

**The molecular basis for oocyst wall
formation in *Eimeria maxima***

by

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CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP

I certify that this thesis has not previously submitted for any degree and is not being submitted as part of candidature for any other degree. I also certify that the thesis has been written by me and that any help that I have received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in the thesis.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	ix
LIST OF FIGURES	xii
LIST OF TABLES	xvi
ABSTRACT	xviii
❖ CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 <i>Eimeria</i>	2
1.2 Life cycle of <i>Eimeria</i> species	4
1.3 Poultry coccidiosis	7
1.4 Chemoprophylaxis to control coccidiosis	8
1.5 Live vaccines against coccidiosis	10
1.6 Subunit vaccines against coccidiosis	12
1.7 Oocyst biogenesis	14
1.8 EmGam56 and EmGam82 are precursor proteins involved in oocyst wall formation	20
1.9 Project aims	22
❖ CHAPTER TWO: MATERIALS AND METHODS	23
2.1 MATERIALS	24
2.1.1 General chemicals	24
2.1.2 Miscellaneous materials	25
2.1.3 General solutions and growth media	25
2.1.4 Commercial kits and columns	26
2.1.5 Molecular weight markers	26
2.1.6 Antibodies	27
2.1.7 Enzymes	27
2.1.8 Bacterial strains for expression	27

2.1.9 Animal strains	27
2.1.10 Parasites	28
2.2 METHODS	28
2.2.1 Parasite preparation	28
2.2.1.1 <i>E. maxima</i> oocyst harvest from faeces	28
2.2.1.2 <i>E. tenella</i> oocyst harvest from caeca	29
2.2.1.3 Sodium hypochlorite treatment of oocysts	29
2.2.2 Isolation of oocyst walls for intact oocysts	30
2.2.3 Elimination of polysaccharide granule contamination from oocyst wall preparation	30
2.2.4 Examination of the oocyst walls by Transmission Electron Microscopy (TEM)	31
2.2.5 Preparation of oocyst walls for compositional analysis	31
2.2.5.1 Methanolysis	31
2.2.5.2 Acid hydrolysis	32
2.2.6 Extraction of oocyst wall proteins by NaOH	32
2.2.7 Bioinformatic analysis of protein sequence of EmGam56	33
2.2.7.1 Secondary structure predictions on EmGam56	33
2.2.7.2 Disorder predictions on EmGam56	33
2.2.8 Generation of recombinant constructs	36
2.2.8.1 DNA amplification by PCR	36
2.2.8.2 Agarose gel electrophoresis	36
2.2.8.3 Gel extraction	38
2.2.8.4 Ligation	38
2.2.8.5 Transformation	38
2.2.8.6 Colony PCR	38
2.2.8.7 Plasmid preparation	39
2.2.8.8 DNA sequencing	40
2.2.9 Expression of recombinant proteins	40
2.2.10 Purification of recombinant proteins	41
2.2.11 Ion exchange chromatography	42
2.2.12 SDS-PAGE	42

2.2.13 Silver staining	43
2.2.14 Immunoblotting	43
2.2.15 ELISA	44
2.2.16 Secondary structure analysis of pETEmGam56.102-225 by CD	44
2.2.17 Structural analysis of pETEmGam56.102-225 by 1D-NMR	45
2.2.18 <i>In vitro</i> crosslinking of r56	45
2.2.19 Detection of high molecular weight oligomers by ECL	46
2.2.20 Detection of dityrosine by HPLC	47
 ❖ CHAPTER THREE: OOCYST WALL COMPOSITION OF <i>EIMERIA TENELLA</i> and <i>EIMERIA MAXIMA</i>	 48
3.1 Introduction	49
3.2 Microscopic and TEM examination of oocyst walls prepared as per Stotish <i>et al.</i> (1978) revealed contamination with polysaccharide granules	52
3.3 Elimination of polysaccharide granules from oocyst wall preparations	55
3.4 The effect of sodium hypochlorite on the bi-layered structure of the oocyst wall	59
3.5 Oocyst walls of <i>E. tenella</i> and <i>E. maxima</i> are composed of lipids, carbohydrates and proteins	59
3.6 Discussion	72
 ❖ CHAPTER FOUR: STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF EMGAM56	 76
4.1 Introduction	77
4.2 PSIPRED, APSSP2, SSpro, GOR4, HNN and SOPMA analysis of EmGam56 secondary structure	78
4.3 FoldIndex© analysis of EmGam56 secondary structure	78
4.4 IUPred, RONN, DISPROT and DisEMBL™ analyses for disorder within the secondary structure of EmGam56	84
4.5 Generation of a truncated recombinant EmGam56	87
4.6 Expression and purification of recombinant pETEmGam56.102-225	92
4.7 Optimisation of expression of pETEmGam56.102-225	94
4.8 Recognition of pETEmGam56.102-225 by antibodies that recognise native	104

EmGam56	
4.9 The effect of heat treatment and pH on the stability of pETEmGam56.102-225	104
4.10 Structural analysis of pETEmGam56.102-225 by CD and NMR	107
4.11 Discussion	111
❖ CHAPTER FIVE: PEROXIDASE AND PEROXIDE	117
MEDIATED CROSS-LINKING OF A TYROSINE-RICH	
PROTEIN FROM THE WALL FORMING BODIES OF	
THE MACROGAMETE OF <i>EIMERIA MAXIMA</i>	
5.1 Introduction	118
5.2 Experimental plan	118
5.3 Hydrogen peroxide catalyses cross-linking of r56 in the absence of exogenous enzyme	120
5.4 DOPA oxidase does not catalyse cross-linking of r56	123
5.5 Myeloperoxidase does not catalyse cross-linking of r56 in the presence of <i>t</i> -butylhydroperoxide	125
5.6 Horseradish peroxidase catalyses cross-linking of r56 in the presence and absence of exogenous <i>t</i> -butylhydroperoxide	129
5.7 <i>Arthromyces</i> peroxidase catalyses cross-linking of r56 in the presence and absence of exogenous <i>t</i> -butylhydroperoxide	135
5.8 Catalase reverses the <i>Arthromyces</i> peroxidase-catalysed crosslinking of r56 in the absence of <i>t</i> -butylhydroperoxide	141
5.9 Discussion	143
❖ CHAPTER SIX: GENERAL DISCUSSION	148
❖ CHAPTER SEVEN: REFERENCES	165
APPENDICES	193

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

aa	amino acids
AGRF	Australian Genome Research Facility
APGA	affinity purified gametocyte antigens
APx	<i>Arthromyces</i> peroxidase
3'AT	3'-amino-1, 2, 4-triazole
BCIP/NBT	5-bromo-4-chloro-3-indolyl phosphate/nitro blue tetrazolium
BSTFA	<i>N, O-bis</i> (trimethylsilyl)trifluoroacetamide
bp	base pairs
BSA	bovine serum albumin
CD	circular dichroism
COWP	<i>Crptosporidium</i> oocyst wall protein
DAPI	4, 6-diamidino-2-phenylindole
DEAE	diethylaminoethyl
DNA	deoxyribonucleic acid
DOPA	3, 4-dihydroxyphenylalanine
ECL	Enhanced chemiluminescence
EDTA	ethylenediaminetetraacetic acid
EIA	enzyme immunoassay
ELISA	enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay
EmGam56	56 kDa gametocyte antigen from <i>E. maxima</i>
EmGam82	82 kDa gametocyte antigen from <i>E. maxima</i>
ExPASy	Expert Protein Analysis System
g	centrifugal force (gravity)
GC	gas chromatography
GLC	gas-liquid chromatography
hr	hour(s)
HPLC	high-pressured liquid chromatography
HRPO	horseradish peroxidase
I (or IL)	inner layer of oocyst walls

IPTG	isopropyl-b-thiogalactopyranoside
IUPs	intrinsically unstructured proteins
kDa	kilodalton
LB Amp medium	Luri-Bertani medium containing 100 µg/ml ampicillin
LB Amp plate	Luri-Bertani plate containing 100 µg/ml ampicillin
LB medium	Luria-Bertani medium
lpm	litre per minute
M	molar
mA	milliampere(s)
min	minute(s)
ml	milliliter
µl	microlitre
µm	micrometre
mM	millimoles per litre
MPx	myeloperoxidase
MS	mass spectrometry
NCS	normal chicken serum
1D-NMR	one-dimensional nuclear magnetic resonance
O (or OW)	oocyst walls
OD	optical density
O (or OL)	outer layer of oocyst walls
O/N	over night
PAGE	polyacrylamine gel electrophoresis
PBS	phosphate buffered saline
PCR	polymerase chain reaction
PDB	protein data bank
PEG	poly(ethylene glycerol)
<i>pETEmGam56.102-225</i>	gene encoding for a truncated form of EmGam56
pETEmGam56.102-225	a truncated form of EmGam56
PG	polysaccharide granules
PH	phenylhydrazine hydrochloride

ppm	parts per million
PVDF	polyvinylidene fluoride
RIA	radioimmunoassay
rpm	revolutions per minute
RNN	recursive neural network
RT	retention time
<i>r56</i>	gene encoding for a recombinant form of EmGam56
r56	a recombinant form of EmGam56
S	sporocyst walls
SDS	sodium dodecyl sulfate
SDS-PAGE	sodium dodecyl sulfate polacrylamide gel electrophoresis
SHA	salicylhydroxamic acid
SpW	sporocyst walls
S/O	sporulated oocysts
TBE	tris borate/EDTA
TBS	tri-buffered saline
<i>t</i> -BHP	<i>tertiary</i> -butylhydroperoxide
TCA	trichloroacetic acid
TE	tris/EDTA
TEM	Transmission Electron Microscopy
TMCS	trimethylchlorosilane
TMS	trimethylsilyl
Tris	tris[hydroxymethyl]aminomethane
U/O	unsporulated oocysts
UV	ultraviolet
W or WFB	wall forming bodies
W1 or WFB1	wall forming bodies type 1
W2 or WFB2	wall forming bodies type 2

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1 Life cycle of <i>Eimeria</i> species	6
Figure 1.2 Structure of an unsporulated (left) and a sporulated (right) oocyst from <i>Eimeria maxima</i> showing UV autofluoresence in blue	7
Figure 1.3 Electron micrographs of developing and mature macrogametocytes (a-c); and plastic embedded sections (d-f) of developing and mature macrogametocytes that have been immuno-labelled with anti-APGA antibodies and visualized with fluoresceine isothiocyanate and DAPI counterstaining	15
Figure 1.4 Plastic embedded sections showing the various stages of oocyst wall formation in organisms that have been immuno-labelled with anti-APGA antibodies and visualized with fluoresceine isothiocyanate and DAPI counterstaining	19
Figure 1.5 Structure of dityrosine	21
Figure 2.1 Strategy used to generate DNA fragment encoding for amino acids 102-255 of <i>EmGam56</i>	37
Figure 3.1 Experimental plans for the study carried out in this chapter	51
Figure 3.2 Microscopic examination of oocyst walls before and after purification by density sucrose centrifugation	53
Figure 3.3 Electron microscopic images of purified oocyst walls from <i>E. maxima</i> bleached unsporulated oocysts	54
Figure 3.4 Electron microscopic images of heat and alpha-amylase treated oocyst walls prepared from <i>E. maxima</i> bleached unsporulated oocysts	56
Figure 3.5 Microscopic images of alpha-amylase treated oocyst walls from <i>E. maxima</i> bleached unsporulated oocysts	58
Figure 3.6 Electron microscopic images of oocyst wall preparations from <i>E. tenella</i> and <i>E. maxima</i> unbleached versus bleached sporulated versus unsporulated oocysts	60

Figure 4.1 Secondary structure prediction of EmGam56 by PSIPRED	82
Figure 4.2 FoldIndex© analysis of EmGam56	84
Figure 4.3 Disorder predictions for EmGam56 by IUPred, RONN and DISPROT	86
Figure 4.4 Disorder prediction for EmGam56 by DisEMBL™	87
Figure 4.5 Analysis of PCR products of <i>pETEmGam56.102-225</i> by agarose gel electrophoresis	89
Figure 4.6 Analysis of the colony PCR products of <i>pETEmGam56.102-225</i> by agarose gel electrophoresis	89
Figure 4.7 DNA and amino acid sequences of <i>pETEmGam56.102-225</i>	91
Figure 4.8 Immunoblot analysis of the expression of <i>pETEmGam56.102-225</i>	92
Figure 4.9 Immunoblot analysis of purified <i>pETEmGam56.102-225</i> fractions	93
Figure 4.10 Coomassie blue staining (A) and immunoblot analysis (B) of <i>pETEmGam56.102-225</i> expression from bacterial culture induced with 1 mM IPTG at 30°C	95
Figure 4.11 Coomassie blue staining (A) and immunoblot analysis (B) of <i>pETEmGam56.102-225</i> expression from bacterial culture induced with 1 mM IPTG at 25°C	97
Figure 4.12 Coomassie blue staining (A) and immunoblot analysis (B) of <i>pETEmGam56.102-225</i> expression from bacterial culture induced with 0.1 mM IPTG at 25°C	98
Figure 4.13 SDS-PAGE analysis of purified <i>pETEmGam56.102-225</i> fractions from culture induced with 1 mM IPTG at 25°C for 3 hours	100
Figure 4.14 SDS-PAGE analysis of purified <i>pETEmGam56.102-225</i> proteins by anion-exchange chromatography	101
Figure 4.15 SDS-PAGE (A) and immunoblot analysis (B) of concentrated <i>pETEmGam56.102-225</i>	103
Figure 4.16 Reactivity of <i>pETEmGam56.102-225</i> with antibodies that recognise native EmGam56	105
Figure 4.17 Immunoblot analysis of the effect of heat treatment on <i>pETEmGam56.102-225</i>	106
Figure 4.18 Immunoblot analysis of the effect of pH change on <i>pETEmGam56.102.225</i>	107

Figure 4.19 CD spectra of pETEmGam56.102-225	108
Figure 4.20 1D-NMR spectrum of pETEmGam56.102-225	110
Figure 5.1 ECL analyses of H ₂ O ₂ (A) and <i>t</i> -BHP (B) catalyzed r56 crosslinking	121
Figure 5.2 ECL analyses of the effect of catalase on r56 crosslinking	122
Figure 5.3 ECL analyses of DOPA oxidase catalyzed r56 crosslinking	124
Figure 5.4 ECL analysis of MPx catalyzed r56 crosslinking	126
Figure 5.5 ECL analysis of time course on MPx catalyzed r56 crosslinking	127
Figure 5.6 ECL analyses of r56 crosslinking with varied MPx concentration	128
Figure 5.7 ECL analysis of HRPO catalyzed r56 crosslinking	131
Figure 5.8 ECL analysis of time course on HRPO catalyzed r56 crosslinking	132
Figure 5.9 ECL analyses of r56 crosslinking with varied HRPO concentration	133
Figure 5.10 ECL analyses of HRPO catalyzed r56 crosslinking in the presence of inhibitors	134
Figure 5.11 ECL analysis of APx catalyzed r56 crosslinking	137
Figure 5.12 ECL analysis of time course on APx catalyzed r56 crosslinking	138
Figure 5.13 ECL analyses of r56 crosslinking with varied APx concentration	139
Figure 5.14 ECL analyses of APx catalyzed r56 crosslinking in the presence of inhibitors	140
Figure 5.15 ECL analysis of peroxide scavenger on APx catalyzed r56 crosslinking	142
Figure 6.1 N-terminal sequences of oocyst wall proteins in <i>E. maxima</i>	152
Figure 6.2 Model of oocyst wall formation in <i>Eimeria</i>	155
Figure 6.3 Molecular basis of CoxAbic®	164
Figure A1 GC and MS profile of compositional analysis of <i>E. tenella</i> sporulated oocyst walls	194
Figure A2 GC and MS profile of amino acid composition of oocyst wall proteins from <i>E. tenella</i> sporulated oocyst walls	195
Figure A3 GC and MS profile of compositional analysis of <i>E. tenella</i> unsporulated oocyst walls	196

Figure A4 GC and MS profile of amino acid composition of oocyst wall proteins from <i>E. tenella</i> unsporulated oocyst walls	197
Figure A5 GC and MS profile of compositional analysis of <i>E. maxima</i> sporulated oocyst walls	198
Figure A6 GC and MS profile of amino acid composition of oocyst wall proteins from <i>E. maxima</i> sporulated oocysts	199
Figure A7 GC and MS profile of compositional analysis of <i>E. maxima</i> unsporulated oocyst walls	200
Figure A8 GC and MS profile of amino acid composition of oocyst wall proteins from <i>E. maxima</i> unsporulated oocysts	201
Figure A9 GC and MS profile of amino acid composition of crosslinked recombinant r56 proteins	202

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.1 Important <i>Eimeria</i> species with their respective hosts	3
Table 1.2 Pathogenicity, site of infection and immunogenicity of <i>Eimeria</i> species that infect chickens	4
Table 1.3 Mode of action of anticoccidial agents and their efficacy	9
Table 1.4 Commercially available vaccines against chicken coccidiosis	12
 Table 2.1 Secondary structure predictors used for prediction on EmGam56	 34
Table 2.2 Protein disorder predictors used for disorder prediction on EmGam56	35
Table 2.3 Vector specific primer pairs used for Colony PCR and DNA sequencing	39
 Table 3.1 Summary of oocyst wall contents in percentages of metabolites (w/w) from oocyst walls prepared from 10 ⁶ <i>E. tenella</i> sporulated and unsporulated oocysts (A), <i>E. maxima</i> sporulated and unsporulated oocysts (B) and <i>E. tenella</i> unsporulated oocysts from Stotish <i>et al.</i> (1978) (C)	 64
Table 3.2 Summary of amino acid compositions of oocyst wall proteins prepared from <i>E. tenella</i> sporulated and unsporulated oocysts (A), <i>E. maxima</i> sporulated and unsporulated oocysts (B), <i>E. tenella</i> unsporulated oocysts from Stotish <i>et al.</i> (1978) (C) and gametocyte antigens from <i>E. maxima</i> (D)	65
Table 3.3 Summary of metabolites of lipids in percentages from oocyst walls prepared from <i>E. tenella</i> sporulated and unsporulated oocysts (A), <i>E. maxima</i> sporulated and unsporulated oocysts (B) and <i>E. tenella</i> unsporulated oocysts from Stotish <i>et al.</i> (1978) (C)	67
Table 3.4 Summary of metabolites of carbohydrates in percentages from oocyst walls prepared from <i>E. tenella</i> sporulated and unsporulated oocysts (A), <i>E. maxima</i> sporulated and unsporulated oocysts (B) and <i>E. tenella</i> unsporulated oocysts from Stotish <i>et al.</i> (1978) (C)	71

Table 4.1 Summary of secondary structure predictions for EmGam56 by PSIPRED, APSSP2, SSpro, GOR4, HNN and SOPMA	79
Table 4.2 Relative positions of α -helices, β -sheets and random coils within the amino acid sequence of EmGam56 as predicted by PSIPRED, APSSP2, SSpro, GOR4, HNN and SOPMA	80
Table 4.3 Summary of pETEmGam56.102-225 expression under different conditions	99
Table 6.1 Summary of the functions and characteristics of peroxidases in each superfamily	162

ABSTRACT

Eimeria is a genus of protozoa within the Apicomplexa, a phylum that includes *Plasmodium* species (which cause malaria) and *Toxoplasma gondii* (which cause foetal abnormalities and encephalitis), and many other species of parasites. *Eimeria* belongs to the subclass Coccidia, and a defining characteristic of this group is their transmission from host to host via oocysts that contaminate food and water. The resilient oocyst wall protects the parasites as they are excreted in the host's faeces and in the outside world, allowing them to survive for several months between hosts. It is formed from the contents of specialised organelles – wall forming bodies – found in the macrogametocyte stage of the parasites.

Two proteins, EmGam56 and EmGam82, from the wall forming bodies of *Eimeria maxima* have been studied intensively in recent years (see Belli *et al.*, 2006). Both are processed and/or degraded into smaller tyrosine-rich polypeptides (from 8 to 33 kDa) and incorporated into the oocyst wall. The tyrosine richness of these proteins and the presence of dityrosine in the oocyst wall has led to the proposal that dityrosine cross-linking of these proteins forms a matrix that is crucial component for oocyst wall formation (Belli *et al.*, 2006). The aims of this thesis are to:

- [1] deduce the biochemical composition of the oocyst walls using gas chromatography (GC) and mass spectrometry (MS);
- [2] determine the structural features of EmGam56 using bioinformatics, circular dichroism (CD), and one-dimensional nuclear magnetic resonance (1D-NMR);
- [3] demonstrate that peroxidase-catalysed dityrosine crosslinks can be induced to form between truncated forms of EmGam56.

GC and MS revealed that the *Eimeria* oocyst wall is composed mainly of proteins (>90%) with small amount of lipids (1.4-7.6%) and carbohydrates (0.3-2.0%). There is little difference between the unsporulated and sporulated oocyst walls of *E. tenella* and *E. maxima*. Thus, the structure of proteins like EmGam56 is key to understanding how oocyst walls are constructed.

Bioinformatic analyses indicated that EmGam56 is an intrinsically unstructured protein (IUP), dominated by random coils (52-70%), with some α -helices (28-43%) but few β -sheets (1-11%); this was confirmed by CD and 1D-NMR. Furthermore, the structural integrity of the protein under extreme temperatures (boiling for 40 minutes) and pH (pH 1.3-11) indicated its IUP nature. The intrinsic lack of structure in EmGam56 could facilitate its incorporation into the oocyst wall in two ways: first, IUPs are highly susceptible to proteolysis, explaining the several differently-sized oocyst wall proteins derived from EmGam56; and, second, the flexibility of IUPs could facilitate cross-linking between these tyrosine-rich derivatives.

Peroxidases are key to the formation of dityrosine bonds (see Belli *et al.*, 2006 for a review). An *in vitro* cross-linking assay was developed using a recombinant 42 kDa truncation of EmGam56. The protein was exposed to various peroxidases and peroxides, the formation of polymers was followed by Western blotting, and the formation of dityrosines was determined by HPLC. Peroxidases from plants or fungi, but not mammals, catalysed rapid formation of polymers. No peroxidase has yet been found in the incompletely annotated *E. tenella* genome database but peroxidase activity has been detected in the wall forming bodies (Belli *et al.*, 2006). Therefore, future searches for *Eimeria* peroxidases should focus on plant-like homologous.

The results presented in this thesis support the proposal that dityrosine bonding between proteins is an important factor in the formation of the oocyst wall of coccidian parasites and are consistent with the hypothesis that antibodies stimulated by vaccination with EmGam56 and related proteins could prevent formation of oocysts.