



Microbial transformations of betulinic and betulonic acids



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 17 March 2015
Received in revised form 16 April 2015
Accepted 20 April 2015
Available online 27 April 2015

Keywords:

Betulinic acid
Betulonic acid
Microbial transformation
Enzymatic hydroxylation
Enzymatic oxidation

ABSTRACT

Enzymatic transformation of betulinic acid by growing cells of microorganisms provided several hydroxylated and oxidized products. *Bacillus megaterium* SC16644 gave 7 β ,15 α -dihydroxybetulinic acid, 7 β ,15 α -dihydroxybetulonic acid, and a new compound 7 β ,15 α ,23-trihydroxybetulinic acid [3 β ,7 β ,15 α ,23-tetrahydroxy-lup-20(29)en-28-oic acid]. Another strain of *B. megaterium* SC6394 produced 30-oxobetulinic acid, and a mixture of 30-hydroxybetulinic acid and a new compound 7 β -hydroxy-30-oxobetulinic acid [7 β -hydroxy-3,30-dioxo-lup-20(29)en-28-oic acid]. Three products were obtained from the biotransformation of betulinic acid by *Streptomyces fragilis* SC16401: 7 β -hydroxybetulinic acid, and two new compounds 2 α ,7 β -dihydroxybetulinic acid [2 α ,3 β ,7 β -trihydroxy-lup-20(29)en-28-oic acid] and 2-oxo-7 β -hydroxybetulinic acid [2-oxo-3 β ,7 β -dihydroxy-lup-20(29)en-28-oic acid]. *Cunninghamella elegans* SC16025 gave 25-hydroxybetulinic acid from betulinic acid. Oxidation of betulinic acid by *Aspergillus terreus* SC16513 led to two A-ring fission products: 4-hydroxy-3,4-seco-lup-20(29)en-3,28-dioic acid and 3,4-seco-lup-20(29), 4(23)-dien-3,28-dioic acid. *B. megaterium* SC16644 catalyzed transformation of betulonic acid provided 7 β -hydroxybetulinic acid, 7 β ,15 α -dihydroxybetulinic acid, and a new compound 7 β ,15 α ,30-trihydroxybetulinic acid [3-oxo-7 β ,15 α ,30-trihydroxy-lup-20(29)en-28-oic acid].

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1. Introduction

Lupeol [3 β -hydroxy-lup-20(29)en] **1a**, betulin [3 β ,28-dihydroxy-lup-20(29)en] **1b**, betulinic acid [3 β -hydroxy-lup-20(29)en-28-oic acid] **1c** and betulonic acid [3-oxo-lup-20(29)en-28-oic acid] **1d** are naturally occurring pentacyclic triterpenes belonging to the lupane group isolated from many plants. Betulinic acid (**1c**) derivatives were reported to have anticancer [1–3] and anti-HIV [4–7] activities. Several semi-synthetic derivatives of betulinic acid **1c** were found to improve oral bioavailability and pharmacological activity [5–7] where the synthetic modifications were mostly centered on addition

of sugars or polar groups to the C-3 hydroxyl and C-28 carboxyl groups of betulinic acid **1c** (Fig. 1; Table 1).

Several microbial transformations of betulinic acid and its derivatives were reported to prepare hydroxylated/oxygenated derivatives to improve the polarity and pharmacological properties. Microbial transformation of betulinic acid **1c** by *Cunninghamella echinulata* NRRL 5695 produced C-28 β -D-glucoside **1e** which showed no in vitro activity against melanoma [8]. Microbial transformation of betulinic acid **1c** by *Bacillus megaterium* ATCC14581 produced betulonic acid **1d**, 7 β -hydroxybetulinic acid [3 β ,7 β -dihydroxy-lup-20(29)en-28-oic acid] **1f** and 6 α ,7 β -dihydroxybetulinic acid [3 β ,6 α ,7 β -trihydroxy-lup-20(29)en-28-oic acid] **1g**; by *C. elegans* ATCC9244 gave 1 β ,7 β -dihydroxybetulinic acid [1 β ,3 β ,7 β -trihydroxy-lup-20(29)en-28-oic acid] **1h**; while *Mucor mucedo* UI4605 afforded 7 β -hydroxybetulinic acid [3 β ,7 β -dihydroxy-lup-20(29)en-28-oic acid] **1f** [9]. Another strain of *B. megaterium* ATCC13368 catalyzed the transformation of betulinic acid **1c** to four products: betulonic acid [3-oxo-lup-20(29)en-28-oic acid] **1d**, 11 α -hydroxybetulinic acid [3-oxo-11 α -hydroxy-lup-20(29)en-28-oic acid] **1i**, 1 β -hydroxybetulinic acid [3-oxo-1 β -hydroxy-lup-20(29)en-28-oic acid] **1j** and 7 β ,15 α -dihydroxybetulinic acid

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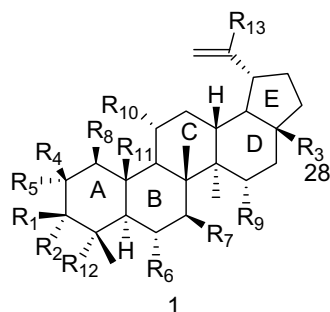
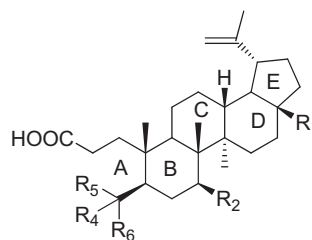


Fig. 1. Structures of starting materials and biotransformation products. See Table 1 for R groups.

[3 β ,7 β ,15 α -trihydroxy-lup-20(29)en-28-oic acid] **1k** [10]. Microbial transformations by *Chaetomium longirostre* provided 4,28-dihydroxy-3,4-seco-lup20(29)en-3-oic acid **2a** and 4-hydroxy-3,4-seco-lup20(29)en-3,28-dioic acid **2b** from betulin **1b**, and 4,7 β ,17-trihydroxy-3,4-seco-28-norlup-20(29)en-3-oic acid **2c** and 7 β ,15 α -dihydroxybetulonic acid [7 β ,15 α -dihydroxy-3-oxo-lup-20(29)en-28-oic acid] **1l** from betulonic acid **1d** [11] where the compounds **2a–c** were formed by the cleavage of ring A (Fig. 2). Biotransformations of both betulinic **1c** and betulonic acids **1d** by several fungi were studied [12] – 7 β ,15 α -dihydroxybetulonic acid [7 β ,15 α -dihydroxy-3-oxo-lup-20(29)en-28-oic acid] **1i**, 7 β -hydroxybetulonic acid [3-oxo-7 β -hydroxy-lup-20(29)en-28-oic acid] **1m** and 7 β ,30-dihydroxybetulonic acid [7 β ,30-dihydroxy-3-oxo-lup-20(29)en-28-oic acid] **1n** were produced by betulonic acid **1d** and *Arthrotrichy* sp., 15 α -hydroxybetulonic acid [3-oxo-15 α -hydroxy-lup-20(29)en-28-oic acid] **1o** was produced by betulinic acid **1c** and *Colletotrichum* sp., 7 β ,15 α -dihydroxybetulonic acid [7 β ,15 α -dihydroxy-3-oxo-lup-20(29)en-28-oic acid] **1l** and 15 α -hydroxybetulonic acid [3-oxo-15 α -hydroxy-lup-20(29)en-28-oic acid] **1o** were obtained from betulonic acid **1d** and *Colletotrichum*



2a, R₁ = CH₂OH, R₂ = H, R₄=OH, R₅=R₆=CH₃
2b, R₁ = COOH, R₂ = H, R₄=OH, R₅=R₆=CH₃
2c, R₁ = OH, R₂ = OH, R₄=OH, R₅=R₆=CH₃
2d, R₁ = COOH, R₂ = OH, R₄+R₅=CH₂, R₆=CH₃

Fig. 2. Structures of biotransformation products obtained via cleavage of A-ring.

sp., 25-hydroxybetulonic acid [3-oxo-25-hydroxy-lup-20(29)en-28-oic acid] **1p** from *Chaetophoma* sp. and betulonic acid **1d**, and both *Chaetophoma* sp. and *Dematiium* sp. transformed betulinic acid **1c** to betulonic acid **1d**. Biotransformation of betulonic acid **1d** by *Nocardia* sp. NRRL 5646 gave methyl ester of betulonic acid [methyl 3-oxo-lup-20(29)en-28-oate] **1q** and methyl ester of 2 α -acetoxybetulonic acid [methyl 2 α -acetoxy-3-oxo-lup-20(29)en-28-oate] **1r** [13]. Both betulinic acid **1c** and betulonic acid **1d** were converted to their respective methyl esters **1s** and **1t**, respectively, by *Nocardia* sp. NRRL 5646 [13,14]

We have identified several compounds synthesized from betulinic acid **1c** with HIV maturation inhibitory activity [15–21]. In order to improve the water solubility, oral bioavailability and pharmacological properties, we sought to improve the polarity of betulinic acid **1c** core by hydroxylation/oxygenation via microbial transformations. This manuscript contains details of our work on the transformations of betulinic acid (**1c**) by two bacteria *B. megaterium*, *Streptomyces fragilis* and two fungi *C. echinulata* and *Aspergillus terreus*, and of betulonic acid (**1d**) by *B. megaterium*. A

Table 1
R groups in Fig. 1.

Compd	R ₁	R ₂	R ₁ + R ₂	R ₃	R ₄	R ₅	R ₄ + R ₅	R ₆	R ₇	R ₈	R ₉	R ₁₀	R ₁₁	R ₁₂	R ₁₃
1a	OH	H	NA	CH ₃	H	H	NA	H	H	H	H	H	CH ₃	CH ₃	CH ₃
1b	OH	H	NA	CH ₂ OH	H	H	NA	H	H	H	H	H	CH ₃	CH ₃	CH ₃
1c	OH	H	NA	COOH	H	H	NA	H	H	H	H	H	CH ₃	CH ₃	CH ₃
1d	NA	NA	O	COOH	H	H	NA	H	H	H	H	H	CH ₃	CH ₃	CH ₃
1e	OH	H	NA	COOX	H	H	NA	H	H	H	H	H	CH ₃	CH ₃	CH ₃
1f	OH	H	NA	COOH	H	H	NA	H	OH	H	H	H	CH ₃	CH ₃	CH ₃
1g	OH	H	NA	COOH	H	H	NA	OH	OH	H	H	H	CH ₃	CH ₃	CH ₃
1h	OH	H	NA	COOH	H	H	NA	H	OH	OH	H	H	CH ₃	CH ₃	CH ₃
1i	NA	NA	O	COOH	H	H	NA	H	H	H	H	OH	CH ₃	CH ₃	CH ₃
1j	NA	NA	O	COOH	H	H	NA	H	H	OH	H	H	CH ₃	CH ₃	CH ₃
1k	OH	H	NA	COOH	H	H	NA	H	OH	H	OH	H	CH ₃	CH ₃	CH ₃
1l	NA	NA	O	COOH	H	H	NA	H	OH	H	OH	H	CH ₃	CH ₃	CH ₃
1m	NA	NA	O	COOH	H	H	NA	H	OH	H	H	H	CH ₃	CH ₃	CH ₃
1n	NA	NA	O	COOH	H	H	NA	H	OH	H	H	H	CH ₃	CH ₃	CH ₂ OH
1o	NA	NA	O	COOH	H	H	NA	H	H	H	OH	H	CH ₃	CH ₃	CH ₃
1p	NA	NA	O	COOH	H	H	NA	H	H	H	H	H	CH ₂ OH	CH ₃	CH ₃
1q	NA	NA	O	COOCH ₃	H	H	NA	H	H	H	H	H	CH ₃	CH ₃	CH ₃
1r	NA	NA	O	COOCH ₃	H	OAc	NA	H	H	H	H	H	CH ₃	CH ₃	CH ₃
1s	OH	H	NA	COOCH ₃	H	H	NA	H	H	H	H	H	CH ₃	CH ₃	CH ₃
1t	NA	NA	O	COOCH ₃	H	H	NA	H	H	H	H	H	CH ₃	CH ₃	CH ₃
1u	NA	NA	O	CH ₂ OH	H	H	NA	H	H	H	H	H	CH ₃	CH ₃	CH ₃
1v	OH	H	NA	COOH	H	H	NA	H	OH	H	OH	H	CH ₃	CH ₂ OH	CH ₃
1w	NA	NA	O	COOH	H	H	NA	H	OH	H	OH	H	CH ₃	CH ₃	CH ₂ OH
1x	NA	NA	O	COOH	H	H	NA	H	H	H	H	H	CH ₃	CH ₃	CHO
1y	NA	NA	O	COOH	H	H	NA	H	OH	H	H	H	CH ₃	CH ₃	CHO
1z	NA	NA	O	COOH	H	H	NA	H	H	H	H	H	CH ₃	CH ₃	CH ₂ OH
1aa	OH	H	NA	COOH	H	OH	NA	H	OH	H	H	H	CH ₃	CH ₃	CH ₃
1bb	OH	H	NA	COOH	NA	NA	O	H	H	H	H	H	CH ₃	CH ₃	CH ₃
1cc	OH	H	NA	COOH	H	H	NA	H	H	H	H	H	CH ₂ OH	CH ₃	CH ₃

NA, not applicable; X, β -D-glucose.

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