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Christelle Mathé, Tony A Mattioli, Olivier Horner, Murielle Lombard, Jean-Marc Latour, et al.. Identification of iron(III) peroxo species in the active site of the superoxide reductase SOR from *Desulfoarculus baarsii*. Journal of the American Chemical Society, American Chemical Society, 2002, pp.4966-7. <hal-01075797>

HAL Id: hal-01075797

<http://hal.univ-grenoble-alpes.fr/hal-01075797>

Submitted on 20 Oct 2014

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Identification of Iron (III) Peroxo Species in the Active Site of the Superoxide Reductase SOR from *Desulfoarculus baarsii*.

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RECEIVED DATE (will be automatically inserted after manuscript is accepted)

Superoxide reductase (SOR) is a newly discovered activity by which some anaerobic or microaerophilic organisms eliminate superoxide, $O_2^{\cdot-}$.¹ The SOR catalyzed reaction differs from that of well-known superoxide dismutases SOD in that it does not produce O_2 , but instead reduces by one electron $O_2^{\cdot-}$ to form H_2O_2 exclusively: $O_2^{\cdot-} + 1 e^- + 2H^+ \rightarrow H_2O_2$.

The active site of SOR consists of a Fe^{2+} center (center II) in an unusual [$His_4 Cys_1$] square pyramidal pentacoordination.² It reacts specifically at a nearly diffusion-controlled rate with $O_2^{\cdot-}$, generating H_2O_2 and the oxidized form of the enzyme, the ferric iron center II. The SORs (originally called desulfoferrodoxin) found in some sulfate reducing bacteria, e.g. *Desulfoarculus baarsii*^{1b} and *Desulfovibrio desulfuricans*,^{2a,3} contain an additional mononuclear Fe^{3+} center, called center I, coordinated by four cysteines with a distorted rubredoxin-type structure. However, center I is not required for the reaction and, up to now, its function remains unknown.^{1b-c}

Recent pulse radiolysis studies of the reaction of center II with $O_2^{\cdot-}$ have allowed the observation, in the micro and millisecond time scale, of intermediates characterized by absorption bands in the 550-650 nm range.⁴ These transient species were proposed to be Fe^{3+} peroxo complexes, from which H_2O_2 is liberated, on the assumption of an inner sphere mechanism for $O_2^{\cdot-}$ reduction and on the basis that the corresponding absorption bands were slightly different from those of the final ferric iron center II.⁴

On the basis of the crystal structure^{2b} and spectroscopic studies⁵ of the SOR from *Pyrococcus furiosus*, it has been proposed that upon oxidation the iron active site becomes six-coordinated, as the consequence of a local protein domain movement which places a strictly conserved glutamate (Glu47 in the SOR from *D. baarsii*) in the free coordination site. We have mutated the Glu47 to alanine (E47A) in the SOR from *D. baarsii* and found that this mutation did not affect the kinetics of formation of the above mentioned intermediates detected by pulse radiolysis.^{4a-b} However, because this Glu residue becomes a ligand for the oxidized iron, a likely hypothesis could be that it serves to release H_2O_2 from the Fe^{3+} peroxo intermediate by substitution in the iron coordination sphere.

Here, we have reacted SOR E47A from *D. baarsii* directly with H_2O_2 and have found that the active site of the mutant can indeed transiently stabilize a Fe^{3+} peroxo species, that could be spectroscopically characterized.

When we rapidly manually mixed SOR E47A from *D. baarsii* with 6 equivalents of H_2O_2 , a UV-visible absorption feature with a maximum at 560 nm, characteristic for the oxidation of the iron center II,^{6a} was immediately observed (Fig.1A).^{6b} The

4.2 K EPR spectrum,⁷ after subtraction of signals from center I, recorded just after addition of 6 equivalents of H_2O_2 was complex, with a major feature at $g = 4.3$ and a minor one at $g = 4.15$ (Fig.1Bi). The former one is comparable to that of an EPR spectrum of SOR E47A oxidized with hexachloroiridate (IV) (Fig.1Bii). It is characteristic for a high-spin Fe^{3+} in a rhombic ligand field.^{1b,3} No other signals in the $g = 2$ and $g = 8-10$ regions were observed. At longer incubation time (10 min) with H_2O_2 , the feature at $g = 4.15$ completely disappeared (data not shown).

Resonance Raman (RR) spectra at 15 K,⁸ taken from the SOR E47A frozen immediately after addition of H_2O_2 indicated the presence of two new bands at 850 and 438 cm^{-1} (Fig.2b), which were not present when SOR was oxidized with hexachloroiridate (IV) (Fig.2a). The RR spectra also exhibit a band at 742 cm^{-1} which has been attributed to an internal C-S stretching mode of the $CysS-Fe^{3+}$ active site.³ When the same Raman measurements were made after mixing with $H_2^{18}O_2$, the 850 and 438 cm^{-1} bands were observed to down shift to 802 and 415 cm^{-1} , respectively (Fig.2c). RR measurements in D_2O buffer indicated no significant shifts of the 850 and 438 cm^{-1} bands to within 1 cm^{-1} (cf. Supporting Information).

When the reaction was carried out with the wild-type SOR and H_2O_2 , under the same conditions that we described above for the mutant, an intense RR band at 743 cm^{-1} was observed (Fig. 2d). This band can be used as a marker of the amount of Fe^{3+} formed in these conditions. The bands at 850 and 438 cm^{-1} observed in the case of the mutant with a similar amplitude as that of the 743 cm^{-1} band (Fig. 2b) were now in the case of the wild-type found to be very weak compared to the 743 cm^{-1} band (Fig. 2d). However, they exhibited the same shift upon ^{18}O substitution than reported in the case of the mutant (data not shown). The 4.2 K EPR spectra of the SOR wild-type, after subtraction of signal of center I, and recorded immediately after addition of H_2O_2 , exhibited the rhombic signal at $g = 4.3$,^{1b,3} whereas the feature at $g = 4.15$ was very weak and completely vanished within a few min (data not shown).

The observed RR frequencies at 850 and 438 cm^{-1} and their ^{18}O isotopic shifts (-48 and -23 cm^{-1}) are consistent with the $\nu(O-O)$ and $\nu(Fe-O_2)$ stretching modes, respectively, of an Fe^{3+} -peroxo species.⁹ The lack of deuterium isotopic shifts suggests that this peroxo species is not protonated. We thus conclude that H_2O_2 can oxidize SOR and bind to the ferric center II to yield a transient high-spin Fe^{3+} -peroxo species, associated with the feature at $g = 4.15$, as observed from the 4.2 K EPR spectra. The absorption band at 560 nm resulted probably mainly from the Cys -to- Fe^{3+} charge transfer band,^{3,5} but also

contains a contribution of the peroxo-to-iron Fe^{3+} charge transfer band.⁹ The resolution of these two charge transfer bands could be achieved by a RR excitation profile, but this is complicated because of the strong interference of center I when excitations are made below 647 nm.³

The observed Raman frequencies are comparable to those described for the end-on high-spin Fe^{3+} -OOH species in oxyhemerythrin which showed deuterium isotope shifts.¹⁰ However, for SOR reported here, the unusually low Fe-O_2 frequency (438 cm^{-1}) strongly suggests a side-on $\eta^2\text{Fe}^{3+}$ -peroxo species¹¹ as found in the high-spin Fe complexes such as $[(\text{EDTA})\text{Fe}(\eta^2\text{-O}_2)]^{3+}$, for example.⁹ In addition, the lack of deuterium shift, suggesting a non-protonated peroxo species, is also consistent with a side-on $\eta^2\text{Fe}^{3+}$ -peroxo species since it is expected to be more stable in the unprotonated form. Such a coordination in the SOR active site would thus imply either a heptacoordination for the iron or a loss of one of the imidazole ligands, but up to now there is no evidence for such possible coordination changes.⁵ Clearly, relevant model Fe-peroxo species with sulfur ligands, not yet available, would support our proposal of a side-on peroxo coordination in SOR.

In conclusion, the data presented here first show that SOR active site can accommodate a Fe^{3+} -peroxo species and thus support the hypothesis that reduction of $\text{O}_2^{\cdot-}$ proceeds through such intermediates. To our knowledge, this is the first Fe^{3+} -(hydro)peroxo species that has been identified in a mononuclear non-heme iron protein, with such an unusual active site. Current RR experiments in the laboratory are directed in order to identify Fe^{3+} -peroxo species formed immediately after reaction with $\text{O}_2^{\cdot-}$.

Second, the results suggest that the conserved Glu47 might serve to help H_2O_2 release, as illustrated in Scheme 1, since mutation of that residue to alanine results in stabilization of the Fe^{3+} peroxide. It should be noted that the presence of the cysteinate trans to the peroxide may also be crucial in promoting H_2O_2 dissociation from the Fe^{3+} -peroxo intermediate, by pushing electron density on the iron. As a matter of fact, the Fe-O_2 bond observed here, with $\nu = 438\text{ cm}^{-1}$, is particular weak and the O-O bond with $\nu = 850\text{ cm}^{-1}$ strong, when compared to the corresponding values reported for model complexes that promote O-O cleavage and formation of high valent Fe-O species.⁹

Acknowledgement. TAM thanks P. Mathis and A. W. Rutherford for interest and support in this work. VN and ML thank S. Menage for helpful discussions.

Supporting Information Available. Deuterium isotopic effects on the RR bands at 850 and 438 cm^{-1} .

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- (4) (a) Lombard, M.; Houée-Levin, C.; Touati, D.; Fontecave, M.; Nivière, V. *Biochemistry* **2001**, *40*, 5032-5040. (b) The effect of the E47A mutation on the decay of the intermediates could not be investigated with the experimental procedure used in 4a (c) Coulter, E. D.; Emerson, J. P.; Kurtz, D. M., Jr.; Cabelli, D. E. *J. Am. Chem. Soc.* **2000**, *122*, 11555-11556. (d) Nivière, V.; Lombard, M.; Fontecave, M.; Houée-Levin, C. *FEBS Letters* **2001**, *497*, 171-173. (e) Abreu, I. A.; Saraiva, L. M.; Soares, C. M.; Teixeira, M.; Cabelli, D. E. *J. Biol. Chem.* **2001**, *276*, 38995-39001.

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- (6) (a) The absorption spectrum of center II of the SOR E47A from *D. baarsii* oxidized with a slight molar excess of K_2IrCl_6 is characterized by a band centered at 560 nm, $\epsilon = 1.6\text{ mM}^{-1}\text{ cm}^{-1}$. (b) At longer incubation times, the 560 nm absorption band rapidly shifts at 650 nm with a decrease in intensity, reflecting a possible degradation process due to excess of H_2O_2 .
- (7) EPR spectra were recorded on a Bruker EMX spectrometer. For low-temperature studies, an Oxford Instrument continuous-flow helium cryostat and temperature control system were used.
- (8) Resonance Raman spectra were recorded using instrumentation as reported in: Ollagnier-de-Choudens, S.; Mattioli, T. A.; Takahashi, Y.; Fontecave, M. *J. Biol. Chem.* **2001**, *276*, 22604-22607. Final concentration of protein, held in a He gas circulating cryostat at 15 K, was 1 mM and 50 mW of 647.1 nm radiation from a Kr^+ laser (Coherent Innova 90) was used to excite the spectrum. Spectra were accumulated for 40 min and baselines were corrected using GRAMS 32 (Galactic Industries).
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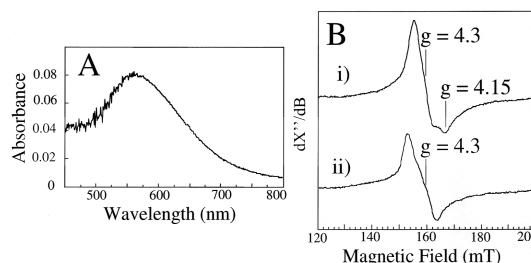


Figure 1. UV-visible (A) and X-band EPR spectra (B) of SOR E47A mutant from *D. baarsii* (200 μM in 50 mM Tris/HCl pH 7.6) treated with 6 equivalents H_2O_2 or 3 equivalents K_2IrCl_6 . (A) UV-Visible spectrum recorded 5 s after addition of H_2O_2 . (B) EPR spectrum after treatment with i) H_2O_2 and immediate freezing after mixing, ii) K_2IrCl_6 . The contribution of the high-spin Fe^{3+} center I [$\text{Fe}(\text{SCys})_4$] was subtracted from each UV-visible and EPR spectrum. EPR conditions: temperature 4.2 K, microwave frequency 9.676 GHz, power 20 mW, modulation 1.0 mT/100 kHz.

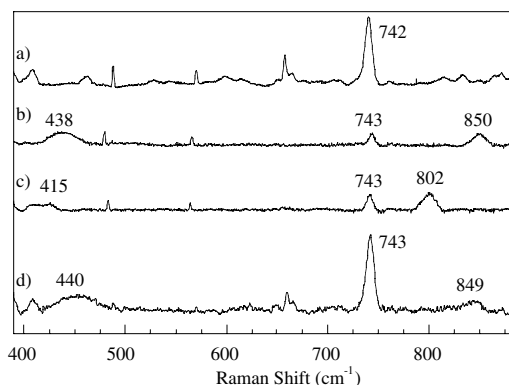
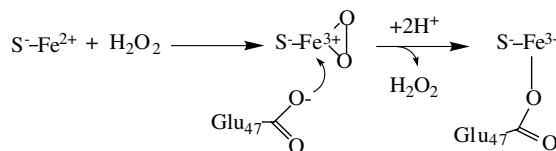
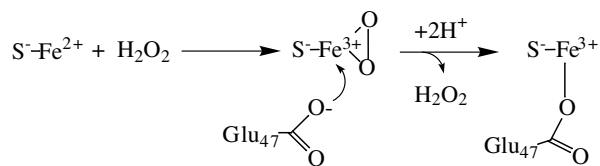


Figure 2. Resonance Raman spectra of SOR E47A mutant and wild-type forms from *D. baarsii* (1 mM in 50 mM Tris/HCl pH 7.6) excited at 647.1 nm (50 mW) at 15 K. a): SOR E47A treated with 3 equivalents K_2IrCl_6 . b): SOR E47A treated with 6 equivalents of H_2O_2 , rapidly mixed and immediately frozen (less than 5 s). c): SOR E47A treated with $\text{H}_2^{18}\text{O}_2$, same conditions as b). d): SOR wild-type treated with 6 equivalents of H_2O_2 rapidly mixed and immediately frozen (less than 5s).



Scheme 1.

Table of Contents graphic :



ABSTRACT FOR WEB PUBLICATION.

The active site of superoxide reductase SOR consists of a Fe^{2+} center in an unusual $[\text{His}_4 \text{Cys}_1]$ square pyramidal geometry. It specifically reduces superoxide to produce H_2O_2 . Here, we have reacted the SOR from *Desulfoarculus baarsii* directly with H_2O_2 . We have found that its active site can transiently stabilize a Fe^{3+} -peroxo species that we have spectroscopically characterized by resonance Raman. The mutation of the strictly conserved Glu47 into alanine results in a stabilization of this Fe^{3+} -peroxo species, when compared to the wild-type form. These data support the hypothesis that the reaction of SOR proceeds through such Fe^{3+} -peroxo intermediate. This also suggests that Glu47 might serve to H_2O_2 released during the reaction with superoxide.

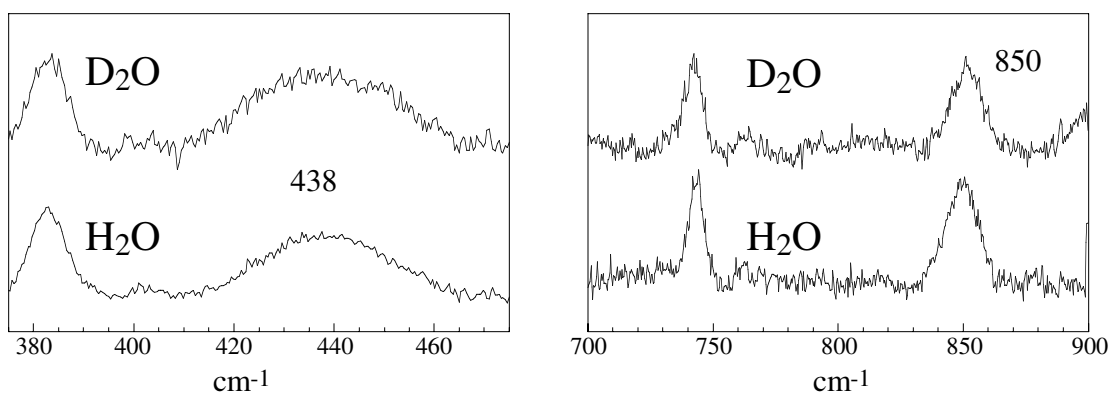


Figure S1. Deuterium isotopic effects on the resonance Raman spectra for the $\nu(\text{Fe}-\text{O}_2)$ (left panel) and $\nu(\text{O}-\text{O})$ (right panel) regions of SOR E47A mutant from *D. baarsii* (1 mM in 50 mM Tris/HCl pH 7.6, or pD 8.0) excited at 647.1 nm (50 mW) at 15 K, treated with 6 equivalents of H_2O_2 , rapidly mixed and immediately frozen (less than 5 s). Upper spectra in D_2O solution. Lower spectra in H_2O solution.
