Extracellular Xylanase Production by Two Thermophilic Alkali-Tolerant Bacillus Strains in Batch and Continuous Cultures

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Thermostable Xylanases, Batch Culture, Continuous Culture, Bacillus

Xylanase production of newly isolated thermophilic alkali-tolerant Bacillus sp. strain SP and strain BC was investigated in batch and continuous cultures. Enzyme synthesis was inducible with both strains and was observed only in xylan-containing media. Xylan from oat spelt is a better inducer than xylan from birch for strain Bacillus sp. BC while such difference was not observed for strain SP. Compared with batch cultures xylanase production of both strains increased about two times and its rate became more than four times faster in continuous cultures at a dilution rate of 0.2 h⁻¹.

Introduction

Important applications of xylanases in biodegradation of xylan raised increased interest for their microbial production. Xylanases with activity at high temperature and alkaline conditions are very useful for enzymatic pulp-bleaching process reducing the use of chlorine chemicals in the conventional technology (Vikari et al., 1994). It was established for some thermostable extracellular enzymes that the level of enzyme concentration and productivity in continuous cultures, compared with batch cultures, increased at relatively low dilution rates (Antranikian et al., 1987; Becker et al., 1997; Emanuilova and Toda, 1984). Continuous production of bacterial xylanases was a subject only of a few studies (Adamsen et al., 1995; Rothlisberger et al., 1992). As described in our previous work, we isolated two alkali-tolerant thermophilic strains (SP and BC) collected near Bulgarian hot springs showing xylanolytic activity by continuous cultivation. The xylanases in the supernatants of the cultures are thermostable at 70 °C for 30 min and resistant to pH 5.5–8.0 (strain SP) and 6.0–7.5 (strain BC) (Dimitrov et al., 1997). The present investigation was undertaken to evaluate the xylanase production of both strains in batch and continuous cultures.

Materials and Methods

Bacterial strains and culture conditions

The strains SP and BC belong to the genus Bacillus and were assigned to the species B. stearothermophilus (Mandeva et al., 1998). To investigate the effect of different carbohydrates on xylanase production, the strains were cultivated in a medium containing in g.l⁻¹: carbohydrate, 2.0; yeast extract (Difco), 1.0; bacto peptone, 2.0; pH 8.0–8.5. The cultivation was carried out in 100-ml flasks containing 20 ml medium, at 60 °C, using a platform shaker (New Brunswick) at 240 rpm for 20 h. Batch and continuous cultivation, using media with birch or oat spelt xylan, were carried out in a fermentor with stirring (Model C-30, New Brunswick Co., Edison, NJ) with a working volume of 350 ml at 60 °C and aeration, 1.0vvm (volume air per volume medium per minute). To ensure a constant nutrient concentration and to prevent precipitation of xylan, the medium in the bottle was continuously stirred during continuous cultivation. To obtain the steady state between different dilution rates at least four residence times had passed.

Xylanase assay

Xylanase activity was assayed by mixing 0.05 ml of culture supernatant with 0.05 ml of 1.0% birch extract (Difco). Xylanase activity was measured by the release of reducing sugars from xylan according to the method of Zuber and Haderlein (1970) by mixing 0.05 ml culture supernatant with 0.05 ml of 1.0% birch extract (Difco) and incubation for 5 h at 150 °C. The liberated reducing sugar was determined by the method of Somogyi (1952). The results obtained with the supernatants of cultures containing birch xylan were corrected for the contribution of endogenous xylanase activity, measured in blank incubations without xylan.

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xylan in phosphate buffer (pH 7.0), and the reaction mixture was incubated for 5 min at 70 °C. The reducing sugars were determined by the dinitrosalicylic-acid method, using D-xylose as a standard. The supernatant, mixed with the substrate solution without incubation, was used as a control. Samples were measured at 540 nm. Enzyme concentration was calculated as U.ml⁻¹. One unit (U) of xylanase activity was corresponds to the amount of enzyme that liberates 1 µmol xylose per minute per ml at pH 7 and temperature 70 °C.

Cell concentration

The cell concentration was expressed by direct phase-contrast microscopic counting of the cells in Bürker chamber with dimension: 16 large squares with 1/25 mm² and 9 smole squares with 1/400 mm² (space between cover slip and slide, 0.1 mm).

Results and Discussion

Bacillus sp. SP produced xylanase in a media supplemented with xylans and also with spelt bran, while strain BC did so only with xylans. During the same cultivation time oat spelt xylan yielded about 1.5 times higher enzyme synthesis with strain BC (Table I). Enzyme activity was not detected in media with glucose. These results show that xylanase production by both strains is probably catabolite-repressed confirming the results for others Bacillus producers of xylanases (Esteban et al., 1982, Lopez et al., 1998, Yang et al., 1988). Xylose was not an inducer for enzyme synthesis with strains SP and BC like the other Bacillus strains which produce xylanase (Blanko and Pastor, 1993; Nakamura et al., 1993).

The results of batch and continuous fermentations are presented in Fig. 1, 2 and summarized in Table II. As it can be seen, maximum of xylanase activity of Bacillus sp. SP in batch cultures was almost the same using either birch or oat spelt xylan (0.40–0.45 U ml⁻¹) during 10 h of cultivation. With the strain BC, enzyme activity was higher in cultures with oat spelt xylan (0.6 U ml⁻¹) during 12 h of cultivation.

Continuous cultivation shows that xylanase activity for both strains was a function of dilution rates, and a maximum of this activity was observed at a low dilution rate of 0.2 h⁻¹ independent of xylan origin (Fig. 1B and Fig. 2B).
As shown by Table II the xylanase production was about two times higher (from 1.9 to 2.5) than in batch cultures and several times faster (3.5 to 4.6). As reported maximum xylanase production by the thermophilic anaerobic *Dictyoglomus sp.* B1 was observed in continuous culture at a dilution rate of 0.112 h⁻¹ and was 1.4 times higher than the batch xylanase activity (Adamsen *et al.*, 1995).

We conclude that xylanase production by *Bacillus sp.* strains SP and BC, in continuous cultivation at a dilution rate of 0.2 h⁻¹, is higher and faster than in batch culture. For *Bacillus sp.* SP both kinds of xylans could be used as carbon source (birch or oat spelt) while for *Bacillus sp.* BC oat spelt xylan provided a higher and faster enzyme production than birch xylan.

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![Graph](image)

**Fig. 2.** Cell density (●-● birch xylan, ○-○ oat spelt xylan) and xylanase activity (■-■ birch xylan, ○-○ oat spelt xylan) during A) batch and B) continuous cultivation of *Bacillus sp.* BC

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bacillus sp.</th>
<th>Carbon source</th>
<th>Batch culture</th>
<th>Continuous culture at D = 0.2 h⁻¹</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>tₑ [h]</td>
<td>E U ml⁻¹</td>
<td>tₓ [h]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SP birch xylan</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oat spelt xylan</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BC birch xylan</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oat spelt xylan</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

tₑ – cultivation time of maximum enzyme activity; E – enzyme activity; tₓ – cultivation time of maximum cell concentration; x – cell concentration; D – dilution rate.


