyl radical in R2 oxidizes a cysteine residue in the R1 subunit by long-distance (~35 Å), inter-subunit, proton-coupled electron transfer (PCET) (7, 8). This step produces a cysteine thiyl radical, which initiates reduction of the nucleotide by abstracting hydrogen from C-3' (7).

We recently demonstrated that the class Ic RNR from *Chlamydia trachomatis* employs a different strategy to generate the cysteine thiyl radical in its R1 subunit. Its R2 subunit harbors a stable, heterodinuclear Mn^{IV}/Fe^{III} cofactor (9), which has an *S* = 1 ground state as a consequence of antiferromagnetic (AF) coupling between the Mn^{IV} (*S*_{Mn} = 3/2) and high-spin Fe^{III} (*S*_{Fe} = 5/2) sites (10). This cluster can generate the cysteine thiyl radical on the R1 subunit as the cluster is reduced to the Mn^{III}/Fe^{III} state (9). The Mn^{III}/Fe^{III} cluster exhibits an *S* = 1/2 ground state arising from AF coupling between the Mn^{III} (*S*_{Mn} = 2) and high-spin Fe^{III} (*S*_{Fe} = 5/2) sites. In the presence of the R1 subunit, cytidine 5'-diphosphate (CDP), and adenosine 5'-triphosphate (ATP), the Mn^{III}/Fe^{III} cluster exhibits a sharp electron paramagnetic resonance (EPR) spectrum centered at *g* = 2 with six groups of resonances arising from coupling to one Mn nucleus

[†] This work was supported by the National Institutes of Health (GM-55365 to J.M.B.), the Beckman Foundation (Young Investigator Award to C.K.), and the Dreyfus Foundation (Teacher Scholar Award to C.K.).

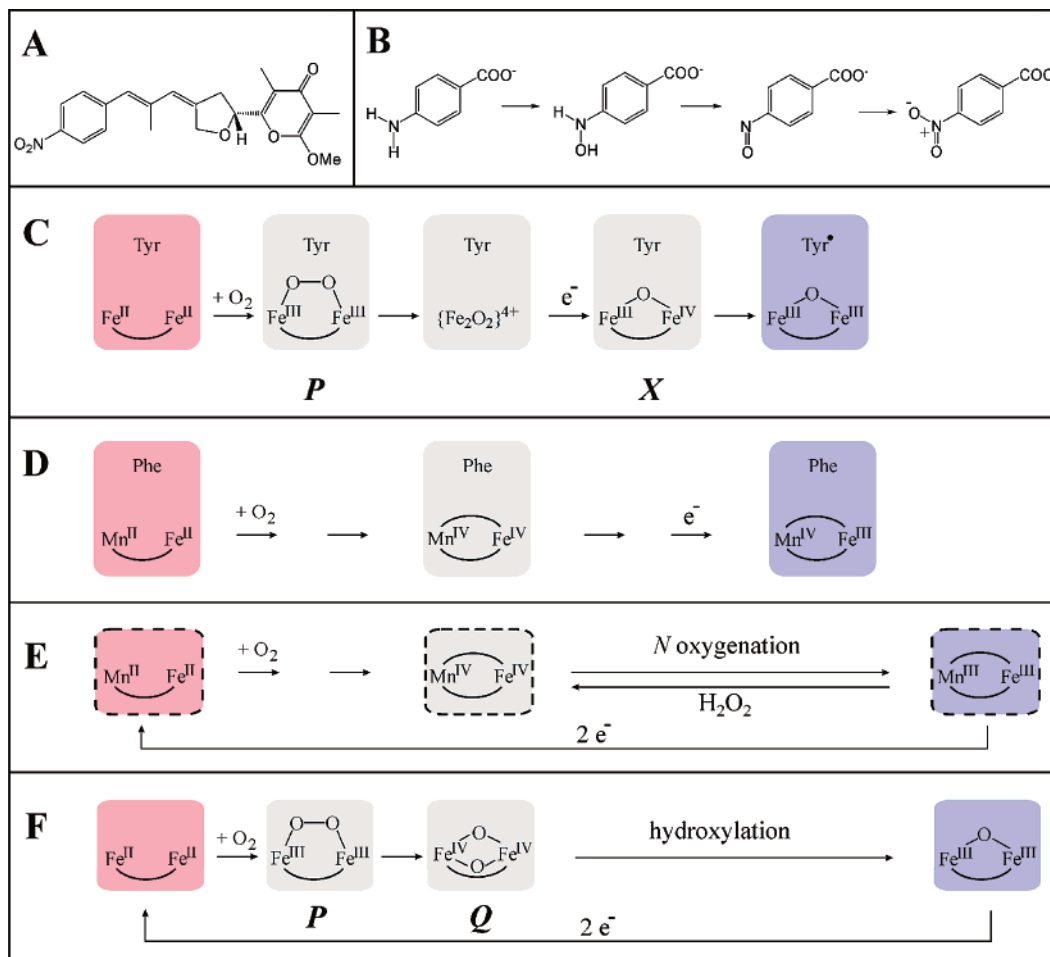
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¹ Abbreviations: PAB, *p*-aminobenzoate; PNB, *p*-nitrobenzoate; EPR, electron paramagnetic resonance; PCET, proton-coupled electron transfer; RNR, ribonucleotide reductase; sMMO, soluble methane monooxygenase; sMMOH, the hydroxylase component of sMMO; sMMOR, the reductase component of sMMO; ACP: acyl carrier protein; AF: antiferromagnetic; CDP: cytidine 5'-diphosphate; ATP: adenosine 5'-triphosphate; MBP: maltose binding protein; LB: Luria Bertani.

Scheme 1: Structure of Aureothin (**A**), the Conversion of PAB to PNB Catalyzed by AurF (**B**), and Comparison of the Proposed Mechanisms of Oxygen Activation by *E. coli* R2 (**C**), *C. trachomatis* R2 (**D**), *S. thioluteus* AurF (**E**), and of sMMO (**F**)^a



^aThe reactant complexes are shaded in red, the stable product states are in blue, and reaction intermediates are in gray. The states shown in (C), (D), and (F) have been experimentally characterized. The states in (E) are hypothetical.

(100% ⁵⁵Mn with nuclear spin quantum number $I = 5/2$) (Figure 1). The hyperfine structure of the spectrum, in particular, on the first, fifth, and sixth groups of resonances, is a consequence of the anisotropy of the A_{Mn} tensor and (to a lesser extent) the g tensor. Spectral simulations allowed these parameters to be determined and revealed pronounced anisotropy of A_{Mn} [(269, 314, 392) MHz] (9). The observed anisotropy is consistent with the assignment as Mn^{III} ($S_{Mn} = 2$) (11, 12). The heterodinuclear nature of the cofactor was verified by the observation of hyperfine coupling to ⁵⁷Fe ($I = 1/2$) in the EPR spectra (9). Mössbauer experiments revealed that the Fe site is in the high-spin Fe^{III} state (9).

The novel cofactor in *C. trachomatis* R2 is generated by reaction of the Mn^{II}/Fe^{II}-R2 complex with O₂ (9). During this reaction, a Mn^{IV}/Fe^{IV} intermediate accumulates almost quantitatively (Scheme 1D) and decays by reduction of the Fe^{IV} site (13). On the basis of the X-ray crystallographic results on the Fe₂^{III/III} form of the *C. trachomatis* R2 protein, which revealed the presence of two bridging oxygenic ligands (putatively, two hydroxides) (14), we proposed that the Mn^{IV}/Fe^{IV} intermediate has a *bis*-(μ-oxo) "diamond core" structure, as was also (and originally) proposed for **Q** in sMMOH (15). The demonstration of a possible heterodinuclear (Mn/Fe)

homologue of **Q** raised the possibility that, similar to the oxidative versatility of the diiron proteins, Mn/Fe enzymes that carry out oxygenase reactions (as opposed to the oxidase reaction in R2) might exist. Indeed, observations published by Hertweck and co-workers (16) and Zhao and co-workers (17) suggest that the *N*-oxygenase, AurF, from *S. thioluteus* may provide the first example of such a Mn/Fe-dependent oxygenase.

Aureothin (Scheme 1A) is a metabolite from *S. thioluteus* (18) with antifungal, antitumoral, and insecticidal activities (19). Its *p*-nitrophenyl group is derived from *p*-nitrobenzoate (PNB) (20), which is produced via oxidation of *p*-aminobenzoate (PAB) by AurF. Both O-atoms incorporated into the nitro group originate from O₂ (Scheme 1B) (21). It was proposed that three successive two-electron oxidations produce *p*-hydroxylaminobenzoate, *p*-nitrosobenzoate, and finally the PNB product (17, 21, 22). The hydroxylamine intermediate was demonstrated, establishing that the first reaction is an *N*-oxygenation (22). ¹⁸O₂ labeling studies of the conversion of this intermediate to PNB showed that the second reaction is formally a dehydrogenation reaction, presumably yielding the not-yet-detected *p*-nitrosobenzoate intermediate (17). AurF catalyzes oxidation of a variety of other para-substituted anilines to the corresponding *p*-

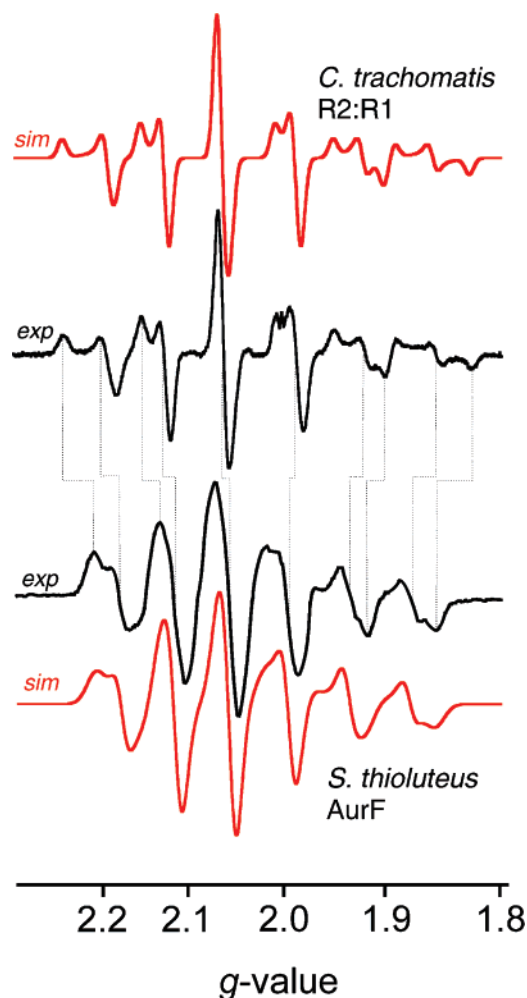


FIGURE 1: Comparison of the X-band EPR spectra of the $\text{Mn}^{\text{III}}/\text{Fe}^{\text{III}}$ cluster of the *C. trachomatis* $\text{Mn}^{\text{III}}/\text{Fe}^{\text{III}}\text{-R2-R1}\cdot\text{CDP}\cdot\text{ATP}$ complex (top) (9) and the oxidized form of *S. thioluteus* AurF (bottom, reproduced from ref 17 with permission of the publisher, Copyright 2000 Wiley-VCH). The corresponding peak positions are indicated by dotted lines. Experimental spectra are shown in black, and simulations according to the parameters quoted in the text are shown in red.

nitrophenyl compounds (16, 21), making it potentially useful in biotechnology.

AurF is a metalloenzyme, but the nature of the cofactor is presently not known. Hertweck and co-workers noted that a maltose binding protein (MBP)–AurF fusion protein, which was shown to exhibit *N*-oxygenase activity *in vivo* and *in vitro*, contains significant amounts of manganese and iron in a ~20:1 ratio (16). The authors suggested that “AurF employs manganese as an oxygen-activating cofactor” and that a “Mn-oxo species” may be the oxygenating intermediate (16). By contrast, Zhao and co-workers reported that AurF is a carboxylate-bridged diiron enzyme (17). This assessment was based on the fact that the protein has the $\text{EX}_2\text{HX}_{60-180}\text{-EX}_2\text{H}$ sequence hallmark of the diiron-carboxylate proteins (23, 24) and their observation of an EPR signal with *g*-values (1.94, 1.79, and 1.70) similar to those of AF-coupled $\text{Fe}_2^{\text{II/III}}$ clusters observed in other carboxylate-bridged $\text{Fe}_2^{\text{II/III}}$ proteins (25, 26) upon dithionite reduction of recombinant AurF isolated from *E. coli* grown in Fe-supplemented minimal medium. Interestingly, Zhao and co-workers also reported the EPR spectrum of oxidized AurF grown in Luria Bertani (LB) medium and noted that it exhibits an EPR signal

associated with manganese (17). Specifically, they noted that the spectrum resembled those of “a mononuclear Mn^{IV} species” (27) and *E. coli* “ribonucleotide reductase enzyme containing a $\text{Fe}^{\text{III}}\text{–Mn}^{\text{III}}$ center” (28). They reasoned that Mn was taken up in lieu of Fe and tested the idea by producing AurF in *E. coli* grown in minimal medium supplemented with Mn. The resulting AurF was found to contain 2 Mn per protein but to lack enzymatic activity *in vivo*.

The EPR spectrum of “oxidized AurF” grown on LB medium (Figure 1A of ref (17)) is similar to that of the *C. trachomatis* $\text{Mn}^{\text{III}}/\text{Fe}^{\text{III}}\text{-R2-R1}\cdot\text{CDP}\cdot\text{ATP}$ complex (9) (Figure 1).² The overall splitting of the signals of the putative $\text{Mn}^{\text{III}}/\text{Fe}^{\text{III}}$ -AurF is smaller, implying that the absolute magnitude of A_{Mn} is less. However, a similar hyperfine pattern is observed (indicated by dotted lines), revealing A_{Mn} to be anisotropic also in the putative $\text{Mn}^{\text{III}}/\text{Fe}^{\text{III}}$ -AurF. Our estimates for the A_{Mn} - and g -tensors obtained by simulation of the published spectrum [$A_{\text{Mn}} = (210, 270, 322)$ MHz; $g = (2.030, 2.014, 2.015)^3$] are consistent with the hypothesis that the Mn^{III} site is AF-coupled to a high-spin Fe^{III} site, yielding the $S = 1/2$ ground state. Although the magnitude of A_{Mn} of AurF is less than that of A_{Mn} of the *C. trachomatis* $\text{Mn}^{\text{III}}/\text{Fe}^{\text{III}}\text{-R2-R1}\cdot\text{CDP}\cdot\text{ATP}$ complex, it is very similar to A_{Mn} of the Mn^{III} site of the $\text{Mn}_2^{\text{III/IV}}$ cluster of catalase (11), after correcting for the different spin coupling coefficients of the two systems using standard methods (29).⁴ This analysis yields the following intrinsic hyperfine tensors (a_{Mn}): $a_{\text{Mn}} = (-158, -205, -213)$ MHz for catalase and $a_{\text{Mn}} = (-158, -203, -242)$ MHz for AurF.

We thus propose that AurF harbors a heterodinuclear Mn/Fe cluster. This proposal allows the seemingly contradictory observations by the Zhao and Hertweck groups to be reconciled. The hypothesis is supported by the following facts: (i) the EPR spectrum of “oxidized AurF” grown on LB medium is similar to that of the $\text{Mn}^{\text{III}}/\text{Fe}^{\text{III}}\text{-R2-R1}\cdot\text{CDP}\cdot\text{ATP}$ complex of *C. trachomatis* RNR (9); (ii) both groups provided evidence for the presence of iron and manganese in their preparations of AurF (16, 17); and (iii) expression of AurF under (presumably) Fe-limited conditions results in inactive dimanganese enzyme (17).

A plausible mechanism for the AurF-catalyzed reaction(s) is shown in Scheme 1E. Activation of O_2 at the $\text{Mn}^{\text{II}}/\text{Fe}^{\text{II}}$ complex could form a $\text{Mn}^{\text{IV}}/\text{Fe}^{\text{IV}}$ intermediate similar to that detected in the *C. trachomatis* R2 activation reaction (Scheme 1D) (9, 13). The $\text{Mn}^{\text{IV}}/\text{Fe}^{\text{IV}}$ intermediate could oxidize the substrate by two electrons (either as *N*-oxygenation or dehydrogenation), resulting in the resting $\text{Mn}^{\text{III}}/\text{Fe}^{\text{III}}$ state, which, we propose, is the state that gives rise to the EPR

² The spectrum reported for the oxidized form of *S. thioluteus* AurF grown on LB medium was recorded with a microwave frequency (9.06 GHz) different than for the spectrum of the *C. trachomatis* $\text{Mn}^{\text{III}}/\text{Fe}^{\text{III}}\text{-R2-R1}\cdot\text{CDP}\cdot\text{ATP}$ complex (9.45 GHz). Therefore, the spectra are plotted with *g* as the abscissa.

³ To account for the shape of the EPR spectrum of AurF, we assumed an anisotropic line width of (30, 30, 20) G. Simulations with isotropic line width could reproduce the positions of the peaks but could not match their shapes as well.

⁴ The Mn^{III} sites of the proposed $\text{Mn}^{\text{III}}/\text{Fe}^{\text{III}}$ cluster of AurF and of the $\text{Mn}_2^{\text{III/IV}}$ cluster of catalase have spin coupling coefficients of $-4/3$ and $+2$ for the $S_{\text{Total}} = 1/2$ states, respectively, in the strong exchange coupling limit ($J \gg D$).

⁵ The EPR spectrum of the proposed $\text{Mn}^{\text{III}}/\text{Fe}^{\text{III}}$ cluster might well be perturbed by the binding of substrate or product, as seen for the case of *C. trachomatis* R2.

gi 41322768	-----	-----MREEQ	PHLATWAAAR	GWVEEGIGS	ATLGRLVRAW	PRRAAVVN--	-KADILDEWA	52
gi 111019967	-----	-M IIDDLQCSDA	DGLVHLPLGLP	SFDPADEAEN	AVISRLAGNW	HRRSTVK---	-RDEPDLDL	56
gi 111023067	-----	-----	MTFQKTPSLP	EYDPSDPVES	AVVSRRLARNW	GQRATVK---	-KPEPDLLA	45
gi 92114812	-----	-----	---MYTATD	PFAPARESE-	-ILARLTDNW	NQRVTVR---	-KARLDLSD	39
gi 108762941	MRRQTPPARL	QTRNDSPLQL	KADDGALVTQ	PLSGDSSAAR	RFLTRLGPHW	ARQAAVK---	-NKEPSLTE	65
gi 118733227	-----	-----	-----MNL	DISRTDDAVR	DALKKLSLLW	KSRAAVN---	-QDLDPYCG	39
gi 84353437	-----	-----	-----	-----MTTA	VTYVSHVDRW	EARATVR---	----SRPRRI	27
gi 77461577	-----	-----	-----	---MSALAPK	PVFQFTLSDW	NTRASVATSP	HDYHLPDNVQ	37
* *								
gi 41322768	53	DYDTLVPDYP	LEIVPFAEHP	LFLAAEPHQR	QRVLTGMWIG	YNERVIATEQ	LIAEPAFDLV	MHGVPFGSDD 122
gi 111019967	57	LFDAGRADYP	EGIVPFRDHP	TWQAMPDAMR	SRLLSAWAWIA	YNRHTVIAEQ	RVANPAFALV	MDGEFFPGLGG 126
gi 111023067	46	LFDLDKQDYP	NDLLPFADHD	RFLGMREEQR	NQLRAWAWIA	FNKNVMDIEQ	YVVNPGFDLV	AHDALDTLGG 115
gi 92114812	40	YYDTSAPDFP	PSMVPFWDHP	RFQAIIDEAK	RRVLGAWIN	YNEKTIFVED	KVINPLCSLL	MKGALPGVDD 109
gi 108762941	66	LLEPAKPDFA	ERLLPFRDHP	TYQGLDEAMK	RRVLSGGLI	YNERVVRVEL	DVVNPVCNDV	LLSKLPGATS 135
gi 118733227	40	AFDPAQDFT	ASLLPFRDHP	AWVEAPQHLR	DQCLSYAWGI	YNLKTIIYIEC	NVVTACEDI	IKTPPPSANR 109
gi 84353437	28	VEDDELRYYP	LERQPLCAHP	AIVDAGDAVR	DFVLLQSFYK	YIQDVIIIFET	EIVNATALRI	ARGRFAHPPF 97
gi 77461577	38	EQLETRHWFP	PAFLPYLAHP	SIEAAGRSML	HRLTARHLVH	FLDYTTLLLEH	RIVNRAVETI	VHGELPVAVP 107
* *								
gi 41322768	123	PLIRKSVQQA	IVDESFHTYM	HMLAIDRTRE	LR-KISERPP	QPELVTYRRL	RRVLADMPEQ	WERDIAVLVW 191
gi 111019967	127	QMDIALAQA	MVDEQYHTLM	HINASALTRR	KRGNPFPPDSA	LPESHTSRTH	RRLRAHAER	WQSLTTLAF 196
gi 111023067	116	DTFAVAHQ	MVDEQYHTLM	HLNASAVTRR	QRGWAMPNNA	LPDVLTLRRQ	RAATADAADP	RKRAITTFAP 185
gi 92114812	110	TVSKKAIAQT	QVDEQFHILM	CLEVCDCARR	QHR--LQDLH	IPTPLLGQRM	DASLAKAENE	REYALIRMA 177
gi 108762941	136	QAAREMAQA	LVD EAYHILL	VVRACRLTRE	QRG--LEDLR	LPVVGVVRRM	HARQASCAEA	WQRLVQLMT 203
gi 118733227	110	ALLQDVMSQA	LLDEALHTRM	SIMACNYIYE	MRG--LAPLD	YADFNLVGWR	NGVLAQCGAE	WERRLARFAI 177
gi 84353437	98	FACRQDAMTV	VIDEDYHAYV	AMDYLRQVEE	ATG--IAPLP	PNSEIELSRA	IPRAVERVGA	QYRDGMELL 165
gi 77461577	108	APMKTAALQL	YTDEGYHALF	SSQVABEQIAS	----LYAIAG	RPVMPRRITR	MNLLIARTGQ	EQRPLACPLL 173
** *								
gi 41322768	192	GAVAETCINA	LLALLARDAT	IQPMHSLITT	LHLRDETAHG	SIVVEVVREL	YARMNEQQR	ALVRCLPIAL 261
gi 111019967	197	ATVSEISINA	YLDLLADDHD	IQVNVSTTAK	LHNREDEYCHA	SISDEMAKLV	YDVLDPVKRR	FFLDMLVAGL 266
gi 111023067	186	MTVAEISISS	YLDLISENDV	IQPVNRATVR	LHNREDEYCHA	SIADDIAGVV	YDTLSPHDRR	HFLDGLVDAM 255
gi 92114812	178	ATVAEMTINV	FLKRLSQDRS	IQPLNRLNTE	LHRQDEASHA	AIFGEIARAV	YERLGAGQQA	IFRAHLLRAI 247
gi 108762941	204	GVATEMCISR	YLSLLSTASE	IQAFNRVTTA	LHQDEASHV	DLFGTLARDV	FNALPEVQQE	FVREILPLPW 273
gi 118733227	178	ACASETLITD	YKLTMAEDRS	IQPICHEVTR	THAVDEWSHS	SVFSSVATDI	VQGLSNRERS	YLRSIILKTV 247
gi 84353437	166	VAISENTVTA	EVAAFSRDAT	LKRSVKGVMA	DHLADEGRHS	AFWINLVKLY	WSEIDEPARL	ALGEGLPCLF 235
gi 77461577	174	GFVSEETIAR	ELLDVCRDSL	VSGVN-DMLR	DHLTDEARHS	RYFTEVFHYL	WLHLNPRQRT	FTATLLDLIL 242
* * * *								
gi 41322768	262	EAFAEQDLA	LLLELNAAGI	RGAEIEVGD	RSTAGGTRLV	RDFSGARKMV	EQGLDLDVAD	FDFPERPDWS 331
gi 111019967	267	DAFVATDYST	WEAIFRIEKV	TGWKMLADV	RAEKSGARLV	RDYSGLYSLM	SDMNVLDGVD	FDWGLAVTGK 336
gi 111023067	256	TAFSSNDYST	WHTIVDILD	DGGQAMIDDA	EHDTRRSALV	QDFSGIHKLC	KHLGVAGEMS	FEWA----- 319
gi 92114812	248	DDFVELDVGF	WRVLDHLEI	PRRHGLQDM	TAKGRASRL	RDYGALVKLL	RRIGIDEGPS	FIFQ----- 311
gi 108762941	274	LWFSEGEADV	WRSVLLQLGI	PRADVMDDC	IANKLLSANE	RAMTDAQKFS	EALGIDNIHW	DRAAALL--- 340
gi 118733227	248	QMFANNEELGA	WSTVFTMVGM	PHARDILHDV	GDSNEIGVYT	DSVQSLIDRI	GLAGRNLGGS	VALVSSVLEE 317
gi 84353437	236	REYLSADLQL	QFDRRLIDAL	DLPAEAERAI	ADDMVGAYPI	TSQHPMIVNI	RQFFRMSGLL	DHAPTRAALS 305
gi 77461577	243	ELFFDVDEHW	LQESLRGAGI	ANTTVREILG	TMTTAQARRQ	RARAGSLATL	SALKKAGFFT	EPQNTLFLAR 312
* * * *								
gi 41322768	332	PHTPR-	336					
gi 111019967	-----							
gi 111023067	-----							
gi 92114812	-----							
gi 108762941	-----							
gi 118733227	318	MQA---	320					
gi 84353437	306	DYL---	308					
gi 77461577	313	AGLIDG	318					

FIGURE 2: CLUSTALW alignment of the amino acid sequences of *S. thioluteus* AurF (gi|41322768) and hypothetical proteins from *Rhodococcus* sp. RHA1 (gi|111019967 and gi|111023067), *Chromohalobacter salexigens* DSM 3043 (gi|92114812), *Myxococcus xanthus* DK 1622 (gi|108762941), *Delftia acidovorans* SPH-1 (gi|118733227), *Burkholderia cenocepacia* PC184 (gi|84353437), and *Pseudomonas fluorescens* PfO-1 (gi|77461577). Conserved residues are shown in boldface. The proposed ligands to the Mn/Fe center are shown in red. Presumed important second-sphere residues are shown in blue.

signal observed by Zhao and co-workers.⁵ By analogy to the bacterial multicomponent monooxygenases, the resting state could then be reduced to the Mn^{II}/Fe^{II} form by an NAD-(P)H-dependent reductase component. Interestingly, hydrogen peroxide was shown to support turnover of the aforementioned MBP–AurF fusion protein when it was immobilized on chromatography resin (16). Oxidation of the Mn^{III}/Fe^{III} cluster by H₂O₂ could directly generate the active Mn^{IV}/Fe^{IV} intermediate, circumventing the reduction step. This so-called “peroxide shunt” was also previously demonstrated for sMMO (30). Our proposed mechanism incorporates the most important feature of the Hertweck hypothesis—the presence of high-valent Mn in the key oxidant (16)—but contrasts with the Zhao hypothesis that AurF is a diiron

protein, which would be expected to employ a mechanism similar to the one shown in Scheme 1F (17).

Sequence database searches revealed a number of hypothetical proteins with similarity to *S. thioluteus* AurF.⁶ None of these proteins has been assigned a function. An alignment of a subset of these sequences reveals several conserved amino acids (Figure 2). They include the two EX_{28–33} DEX₂H motifs (23) (bold faced residues are strictly conserved) previously recognized by Zhao and co-workers (17). As in the diiron-carboxylate proteins, the glutamate and histidine residues should be ligands to the dinuclear cluster, whereas

⁶ The identified sequences were deposited after the studies by the Hertweck and Zhao groups (17, 20).

the aspartate residue preceding each coordinating EX₂H should hydrogen bond with the uncoordinated nitrogen atom of the histidine ligand contributed by the opposite EX₂H motif (14, 31).

In conclusion, we propose that AurF from *S. thioluteus* and the hypothetical proteins with related sequences may be Mn/Fe-dependent oxygenases. Testing this hypothesis should be straightforward. As for the case of *C. trachomatis* R2, neither Fe^{II} nor Mn^{II} should activate preparations of the metal-free (apo) enzymes when added individually, but addition of the two together should yield marked activation.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Analysis of the EPR Spectrum. The published EPR spectrum of AurF was simulated with the program SimFonia from Bruker (Billerica, MA) according to the second-order-perturbation method.

Sequence Analysis. The amino acid sequence of AurF was used to query the database at NCBI (www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov) with their BLAST v2.0 program. The results were aligned with CLUSTALW (www.ch.embnet.org/software/Clustal-W.html).

NOTE ADDED IN PROOF

While this manuscript was under review, the three-dimensional structure of AurF was reported by Schulz, Hertweck, and co-workers, who concluded from their data that the enzyme is “a di-manganese monooxygenase” (32). Anomalous diffraction experiments suggested that the AurF present in the crystals also contained ~ 15% iron. Although their data would suggest that AurF selects manganese in slight preference to iron under the growth and over-expression conditions employed in their study, the authors noted that “it remains conceivable...that the observed activity is caused by the low iron content of AurF,” consistent with our hypothesis that the enzyme uses a heterodinuclear cofactor. Interestingly, the conserved histidine residue that precedes the second EX₂H motif (His223 in AurF) provides a ligand to metal site 1 that is not present in other known di-iron oxidases and oxygenases. Sequence alignments presented above and in the Schulz and Hertweck study show that the “extra” His ligand is conserved among all the sequences tentatively assigned here as manganese- and iron-dependent oxygenases. Hertweck and Schulz suggested that this extra His ligand confers specificity for Mn; thus, we would suggest that metal site 1 binds manganese, as we have also proposed for the manganese- and iron-dependent ribonucleotide reductase R2 subunit from *C. trachomatis* (9).

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BI701060G