Accumulation of Lignans by in vitro Cultures of Three Linum Species

Abdolali Mohagheghzadeh*a,*, Shadab Dehshahria, and Shiva Hemmatia,b

a Department of Pharmacognosy, Faculty of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences
Research Center, Shiraz University of Medical Sciences and Health Services,
P. O. Box 71345-1583, Shiraz, I. R. Iran. Fax: +98-711-2426070.
E-mail: Mohaghegh@sums.ac.ir

b Institut für Entwicklungs- und Molekularbiologie der Pflanzen, Heinrich-Heine-Universität
Düsseldorf, Universitätsstr. 1, D-40225 Düsseldorf, Germany

* Author for correspondence and reprint requests

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Dedicated to Dr. Gholamreza Asghari, Professor of Pharmacognosy, Isfahan Faculty of Pharmacy, Isfahan on the occasion of his birthday

Justicidin B, an arylphthalene lignan, has strong cytotoxicity on chronic myeloid and chronic lymphoid leukemia cell lines. The first report of the production of justicidin B in a Linum species concerned in vitro culture of Linum austriacum. Therefore, culture characterization and presence of arylphthalene-type lignans in calli and plantlets of Linum tenuifolium from section Linastrum, Linum bienne, and Linum glaucum from section Linum were studied. Seed germination of L. tenuifolium in the light and darkness was significantly higher (p < 0.05) than of L. bienne in the light and L. glaucum in the darkness. L. tenuifolium seedling length in the darkness was significantly higher (p < 0.01) than under light conditions. There were no significant differences in the calli and shoot biomass weight, number and length of shoots in three species over one month, while the shoot diameter of L. bienne was significantly different (p < 0.05) from that of L. glaucum. Justicidin B was detected in L. glaucum callus and plantlet cultures by HPLC/MS/UV-DAD and HPLC coupled with a photodiode array detector. This finding is important from pharmaceutical point of view and shows the chemosystematic relation between L. glaucum and L. austriacum and this method will be a powerful tool for detecting natural products in interested and endangered medicinal plants.

Key words: Justicidin B, Lignan, Linum

Introduction

Lignans are monolignol-derived dimers (Hemmati et al., 2007). They form a large group of natural products, which show diverse biological effects. Lignans may serve as lead compounds for the development of new therapeutic agents with cytotoxic, antiangiogenic, antileishmanial, antifungal, hypolipidemic, antiasthmatic and antiviral activity (Vasilev and Ionkova, 2005).

Linum, the largest genus of the family Linaceae, comprises about 230 species distributed throughout the world (Heywood, 1985). The genus Linum is divided into the sections Syllinum, Cathartolinum, Dasylinum, Linum and Linastrum according to classical taxonomy based on morphological characters (Ockendon and Walters, 1968).

The occurrence of lignans in the genus Linum is documented since 1975 (Weiss et al., 1975). In the genus Linum the main types of lignans belong to the dibenzylbutane group (e.g. secoisolariciresinol diglucoside, SDG), aryltetralin group (e.g. podophyllotoxin, PTOX) and arylphthalene group (e.g. justicidin B, Fig. 1) (Bakke and Klosterman, 1956; Broomhard and Dewick, 1990; Mohagheghzadeh et al., 2002). Justicidin B was isolated for the first time in the genus Linum from Linum austriacum and was previously known from Justicia spp. (Acanthaceae) and Haplophyllum spp. (Rutaceae). Since the structure of justicidin B is closely related to PTOX, it was hypothesized that justici-
din B may have similar cytotoxic effects as PTOX. Justicidin B was established to be the cytotoxic principle of Justicia pectoralis (Vasilev and Ionkova, 2005).

Nowadays, sustainable bioproduction of the compounds of interest may be achieved by plant in vitro cultures. For example PTOX – an anticancer compound – can be produced in cell suspension and root as well as hairy root cultures of Podophyllum and various Linum species (Wink et al., 2005).

Herein, the presence of arylnaphthalene-type lignans in in vitro cultures of three species of Linum, evaluation of seed germination and shoot and calli cultures growth measurements were studied.

Results and Discussion

Seed germination was done successfully. The germination rate of L. tenuifolium seeds in the light and darkness was significantly higher (p < 0.05) than of L. bienne in the light and L. glaucum in the darkness. L. tenuifolium seedling length in the darkness was significantly higher (p < 0.01) than under light condition (Table I). However in the other two species such a difference was not observed. Calli and shoot formation occurred successfully. There were no significant differences in the calli fresh weight, number and length of shoots in three species over one month, while the shoot diameter of L. bienne was significantly different (p < 0.05) from that of L. glaucum (Table I).

Biomass analysis by HPLC coupled with a photodiode array detector showed the presence of justicidin B, an arylnaphthalene lignan (Fig. 1), in L. glaucum in comparison with the reference compound. However, in the two other species such a compound was not found. Analysis by HPLC/MS/UV-DAD also showed the presence of justicidin B. The ESI positive mode displayed a fragmentation into [M+H]+ at m/z 365 in L. glaucum.

The identification of justicidin B or other arylnaphthalene lignans in L. glaucum in vitro cultures agrees with the morphological data. L. glaucum has many morphological similarities with L. austriacum (Mohagheghzadeh et al., 2003). However, arylnaphthalene-type lignans were not found in L. bienne and L. tenuifolium in vitro cultures.

Justicidin B has cytotoxic effects that make it suitable to be used as a lead compound for the production of new anticancer drugs. Since, the chemical synthesis of justicidin B is not economically feasible, a plant cell culture is an alternative production system, which could be scaled up. These findings are important in the search for new sources for phytopharmaceuticals. It also shows the chemosystematic relation between L. glaucum and L. austriacum. Studying growth characteristics helps to optimize the growth conditions for pharmaceutically valuable plants to achieve significant amounts of chemicals.

Experimental

Plant material

L. tenuifolium L. seeds were collected in August 2001 at Ardabil, Khalkhal – Asalem road, east Azarbaijan province, Iran, at an altitude of 1900 m. L. bienne Mill. seeds were collected in May 2003 at Bostan mountain, Mamasani – Gachsaran road, Kohgiloie and Boir Ahmad province, Iran, at an altitude of 1000 m. L. glaucum Boiss. & Noein Boiss. seeds were collected in August 2001 at Chehel Cheshmeh mountain, Divan Dare, Kordestan province, Iran. The samples were identified by Iraj Mehregan (Institut für Spezielle Botanik und Botanischer Garten, Johannes Gutenberg-Universität, Mainz, Germany) and voucher speci-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Species</th>
<th>Seedling length [mm]</th>
<th>Shoot diameter [mm]</th>
<th>Shoot length [mm]</th>
<th>Calli weight increase [g]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Light</td>
<td>Dark</td>
<td>Light</td>
<td>Dark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L. glaucum</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>36.0</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L. tenuifolium</td>
<td>15.3a</td>
<td>40.3</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L. bienne</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>3.0b</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Values are means ± S.D. (n = 3), ANOVA test.

a Significant different from light condition (p < 0.01).

b Significant different from L. glaucum shoot diameter (p < 0.05).
mens (nos. 240, 231 and 330) were deposited in the herbarium of Faculty of Pharmacy, Shiraz University of Medical Sciences, Shiraz, Iran.

In vitro cultures

After sterilization (1 min in 96% ethanol, then 9 min in 0.5% sodium hypochlorite and washing three times with sterilized distilled water) the seeds were incubated on agar and coconut milk medium for germination. Callus initiation was carried out from seedlings on MS medium (Murashige and Skoog, 1962) supplemented with α-naphthalene acetic acid (NAA, 1 mg/L), kinetin (kn, 0.5 mg/L) and 2,4-dichlorophenoxyacetic acid (2,4-D, 0.5 mg/L). Plantlets or shoots were initiated on MS medium without hormone or MS media supplemented with 2 mg/L kn, respectively. All the media were supplemented with 3% sucrose and solidified with agar (0.8%) at pH 5.6 before autoclaving. Cultures were subcultivated every 4 weeks. All mentioned cultures except for dark-growing calli cultures were maintained under permanent light at (25 ± 2) °C. For growth measurements of calli or shoots, the entire callus or shoot biomass was transferred to a pre-weighted container and the fresh weight was determined. After 4 weeks their weight, length and diameter were measured. The length of the shoots was measured by a vernier caliper (accuracy 0.1 mm). All measurements were done three times.

Lignan analysis

Extraction and detection of arylnaphthalene lignans were performed as described by Empt et al. (2000). Arylnaphthalene lignans were detected by a Chromquest HPLC (Germany) photodiode array detector and a HPLC/MS/UV-DAD Thermo- Finnigan (Germany) instrument. The HPLC-PDA system from Thermoquest (Egelsbach, Germany) was equipped with a Spectra System KO 6000 LP photodiode array detector, an Spectra System AS1000 autosampler, a degaser and a Spectra System P2000 pump. Assay products were separated on a C18 GROM-Sil (Grom, Rottenburg, Germany; particle size 5 μm, 2 cm × 4 mm and 25 cm × 4 mm) column. The elution system was water containing 0.01% phosphoric acid (A) and acetonitrile (B). The following gradient was used: hold, 25–38% B for the first 25 min, 38–43% B in 18 min, 43–55% B in 3 min, 55–70% B in 8 min, 70–25% B in 2 min, hold with 25% B for 4 min. The flow rate was 0.8 mL/min for the first 25 min, reaching 1 mL/min within 18 min, holding at 1 mL/min between 43–56 min, and 0.8 mL/min in the last 4 min. The LC-MS analysis was performed as mentioned by Schmidt et al. (2006).

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