

# *Progress in* **CLINICAL ENZYMOLOGY** **Volume 2**

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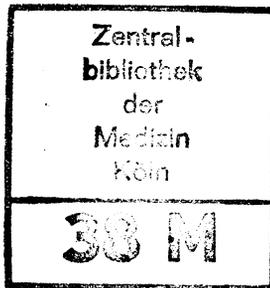
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# Contents

Preface	iii
Contributors	v
<b>Part I. INTERPRETATION AND STANDARDIZATION</b>	
1. A Path for the Future of Clinical Enzymology A. BURLINA	1
2. Modern Diagnostic Strategies in Clinical Enzymology H. KELLER and U. GESSNER	5
3. Diagnostic Enzyme Tests: New Approaches to Their Evaluation D. M. GOLDBERG and G. ELLIS	17
4. Interlaboratory Comparability of Enzyme Measurements R. REJ, J.-P. BRETAUDIÈRE, and M. HØRDER	25
5. Requirements and Functions of Reference Materials for Enzymes M. HØRDER and R. REJ	29
6. A Three-Year Documentation of Enzyme Accuracy Controls H. J. GIBITZ and D. HAUCH	35
7. Use of Patient Samples to Provide Additional Quality Assurance in Enzyme Analysis H. J. GIBITZ and J. SCHWANINGER	39
<b>Part II. LIVER AND PANCREAS</b>	
8. Enzyme Patterns in Liver and Serum of Rats During Growth and Aging E. SCHMIDT, F. W. SCHMIDT, R. BOTH, S. OHLENDORF, R. RAUPACH, and U. STARR	43
9. Effect of Diet and Cell Damage on Enzyme Activities in Different Hepatic Cells E. SCHMIDT, F. W. SCHMIDT, S. OHLENDORF, and R. RAUPACH	53
10. Effect of Heterotopic Pancreas Transplantation on Hepatic Enzymes in Streptozotocin Diabetic Rats E. SCHMIDT, F. W. SCHMIDT, S. OHLENDORF, R. RAUPACH, and I. B. BREKKE	63
11. N-Acetyl- $\beta$ -D-glucosaminidase Isoenzymes in Liver Disease and Cancer P. R. N. KIND	69
12. Diagnostic Value of Serum Trypsin Levels J. M. GATELL ARTIGAS, S. NAVARRO COLAS, R. M. AUUSED FAURE, M. ELENA, and A. M. BALLESTA	73
13. Diagnosis of Pancreatic Disease by Fluorometric Determination of Plasma Trypsin H. RINDERKNECHT, N. F. ADHAM, I. G. RENNER, and S. B. ABRAMSON	77
14. Application of an Amylase Inhibitor to a Kinetic Amylase Assay K. BIRATH	85
15. Purification of Human Mitochondrial Aspartate Aminotransferase Using Ion-Exchange and Affinity Chromatography O. KOLDKJAER	89

16. Purified Gamma-glutamyltransferase as an Enzyme Reference Material 95  
F. SCHIELE, J. MARÉCHAL, and M.-M. GALTEAU
17. Gamma-glutamyltransferase: Identification of the Multiple Forms 99  
R. PENN and D. J. WORTHINGTON
18. Gamma-Glutamyltransferase Isoenzyme Patterns in Hepatobiliary Disease  
Using a New Fluorescence Method 107  
E. NEMESÁNSZKY, S. B. ROSALKI, A. Y. FOO, W. JENKINS, and S. SHERLOCK

## Part III. ACID PHOSPHATASE

19. Acid Phosphatase: An Archetype of the Role of Isoenzyme Analysis in  
Clinical Enzymology 113  
D. W. MOSS
20. Determination of Acid Phosphatase; Problems and Analytic Advances 125  
W. HOHENWALLNER
21. Enzymatic Methods of Acid Phosphatase Measurement 131  
G. GUNDLACH
22. Isozymes of Acid Phosphatase 141  
W. S. OSTROWSKI
23. Immunological Methods in Acid Phosphatase Measurement 157  
P. VIHKO
24. Prostate-Specific Acid Phosphatase: A Comparative Evaluation of Three  
Techniques (RIA, ELISA, EIA) in Prostate Disease 165  
J. GRIFFITHS
25. Direct Immunoassay for Prostatic Acid Phosphatase: Development and  
Clinical Results 171  
G. T. B. SANDERS, G. P. DE VRIES, and N. F. DABHOIWALA
26. A Solid-Phase Immunosorbent Assay for Prostatic Acid Phosphatase 175  
H. HACKENBERG, G. GUNZER, N. HENNRICH, and S. NEUMANN
27. Histochemical and Cytochemical Use of Acid Phosphatase 181  
F. SCHMALZL and C. WIEDERMANN
28. Comparison of Testicular Acid Phosphatases in Man, Miniature Pig, and  
Blue and Hybrid Foxes 191  
T. VANHA-PERTTULA, R. RYTÖLUÖTO-KARKKAINEN, and K. GUHA

## Part IV. IMMOBILIZED ENZYMES

29. Enzyme Attachment and Immobilization in Biology 199  
M. WERNER, C. GARRETT, A. CHIU, and L. KLEMPNER
30. Changes in Specific Enzyme Characteristics upon Binding onto Surfaces 209  
M. STASTNY and H. H. WEETALL
31. Immobilized Enzymes in Continuous-Flow Analysis 219  
C. HORVÁTH
32. Immobilized Creatinase in Analytical Continuous-Flow Systems 231  
S. CAMBIAGHI, D. BASSI, E. MURODOR, G. AIMO, A. CAROPRESO, and C. ROSSO
33. ELISA in Infectious Diseases 241  
A. VOLLER and D. E. BIDWELL

34.	An Enzyme Electrode for the Determination of Urine Oxalate P. VADGAMA, J. M. FUY, M. F. LAKER, and A. K. COVINGTON	247
35.	Immobilization of Alkaline Phosphatase by Various Procedures to the Same Carrier—A Comparison F. PITTNER	251
36.	Purification of Alkaline Phosphatase from Calf Intestine by Immunosorbent Affinity Chromatography A. HORN, R. BUBLITZ, M. SCHULZE, and H. EHLE	255
Part V. MISCELLANEOUS		
37.	Clinical Enzymology of the Eye O. HOCKWIN, CH. OHRLOFF, N. J. VAN HAERINGEN, K. HOFFMANN, M. REIM, and U. WURSTER	261
38.	Urinary Enzyme Excretion in Protein-Overload Proteinuria D. MARUHN, D. PAAR, H. G. HARTMANN, K. D. BOCK, E. BOMBHARD, and D. LORKE	273
39.	Isoamylases in the Diagnosis of Acute Salpingitis G. SKUDE	277
40.	Degradation of Major Proteins of Human Central Nervous System Myelin by Soluble Enzymes of Human Peripheral Polymorphonuclear Leucocytes S. C. RASTOGI and J. CLAUSEN	281
41.	Increased Levels of Two Distinct Elastase-Like Hydrolases in Plasma During Septicemia L. P. NELLES, H. P. SCHNEBLI, M. HOCHUM, and K. H. DUSWALD	289
42.	Enzyme-Linked Immunoassay for Human Granulocyte Elastase/ $\alpha_1$ -Proteinase Inhibitor Complex S. NEUMANN, N. HENNRICH, G. GUNZER, and H. LANG	293
43.	Purification and Comparison of Aminopeptidases from Human Maternal Serum and Placental Particle Preparation K. LALU, S. LAMPELO, and T. VANHA-PERTTULA	299
44.	Enzymatic Reactions Involving 3-Hydroxy-3-Methylglutarate R. DEANA, F. RIGONI, G. QUADRO, and L. GALZIGNA	311
45.	Conductimetric Measurement of Enzymatic Activities J. M. WALLACH	317
46.	Determination of Pseudocholinesterase Activity Using <i>p</i> -Hydroxybenzoate Hydroxylase as a Linked Enzyme Y. KASAHARA, Y. ASHIHARA, M. SUGIYAMA, and T. HARADA	321
47.	Biochemical Properties of Human Serum Cholinesterases (EC 3.1.1.8) from Patients with Elevated Enzyme Activity R. SCHUBERT, J. SASSMANNSHAUSEN, and A. DELBRUCK	323
48.	The Diagnostic Value of the Choline Ester-Splitting Enzymes in Cerebrospinal Fluid G. SIMON, G. CONSTANTINOVITS, E. NAGY, Z. NYÁRY, and A. BRASCH	329
	Index	333

## CHAPTER 41

# Increased Levels of Two Distinct Elastase-Like Hydrolases in Plasma During Septicemia

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### Introduction

Many of the complications of septicemia are believed to be initiated by endotoxin, resulting in activation of the complement system and, through Hageman factor, in massive activation of the kinin, coagulation, and fibrinolytic systems. Furthermore, endotoxin has been shown to stimulate polymorphonuclear leukocytes to release large amounts of neutral proteinases, particularly elastase.<sup>1,2</sup> Activation of the plasma proteolytic systems together with the release of enzymes from the phagocytic cells may overwhelm the proteinase inhibitors, and therefore allow the proteinases to cause local tissue and organ damage.<sup>2</sup> In addition, granulocyte elastase may also contribute directly to "intravascular turmoil" through kinin formation,<sup>3</sup> activation and degradation of coagulation factor XIII,<sup>4</sup> as well as inactivation of antithrombin III,<sup>5</sup> a key coagulation system regulator.

The present experiments were undertaken to measure and characterize elastase(s) and other proteinases released into

the plasma during septicemia. Earlier reports of immunoreactive  $\alpha_1$ -antitrypsin elastase complexes in serum of septic patients<sup>1</sup> and endotoxin-treated dogs<sup>2</sup> suggested that  $\alpha_2$ M( $\alpha_2$ -macroglobin)-proteinase complexes would also be present under these conditions. The methods used in the present study are based on the fact that  $\alpha_2$ M-bound proteinases retain hydrolytic activity toward small molecular weight synthetic substrates, but are unable to attack large (protein substrates).<sup>8</sup>

### Materials and Methods

Plasma samples were obtained from six patients who had undergone major abdominal surgery and later developed septicemia. The samples were taken at irregular intervals for approximately 48 hours following signs of generalized infection. Control plasma was obtained from six healthy donors.

Plasma proteinase levels were quantified<sup>6</sup> by measuring the release of p-nitroaniline from the following chromogenic sub-

strates: Succ-Ala<sub>3</sub>-p-NA\* (Bachem, Bubendorf, CH), MeO-Succ-Ala<sub>2</sub>-Pro-Val-p-NA† (CIBA-GEIGY, Basle), substrates for elastaselike enzymes; Bz-Arg-p-NA‡ (Sigma, St. Louis, Mo.), a substrate for trypsinlike enzymes; and Succ-Phe-p-NA§ (Sigma), a substrate for chymotrypsinlike enzymes. In the assay, 0.2 ml of plasma was diluted with 0.2 ml of 0.1 M Tris-Cl buffer, pH 7.5, containing 1 mM substrate (except for Succ-Ala<sub>3</sub>-NA, which was 5 mM). The mixture was incubated at 37° C for 1–6 hours and the reaction was stopped by the addition of 1 ml of 7.5% trichloroacetic acid. The protein was removed by centrifugation, and the nitroaniline released was reacted to form a purple azo-dye by addition of 25 µl each of sodium nitrite (1.8%), ammonium sulfamate (9%), and N-1-naphthyl-ethylene-diamine di-HCl (1.8%, Sigma). The absorbance of the colored product was measured at 550 nm. Alpha<sub>2</sub>-macroglobulin was quantified according to a modification<sup>6</sup> of the method of Gantrot.<sup>8</sup>

Separation of elastaselike enzymes from plasma was accomplished by applying a 2.75-ml sample to a column (2.6 × 94 cm) of Sephacryl S-300 superfine (Pharmacia, Uppsala), previously equilibrated with 0.02 M sodium citrate buffer, pH 6.5, with 0.15 M NaCl and 0.04% NaN<sub>3</sub>. The column was eluted with the same buffer at a flow rate of 13.5 ml/hr.

## Results and Discussion

Plasma samples taken at several times within a 2-day period from six patients suffering from severe septicemia were analyzed for their content of peptide hydrolases and compared to samples taken from

six normal volunteers. Plasma from all six patients had markedly elevated levels of hydrolases cleaving the four substrates. The degree of elevation is illustrated Figure 1, where the hydrolase levels in pooled plasma from the normal individuals (N) and from the septic patients (S) are compared.

In order to examine more closely the elastase-like hydrolase activities in septic plasma, a sample with high activities was fractionated on a column of Sephacryl S-300 superfine (Fig. 2, top). The hydrolase activity of the elastaselike enzymes showed two main peaks. The First peak (Peak I) had a molecular weight > 10<sup>6</sup> daltons and cleaved the Succ-Ala<sub>3</sub>-p-NA substrate, but was nearly devoid of MeO-Succ-Ala<sub>2</sub>-Pro-Val-p-NA hydrolase activity. As shown in Table 1, this enzyme was completely inactivated by 1,10 phenanthroline, an inhibitor of metalloenzymes, but was insensitive to phenyl-methyl-sulfonyl-fluoride (Pms-F), a small molecular weight inhibitor of serine proteinases, as well as to Eglin C and the Bowman-Birk soybean, both inhibitors of leukocyte elastase. In addition, it was sensitive to EDTA but unaffected by the sulfhydryl reagents, dithiothreitol β-mercaptoethanol.

The second peak eluted together with α<sub>2</sub>M (Mw ~ 8 × 10<sup>5</sup> daltons) and hydrolyzed both the MeO-Succ-Ala<sub>2</sub>-Pro-Val-p-NA and the Succ-Ala<sub>3</sub>-p-NA substrates, the former being hydrolyzed about six times faster. This enzyme activity (Table 1) was insensitive to 1,10 phenanthroline, but it was sensitive toward Pms-F, as well as toward Elgin C, which has previously been shown to inhibit leukocyte elastase complexed with α<sub>2</sub>M (M.J., unpublished observation). A significant degree of inhibition is also observed with the relatively small molecular weight Bowman-Birk soybean inhibitor.

Based on the molecular weight, substrate specificity, and inhibitor pattern, we conclude that the second peak of peptide hydrolase activity corresponds to α<sub>2</sub>M-leukocyte elastase complex. This is further

\*N-succinyl-L-alanyl-L-alanyl-L-alanyl-p-nitroanilide.

†Methoxy-succinyl-L-alanyl-L-alanyl-L-prolyl-L-valyl-p-nitroanilide.

‡N-benzoyl-L-arginyl-p-nitroanilide.

§Succinyl-phenylalanyl-p-nitroanilide.

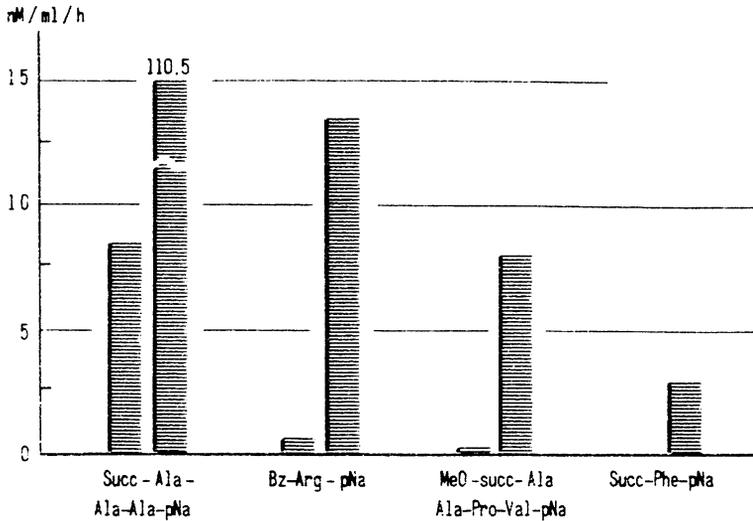


FIGURE 1. Hydrolysis of different peptide nitroanilides by normal plasma and plasma from septic shock patients (pool of six).

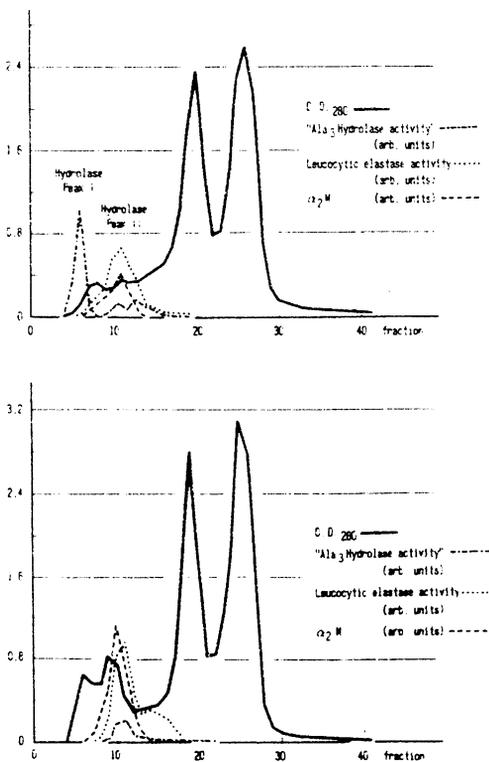


FIGURE 2. Top: separation of plasma proteins from a septic shock patient on Sephacryl 5300. Bottom: calibration of Sephacryl 5300 with normal human plasma to which purified human leukocyte elastase was added.

supported by another experiment, where isolated purified leukocyte elastase was added to normal plasma and fractionated on the same Sephacryl column: the artificial  $\alpha_2M$ -elastase complexes eluted at the same place (Fig. 2, bottom) and showed an identical inhibition pattern. Peak I activity on the other hand is clearly unrelated to leukocyte elastase; it is a metalloenzyme, very highly specific for Succ-Ala<sub>2</sub>-p-NA, and has a molecular weight which is so large as to suggest aggregates or association with small particles. Similar metal-dependent peptide hydrolase activities have been described previously in patients with liver disease.<sup>9,10</sup>

Septicemia and septic shock is apparently associated with a raise in serum leukocyte elastase levels, shown here as  $\alpha_2M$  complexes and in agreement with the occurrence of  $\alpha_1$ -AT complexes demonstrable by immunological means.<sup>1,2,12</sup> In addition, there occurs a massive increase of a metalloenzyme hydrolyzing Succ-Ala<sub>3</sub>-p-NA. This latter activity may reflect an involvement of the liver—a general feature of endotoxemia and septic shock.<sup>11</sup>

**TABLE 1.** Inhibition of partially purified peptide hydrolases from plasma of septic shock patients

Inhibitors		Substrate	
		Peak I: Succ-Ala- Ala-Ala- pNA	Peak II: MeO-succ-Ala- Ala-Pro-Val- pNA
1,10 Phenanthrolin	1 mM	96%	2%
Phenylmethyl-sulfonyl fluorid	1 mM	7%	91%
Eglin	10 µg/ml	1%	96%
Bowman-Birk soybean inhibitor	10 µg/ml	0%	44%
Bowman-Birk soybean inhibitor	50 µg/ml	14%	75%

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