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Identification of Rv3230c as the NADPH Oxidoreductase of a Two-Protein DesA3 Acyl-CoA Desaturase in *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* H37Rv

Yong Chang and Brian G. Fox *

Biophysics Graduate Degree Program and Department of Biochemistry, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 433 Babcock Drive, Madison, Wisconsin 53706-1549

Abstract

DesA3 is a membrane-bound stearyl-CoA Δ^9 desaturase that produces oleic acid, a precursor of mycobacterial membrane phospholipids and triglycerides. DesA3 has sequence homology with other membrane desaturases including the presence of the eight His motif proposed to bind the diiron center active site. This family of desaturases function as multi-component complexes, and thus require electron transfer proteins for efficient catalytic turnover. Here we present evidence that Rv3230c from *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* H37Rv is a biologically relevant electron transfer partner for DesA3 from the same pathogen. For these studies, Rv3230c was expressed as a partially soluble protein in *Escherichia coli*; recombinant DesA3 was expressed in *Mycobacterium smegmatis* as a catalytically active membrane protein. The addition of *E. coli* lysates containing Rv3230c to lysates of *M. smegmatis* expressing DesA3 gave strong conversion of [1- 14 C]-18:0-CoA to [1- 14 C]-*cis*- Δ^9 -18:1-CoA and of [1- 14 C]-16:0-CoA to [1- 14 C]-*cis*- Δ^9 -16:1-CoA. Both *M. tuberculosis* proteins were required to reconstitute activity, as various combinations of control lysates lacking either Rv3230c or DesA3 gave minimal or no activity. Furthermore, the specificity of interaction between Rv3230c and DesA3 was implied by the inability of other related redox systems to substitute for Rv3230c. The reconstituted activity was dependent upon the presence of NADPH, could be saturated by increasing the amount of Rv3230c added and was also sensitive to the salt concentration in the buffer. The results are consistent with the formation of a protein-protein complex, possibly with electrostatic character. This work defines a multi-protein, acyl-CoA desaturase complex from *M. tuberculosis* H37Rv to minimally consist of a soluble Rv3230c reductase and integral membrane DesA3 desaturase. Further implications of this finding relative to the properties of other multi-protein iron enzyme complexes are discussed.

Mycobacterium tuberculosis is a human pathogen that causes one of the world's deadliest diseases, tuberculosis (TB¹). Current estimates are that up to one-third of the world's population may be infected with *M. tuberculosis* and that over two million people die from TB-related diseases each year (1–4). TB has resurged, in part due to the appearance of multiple-drug-resistant strains. Consequently, the development of new drugs and the reexamination of drugs formerly deemed effective have become major focuses of world-wide TB research (3–5). This intense effort has included genome sequencing (6), proteome functional analysis by micro-array approaches (7–11), the TB Protein Structure Initiative [(12),

* To whom correspondence should be addressed: Department of Biochemistry, 433 Babcock Drive, Madison, WI 53706. Telephone: (608) 262-9708. Fax: (608) 262-3453. E-mail: bgfox@biochem.wisc.edu.

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¹Abbreviations: AlkB, alkane ω -hydroxylase; DesA3, product of *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* H37Rv gene rv3229c, a stearyl-CoA Δ^9 desaturase; Rv3230c, product of *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* H37Rv gene rv3230c, a proposed DesA3:NADPH oxidoreductase; SCD, stearyl-CoA Δ^9 desaturase; TB, tuberculosis.

<http://www.doe-mbi.ucla.edu/TB/>] and many other studies of regulatory, metabolic and enzymatic pathways in pathogenic mycobacteria.

One discovery arising from the *M. tuberculosis* genome sequence annotation was the predominance of genes involved in lipid metabolism (6,13,14). This likely reflects the importance of mycolic acid to mycobacterial physiology. Mycolic acid is a wax-like substance assembled from long chain fatty acids that is incorporated into the outer cell wall and helps to protect mycobacteria from desiccation, water-soluble antibiotics, macrophage attack and other ameliorative agents (15). Thus disruption of mycolic acid biosynthesis is recognized as a viable strategy for TB treatment.

The mechanisms used to synthesize mycolic acids are not clear at present. Long chain fatty acids containing position-specific double bonds are required building blocks, but the biosynthetic origins of the inserted double bonds have not been clearly established. For example, chain elongation of enoyl-ACP intermediates during fatty acid biosynthesis has been proposed to provide the necessary precursors (16). Alternatively, multi-protein diiron enzymes such as those found in humans and other eukaryotes might also catalyze the O₂-dependent and position-specific insertion of the required double bonds (13). In this regard, the genome sequence of *M. tuberculosis* and related pathogens has revealed the presence of three O₂-dependent desaturase-like genes (6,13). Among these three genes, *rv0824c* (encoding DesA1) and *rv1094* (encoding DesA2) are annotated to be homologs of the soluble acyl-ACP desaturases found in plants (6,17,18); the X-ray structure of DesA2 supports the structural assignment (19). Furthermore, alkaline phosphatase fusion studies with DesA1 (20,21) and nuclease fusion studies with DesA2 (22) indicate that these two mycobacterial proteins may be transported to the extracellular space. Indeed, DesA1 is a major surface antigen of mycobacteria in infected human patients (21). Still, the true biological functions of these two mycobacterial proteins have not yet been established.

In contrast to the uncertainty regarding the function of DesA1 and DesA2, DesA3 (encoded by gene *rv3229c*) is a membrane enzyme demonstrated to have stearyl-CoA Δ^9 desaturase activity (5). One product of this reaction, oleic acid, is an essential constituent of mycobacterial membrane phospholipids and triglycerides (5,23–25). Thus DesA3 is suggested to be a target of isoxyl (also known as thiocarlide), an anti-tuberculosis drug that inhibits the synthesis of oleic and mycolic acids (5).

DesA3 shares the conserved eight His motif found in membrane acyl-lipid and acyl-CoA desaturases and in the related bacterial membrane enzymes alkane hydroxylase and xylene monooxygenase (5,26–28). By this assessment, DesA3 is likely to be an integral membrane diiron enzyme. Since these other desaturases and hydroxylases require one or more electron transfer partners to pass 2e⁻ from either NADH or NADPH to the active site diiron center, the identification of the electron transfer partner(s) for DesA3 would help to advance the understanding of mycobacterial lipid metabolism. In this work, we provide biochemical evidence that Rv3230c, encoded by gene *rv3230c*, is the biologically relevant electron transfer partner for DesA3, encoded by gene *rv3229c*. Some implications of this assignment are considered.

EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURES

DNA and Plasmid Reagents

Table 1 lists the bacterial strains and plasmids used in this work. Total genomic DNA of *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* H37Rv was obtained from the TB Research Materials Facility at Colorado State University (Prof. J. Belisle, Director, NIH NIAD NO1AI75320). This material was used to clone *rv3230c* and *rv3229c* (encoding DesA3) by PCR methods. Pfu DNA

polymerase was from Stratagene (La Jolla, CA). Oligonucleotide primers were obtained from Integrated DNA Technologies, Inc. (Coralville, IA). *Escherichia coli* strain TOP10 (Invitrogen, Carlsbad, CA) was used for all cloning work. The expression vector pQE80 (Qiagen, Valencia, CA) was used to express Rv3230c in *E. coli*. The shuttle/expression vector pVV16 (29) was used to express DesA3 as a C-terminal His₆-tagged fusion protein under the control of the transcriptional and translational signals of the hsp60 promoter in *Mycobacterium smegmatis* (ATCC 700084). Big Dye DNA sequencing (Applied Biosystems, Foster City, CA; performed by the University of Wisconsin Biotechnology Center) was used to verify the coding sequence of the expression plasmids.

Cloning of Rv3230c

The *rv3230c* gene was amplified by PCR using the primers 5'-cgggGTACCatcgagggaagg-atgagcaagaacacacgac-3' and 5'-cccAAGCTTctagatgtccagcagcgaatcac-3'. The KpnI and HindIII restriction sites are indicated in capital letters. The PCR contained 10% dimethyl sulfoxide and consisted of 30 cycles of melt, anneal and extend at temperatures of 94°C, 55°C and 72°C, respectively. The resulting DNA fragment was purified by gel electrophoresis and extracted using a QIAquick Gel Extraction Kit (Qiagen). The PCR product was digested with KpnI and HindIII and ligated into similarly digested pQE80 vector to create expression vector pQE80-Rv3230c. *E. coli* TOP10 pQE80-Rv3230c transformants were cultured on either Luria-Bertani broth or agar medium, both containing 100 µg/mL of ampicillin. Plasmids isolated from these cells were used to verify the sequence of the PCR-cloned gene.

Expression of Rv3230c

E. coli Rosetta2 (Novagen, Madison WI) transformed with pQE80-Rv3230c was used for expression studies. The transformed strain was cultured on either Terrific Broth or Luria-Bertani agar medium containing 34 µg/mL of chloramphenicol and 100 µg/mL of ampicillin. Expression of Rv3230c was induced by addition of IPTG to 0.5 mM and continued overnight at 16°C. The cells harvested from a 2-L culture (~5 g) were washed once in 20 mM NaH₂PO₄, pH 7.2, containing 150 mM NaCl and re-suspended in the same buffer at a composition of 1 g of wet cell paste per 2 mL of buffer.

Fractionation of Rv3230c

The cell suspension was sonicated for a total of 150 s using a duty cycle of 15 s on and 45 s off (Fisher Model 550 Sonic Dismembrator, 1/8-in horn). During sonication, the temperature of the cell suspension was maintained below 10°C by placing the beaker in an ice water bath containing NaCl. The sonicated cell suspension was centrifuged at 27,000g for 30 min and the supernatant fraction was retained for activity assays. The cell lysates were analyzed for total expression and the presence of Rv3230c in the soluble fraction by Western blotting with primary mouse anti-His-tagged antibody (Novagen) and SDS-PAGE. Samples were prepared and fractionated for SDS-PAGE using approaches developed for high-throughput structural genomics studies (30). For the immunoprecipitation, the lysate was treated with antibody and then the antigen-antibody complex was precipitated by addition of Protein G-linked Sepharose resin (Amersham, Piscataway, NJ). The precipitated sample of Rv3230c was purified by SDS-PAGE and further analyzed by trypsin digestion and mass spectrometry at the University of Wisconsin Biotechnology Center.

Cloning of DesA3

The *rv3229c* gene (encoding DesA3) was amplified using the primers 5'-gggaattcCATA-TGgcgatcactgacgtcgacgtattcgcg-3' and 5'-cccAAGCTTggctgccagatcgctgggttcgg-3'. The NdeI and HindIII restriction sites are indicated in capital letters. The PCR contained 10% dimethyl sulfoxide and consisted of 30 cycles of melt, anneal, and extend at temperatures of 94°C, 55°C

C, and 72°C, respectively. The resulting DNA fragments were purified by gel electrophoresis and extracted using a QIAquick Gel Extraction Kit. The PCR product was digested with NdeI and HindIII and ligated into the similarly digested pVV16 to create expression vector pVV16-DesA3. *E. coli* TOP10 pVV16-DesA3 transformants were cultured on either Luria-Bertani broth or agar medium containing 50 µg/mL of kanamycin. Plasmids isolated from these cells were used to verify the sequence of the PCR-cloned gene.

Expression of DesA3

Mycobacterium smegmatis (ATCC 700084) was transformed by electroporation with either pVV16-DesA3 or pVV16 containing no insert. These transformants were maintained on either Middlebrook 7H10 agar medium or Middlebrook 7H9 broth enriched with Middlebrook OADC (oleic acid–albumin–dextrose–catalase, Becton Dickinson, Spark MD) and 20 µg/mL kanamycin. The expression studies were performed in 2-L of the enriched medium. DesA3 was constitutively expressed at 37°C. The cells were grown for ~38 h, harvested by centrifugation and washed once in 20 mM NaH₂PO₄, pH 7.2, containing 500 mM NaCl.

Preparation of *M. smegmatis* Lysate

The cell paste was re-suspended in the wash buffer at a composition of 1 g of wet cell paste per 2 mL of buffer. The cell suspension was sonicated for a total of 480 s using a duty cycle of 15 s on and 45 s off with the temperature of the suspension maintained below 10°C. A fraction of the total lysate was retained for assays and other analyses and the remainder was centrifuged at 27,000g for 30 min to separate the supernatant and the pellet fractions. The soluble fraction was removed and the pellet fraction was re-suspended in the same volume as total cell lysate subjected to centrifugation. The three samples were then treated with the same amount of 50 mM Tris-HCl, pH 7.4, containing 150 mM NaCl, 1 mM phenylmethanesulfonyl fluoride, 1 mM EDTA, 1% Triton X-100, 1% sodium deoxycholate and 0.1% SDS. For immunoprecipitation, the expressed DesA3 was treated with the primary mouse anti-His-tagged antibody and analyzed by trypsin digestion and mass spectrometry as described for Rv3230c.

Desaturation Assay

Radioactive fatty acyl-CoAs were obtained from American Radiolabeled Chemicals (St. Louis, MO). The DesA3 activity assay was similar to an SCD activity assay (31). The reaction mixture contained 20 mM of potassium phosphate and 150–250 mM of NaCl in a total reaction volume of 200 µL. Aliquots (20 µL) of the *M. smegmatis* pVV16 or pVV16-DesA3 total lysate, supernatant or pellet fractions were added in various combinations with aliquots (15 µL) of supernatant fraction prepared from either *E. coli* pQE80 or pQE80-Rv3230c. The reaction was initiated by addition of 0.4 µmol of NADPH, 6 nmol of stearoyl-CoA, 0.03 µCi of [1-¹⁴C]-stearoyl-CoA and 0.2 nmol of FAD in a combined volume of 200 µL. The reaction was incubated at 37°C for 1 h and stopped by the addition of 200 µL of 2.5 M KOH in ethanol. The mixture was heated at 80°C for 1 h and acidified by the addition of 280 µL of formic acid. The saponified fatty acids were extracted with 700 µL of hexane, 200 µL of the extract was evaporated to dryness, resuspended in 50 µL of hexane and separated into saturated and unsaturated acids on a 10% AgNO₃-impregnated thin-layer chromatography plate using chloroform:methanol:acetic acid:water (90:8:1:0.8) as the developing solvent. Radioactivity was counted by phosphorimaging using a Packard Instant Imager (Packard, Meriden, CT) for 30–60 min. Samples prepared in this manner gave ~200 total imager units for the major radioactive bands detected, which is within the linear response range of the instrument. Reactions performed with stearoyl-CoA were also treated by thin-layer chromatography as described above, and the individual bands were extracted from the plate, methylated and

analyzed by GC/MS to determine fatty acid content (32). For unsaturated fatty acids, the position of double bonds was determined as previously described (33).

For studies of the Rv3230c dependence of the reaction, different volumes of an *E. coli* pQE80-Rv3230c lysate containing Rv3230c were added to provide 0 to 1.28 mg of total protein. For studies of the salt dependence of the reaction, the NaCl concentration in the buffer was varied from 1.3 mM (no additional NaCl added) to 1000 mM. For studies of the pyridine nucleotide dependence, either NADH or NADPH was added in the concentration range from 0 to 2 mM. For studies of the flavin dependence, either FAD or FMN was added in the concentration range from 0 to 16 μ M. For studies of the ability of other reductases to substitute for Rv3230c, toluene 4-monooxygenase reductase (34,35) was added in the concentration range from 0 to 1 μ M and NADH replaced NADPH. In addition, assays were performed with *Anabaena* [2Fe-2S] ferredoxin and corn root ferredoxin reductase, mimicking the method and two-protein electron transfer chain used to assay plant stearyl-ACP Δ^9 desaturase (18).

Other Analyses

The primary sequences of proteins related to Rv3230c and DesA3 were obtained from a BLASTP search initiated at <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/BLAST/>. Operon prediction (36) was obtained from The Institute for Genomic Research website at <http://www.tigr.org/tdb/>. PFAM searches and protein domain assignments (37) were performed using the Washington University mirror site <http://pfam.wustl.edu>. Kyte-Doolittle hydropathy analysis (38) was performed using Protean (DNASTAR, Madison, WI). The TMHMM prediction program [(39,40), <http://www.cbs.dtu.dk/services/TMHMM-2.0>] was also used to analyze the putative trans-membrane topologies. Multiple sequence alignments were produced from CLUSTALW (41) with default parameters using MegAlign (DNASTAR). SWISS-MODEL (37) was used for threading of the Rv3230c primary sequence to the structure of phthalate dioxygenase reductase [Protein Data Bank accession code 2PIA, (42)].

RESULTS

Bioinformatic Analysis of Rv3230c

In the *M. tuberculosis* H37Rv genome, the gene *rv3230c* is located immediately before the gene *rv3229c*. *Rv3230c* was annotated to encode a putative oxidoreductase, while *rv3229c* was annotated to encode a membrane desaturase. Similar gene pairs are found in other genomes, notably including the pathogens *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* CDC1551, *Mycobacterium bovis* AF2122/97, *Mycobacterium avium* paratuberculosis and *Corynebacterium diphtheria*. The annotation of *rv3229c* was previously confirmed by heterologous expression and measurement of stearyl-CoA desaturase activity (5).

Previous operon prediction analyses indicated a high probability that *rv3230c* and *rv3229c* would be part of an operon (<http://www.tigr.org/tdb/>; <http://www.doe-mbi.ucla.edu/~strong/map/>) and that numerous other mycobacterial ferredoxins and oxidoreductases would not be co-expressed with *rv3229c*. Consistent with this assessment, genome-level expression studies (8,9) revealed the coordinated expression of *rv3230c* and *rv3229c* under a variety of growth conditions (Table 2). Taken together, these results suggested that *rv3230c* and *rv3229c* would be expressed together and thus plausibly have a functional relationship.

Protein family analysis indicated that Rv3230c, the putative oxidoreductase encoded by the *rv3230c* gene, consists of flavin binding, NAD binding and [2Fe-2S] ferredoxin domains. Figure 1 shows a schematic representation of this linkage of redox domains, and includes comparable representations of the domains other oxidoreductases complexes considered in this

work. The other oxidoreductases shown in Figure 1 catalyze electron transfer reactions between NAD(P)H and iron-containing enzymes such as the *cis*-diol-forming aromatic ring dioxygenases (43–45), the bacterial diiron center hydroxylases (34,46) and plant acyl-ACP desaturases (17). Among the three-domain reductases, phthalate dioxygenase reductase [2PIA, (42)] and benzoate 1,2-dioxygenase reductase [1KPH, (47)] provide representative three domain structures. The domain arrangement in Rv3230c matches that of phthalate dioxygenase reductase (42), with the flavin binding domain located at the N-terminal and the [2Fe-2S] ferredoxin domain located at the C-terminal. Rv3230c and phthalate dioxygenase reductase have ~23% sequence identity. Rv3230c also differs from other related reductases as it has a calculated pI of 9.4, as compared to 5.9 for phthalate dioxygenase reductase, 5.1 for toluene 4-monooxygenase reductase, 4.1 for *Anabaena* [2Fe-2S] ferredoxin and 8.1 for corn root ferredoxin reductase. For comparison, the individual FAD and NAD binding domains (residues 63–226) and [2Fe-2S] ferredoxin domain (residues 300–380) from Rv3230c have pI-values of 10.0 and 5.5, respectively.

Bioinformatics Analysis of DesA3

Kyte-Doolittle hydropathy analysis was previously used to deduce the positions of four long stretches of hydrophobic residues in rat SCD that might act as trans-membrane helices (26). Figure 2 shows a combination of this analysis and the location of the eight His motif (26) for human SCD and bacterial AlkB, two representative diiron enzymes known to be integral membrane proteins, along with a comparable analysis of DesA3. This analysis predicts that SCD will have four trans-membrane regions (Figure 2A) and also predicts that AlkB may have up to six trans-membrane regions (Figure 2B). By comparison, the Kyte-Doolittle analysis shown in Figure 2 predicts that DesA3 may have only three hydrophobic sequences of 18 residues, long enough to cross the cell membrane.

As a further evaluation of membrane protein topology, the TMHMM analysis of SCD and AlkB, also shown in Figure 2, still predicts four and six trans-membrane helices, respectively (*red* lines). Figure 2 also shows the probability that a given residue position may be on the interior of the membrane (*blue* line) or on the exterior (*green* line) according to the TMHMM analysis. In contrast to the prediction with SCD and AlkB, the TMHMM analysis of DesA3 predicted only one likely trans-membrane helix motif. Thus, while DesA3 appears to retain the eight His motif associated with other membrane diiron enzymes, current bioinformatics analyses suggests differences in the predicted topology relative to known integral membrane enzymes, including the spacing and length of putative trans-membrane hydrophobic sequences, the relative location of the putative eight His metal binding motif and the disposition of the C-terminal region relative to the interior surface of the membrane. Others have noted the specific residue differences near to the eight His motif (5).

Expression Studies

Rv3230c was expressed in *E. coli* Rosetta2 as a fusion to an N-terminal His₆-tag. Figure 3A shows that the expressed Rv3230c could be detected by use of the anti-His-tag antibody and denaturing SDS-PAGE. Total expressed Rv3230c partitioned between the soluble and pellet fractions after centrifugation. Overall, the expressed protein was only sparingly soluble under the expression conditions used. Figure 4A shows the primary sequence of Rv3230c, while Table 3 shows the results of tryptic digest MALDI-MS of Rv3230c purified by immunoprecipitation using an anti-His₆-tag antibody. The tryptic digest work revealed 5 peptides, indicated by *bold* type in Figure 4A (note that trypsin cleaves Rv3230c between Arg355 and Met356), whose masses closely match the predicted Rv3230c digestion profile. These 5 peptides represent 28% of the complete sequence. Among the 5 peptides, the primary sequences of two peptides were confirmed by further MS/MS sequencing, and these two

peptides are indicated by *bold* and *italic* in Figure 4A. These positive results confirm that Rv3230c was expressed in *E. coli*.

A mycobacterial expression vector pVV16 (29) was used to express DesA3 containing a C-terminal His-tag in *M. smegmatis*. For screening purposes, an anti-His-tag antibody was used to localize DesA3. Figure 3B shows that the majority of the total expressed DesA3 was in the pellet fraction, while the supernatant fraction contained only a small amount of antibody-reactive protein. Figure 4B shows the primary sequence of DesA3. Table 3 shows the results of tryptic digest MALDI-MS of the DesA3 purified by immunoprecipitation using an anti-His₆-tag antibody and denaturing SDS-PAGE. This work revealed 9 peptides (22% of the complete protein) with masses that closely matched the predicted DesA3 digestion profile, thus confirming that the expressed membrane protein was DesA3.

Reconstitution of DesA3 Activity

Figure 5 and Table 4 show results from stearyl-CoA Δ^9 desaturase assays made using various combinations of the total cell lysates, supernatants and pellet fractions of *M. smegmatis* and the supernatant fractions of *E. coli* Rosetta2.

Figure 5A and Table 4 shows results of control experiments using lysates prepared from *M. smegmatis* transformed with pVV16 lacking a gene insert. For each experiment, the total cell lysate, the soluble fraction and the re-suspended pellet fraction were evaluated. The addition of buffer, a lysate prepared from *E. coli* Rosetta2 transformed with an empty pQE80 vector or a lysate prepared from *E. coli* Rosetta2 pQE80-Rv3230c gave little or no significant conversion of 18:0-CoA to 18:1-CoA above background. This shows that either *M. smegmatis* or *E. coli* as grown for this study do not have a detectable 18:0-CoA Δ^9 desaturase activity. Likewise, Figure 5B shows that the total pVV16-DesA3 lysate supplemented with either buffer alone or with the control lysate from *E. coli* Rosetta2 pQE80 gave similar low, but detectable activity (*lanes* 1 and 4).

When the *M. smegmatis* pVV16-DesA3 total lysate, supernatant and pellet fractions were treated with the lysate from *E. coli* Rosetta2 pQE80-Rv3230c (Figure 5B, *lanes* 7 to 9 and Table 4), an increase in the conversion of 18:0-CoA to 18:1-CoA was observed from all three fractions as compared to the addition of the control lysate (*lanes* 4 to 6). GC-MS analysis of the product band showed that a Δ^9 position double bond was present, which was consistent with the migration position when compared to a *cis* - Δ^9 -18:1 standard. For the combination of the pellet fraction and the pQE80-Rv3230c lysate, a ~10-fold increase in activity was obtained. When the pVV16-DesA3 pellet fraction and Rv3230c supernatant were reacted with 16:0-CoA, the major product of the reaction was *cis* - Δ^9 -16:1 as determined by thin-layer chromatography.

In other experiments (data not shown), the reconstituted desaturation activity was best in buffer containing ~150–500 mM NaCl but decreased above this salt concentration. This result suggests an ionic contribution to solubility, stability or complex formation. Furthermore, the addition of FAD above 1 μ M approximately doubled the desaturation activity, while the addition of FMN provided only a slight stimulation, suggesting that Rv3230c may use FAD as a cofactor. As compared with NADPH, NADH did not stimulate the desaturation activity in the concentration range from 0 to 2 mM, indicating Rv3230c is specific for the use of NADPH. DesA3 was also abundantly expressed as a C-terminal fusion to maltose binding protein in *E. coli* Rosetta2 and appeared in the pellet fraction. However, lysates prepared from these cells gave no NADPH-dependent conversion of 18:0-CoA, either alone or when supplemented with the *E. coli* supernatant containing Rv3230c.

Saturation of DesA3 Activity by Rv3230c

In order to further investigate the specificity of the reaction of Rv3230c with DesA3, different volumes of the lysate containing Rv3230c were added to the pellet fraction prepared from *M. smegmatis* pVV16-DesA3. Figure 6 shows that increasing the amount of control lysate prepared from *E. coli* pQE80 empty vector did not increase the amount of 18:1-CoA formed. In contrast, increasing amounts of *E. coli* lysate containing Rv3230c stimulated production of 18:1-CoA to a maximal level, consistent with saturation of a binding interaction. However, further addition of the Rv3230c lysate decreased the amount of 18:1-CoA produced. For example, with the addition of greater than 1 mg of total protein from the Rv3230c lysate, the desaturation reaction was almost completely blocked. As a different test of the specificity of reaction, addition of the purified toluene 4-monooxygenase reductase (domain arrangement similar to benzoate 1,2-dioxygenase reductase, 1KPH, see Figure 1) in the concentration range of 0 to 1 μ M did not complement DesA3 activity. Likewise, the use of *Anabaena* [2Fe-2S] ferredoxin and corn root ferredoxin reductase [a two-protein electron complex (18), see Figure 1] did not complement DesA3 activity.

DISCUSSION

The results presented here arise from the heterologous expression of DesA3 in *M. smegmatis*, which yields a catalytically active desaturase that is located in the membrane fraction. In this work, we have further shown that the combination of an *E. coli* lysate containing recombinant Rv3230c and a *M. smegmatis* pellet fraction containing DesA3 gives rise to a substantial enhancement of desaturase activity. On the basis of this result, we propose that DesA3 and Rv3230c represent a functional two-protein desaturase complex from *M. tuberculosis* H37Rv. Some of the implications of this finding are discussed below.

Topology of Membrane Desaturases

DesA3 shares the eight His motif of the membrane acyl-lipid and acyl-CoA desaturases, the bacterial alkane and xylene monooxygenases and other O₂-dependent enzymes (5,26–28). Kyte-Doolittle analysis of these other proteins revealed the presence of multiple hydrophobic sequences that may span the cellular membrane (26). Likewise, previous Kyte-Doolittle hydropathy analysis suggested that DesA3 might contain up to three hydrophobic domains (5). For comparison, TMHMM analysis predicted four trans-membrane helices for SCD and six trans-membrane helices for AlkB but predicted no putative trans-membrane region in DesA3. This may arise from differences throughout the primary sequences of DesA3 relative to the other homologs but may also arise from incorrect assignment of the cellular location of the C-terminus of DesA3 (48). Nevertheless, it is clear from the results of Figure 3B and other work (5) that DesA3 is a membrane protein. It has also been previously noted that DesA3 has a number of different amino acid residues near to the conserved His motif (5). These differences provide tantalizing indications that DesA3 may be distinct from other integral membrane desaturases, which may possibly reflect the electron transfer partners used during catalysis.

Electron Transfer Partners of Membrane Desaturases

The acyl-ACP and acyl-lipid desaturases from the plant plastids use [2Fe-2S] ferredoxin as the electron donor (18,49–51). In vitro, a two-component electron transfer chain can be reconstituted for these enzymes by [2Fe-2S] ferredoxin and ferredoxin reductase (which provides the flavin and NAD binding domains, see Figure 1). In contrast, most other acyl-lipid desaturases of plants and the acyl-CoA desaturases of animals and fungi use the membrane-associated cytochrome *b*₅ reductase and cytochrome *b*₅ as a two-component electron transfer chain (52–56). Furthermore, some desaturases also exist as a fusion with a cytochrome *b*₅ domain (57), and presumably use cytochrome *b*₅ reductase to initiate electron transfer from NADPH. Other bacterial membrane enzymes such as AlkB and xylene monooxygenase use a

specialized rubredoxin (AlkG) and flavoprotein (AlkT) or a multi-domain flavin and [2Fe-2S] reductase (XylA) for electron transfer (27,28).

Properties of Rv3230c

In our search for electron transfer partners to the mycobacterial desaturases, we considered that Rv3230c might be part of an operon along with DesA3. Pfam analysis indicated that Rv3230c would be a fusion of flavin binding, NAD binding and [2Fe-2S] ferredoxin domains, which would be a suitable composition for a metalloprotein oxidoreductase, albeit one not previously associated with a desaturase enzyme. Neither T4moF, an oxidoreductase with a different domain order, nor the two-component ferredoxin and reductase were able to substitute for Rv3230c in catalytic assays (Figure 1). Thus Rv3230c has specificity for reaction with DesA3.

Rv3230c has only 23% sequence identity with phthalate dioxygenase reductase. Nevertheless, the X-ray structure of phthalate dioxygenase reductase provided an excellent structural homology model for Rv3230c (see Figure 7A and 7B, respectively). The homology model had an E-value of $2.97e-5$, where E-values smaller than 0.05 indicate increasingly high probability for the match between sequence and target structure. In the threaded structure, the first 58 residues of Rv3230c were not modeled to the smaller dioxygenase reductase. This unmatched region has amphipathic character, with a predicted short hydrophobic region immediately preceding the start of the flavin-binding domain (*white* spheres in Figure 7B). Overall, the remainder of the Rv3230c model closely matched the three domain structure of phthalate dioxygenase reductase, including conserved residues making contact with the flavin cofactor and the NAD(P)H binding domain [(43, 58, 59), summarized in Figure 3C] and the spacing of the Cys ligands to the [2Fe-2S] center (e.g., Rv3230c Cys-333, Cys-338, Cys-341 and Cys-368 and 2PIA Cys-272, Cys-277, Cys-280 and Cys-308). Of note, Phe225 from phthalate dioxygenase reductase has been proposed to have configurational flexibility in order to promote nicotinamide-flavin stacking (42), and this residue is conserved in Rv3230c as Phe287.

Only a few residue positions showed deviations of the experimental and predicted backbone atoms greater than 1 Å (*orange* tubes in Figure 7B). One of the variable loops in Rv3230c was predicted to precede the Arg-55 to Ser-58 sequence that contributes contacts to FMN-N5 in phthalate dioxygenase reductase. Another of the variable loops in Rv3230c was also predicted to be near to the putative flavin-binding site. This loop included an insertion of 5 residues, perhaps corresponding to a difference that might accommodate FAD binding suggested in Rv3230c instead of FMN found in phthalate dioxygenase reductase. Two of the other variable loops were on the surface of the [2Fe-2S] domain nearest to the interface with the flavin-binding site. One noticeable difference between the threaded structure of Rv3230c and phthalate dioxygenase reductase was the predicted number of surface Arg and Lys residues on Rv3230c, which contribute to the elevated pI of 9.4. Since Rv3230c reacts with an integral membrane protein, a net positive surface charge may facilitate interactions with negatively charged phospholipid membrane.

Comparison with Other Mycobacterial Desaturases

M. smegmatis has several DesA3 homologs based on sequences annotations. Constitutive expression of one of these homologs might have contributed to the low background accumulation of 18:1-CoA observed in control assays. However, since exogenous unsaturated fatty acids often reduce the expression of stearyl-CoA desaturases (60–63), the presence of oleic acid in the growth medium may have also substantially inhibited expression of these endogenous desaturases. By comparison, the heterologous expression of *M. tuberculosis* DesA3 from pVV16 was under control of the hsp60 promoter and would likely not be directly affected by medium composition.

As presently defined here, the DesA3 complex from *M. tuberculosis* is composed of a soluble reductase and a membrane bound desaturase. This composition is distinct from an entirely soluble *cis*- Δ^{15} 24:0-CoA desaturase system reported from *M. smegmatis* (64). This previously described three-protein complex consisted of an NADPH-oxidase, a ferredoxin-containing fraction and a terminal desaturase that had low reactivity for 18:0-CoA.

A stearyl-CoA Δ^9 desaturase was also reported from *Mycobacterium phlei* (65,66). This enzyme was a three-component particulate system consisting of an FAD-requiring NADPH-cytochrome *c* reductase, an intermediate carrier of unknown nature and a cyanide-sensitive terminal oxidase. The present complex from *M. tuberculosis* has notable similarities to this *M. phlei* complex, perhaps corresponding to the FAD-requiring reductase and the terminal oxidase. The nature of the intermediate carrier, if indeed required for the Rv3230c and DesA3 complex, is not known. In principle, the *M. smegmatis* lysate might provide other complementary proteins required for function of the *M. tuberculosis* DesA3 complex. We considered whether five other ferredoxins (Rv0763c, Rv1177, Rv1786, Rv2007c, and Rv3503c) present in the *M. tuberculosis* H37Rv genome might also be part of a DesA3 complex. However, since none of the genes for these ferredoxins are located near to *desA3*, and since the available gene expression results do not reveal a correlation, the role of these other ferredoxins in the DesA3 complex is not easily ascertained.

Catalysis by the DesA3 Complex

Our measurements using different combinations of soluble and pellet fractions without Rv3230c had no significant desaturase activity, as was previously observed using *M. bovis* BCG lysate (5). We found that *E. coli* control lysates could provide a weak stimulation of 18:0-CoA desaturation in *M. smegmatis* lysates expressing DesA3. This activity did not increase as more of the control lysate was added (Figure 6), suggesting non-specific interactions of endogenous *E. coli* proteins. In contrast, 18:0-CoA desaturase activity was readily detected when either total or pellet fractions prepared from *M. smegmatis* expressing DesA3 were mixed with a lysate containing Rv3230c. The stimulation of the DesA3 reaction by the Rv3230c lysate exhibited apparent saturation behavior, but also became inhibitory at higher concentrations. The saturation behavior is typical when one protein of an enzyme complex is treated as a varied substrate in standard steady-state kinetic analysis (67). Moreover, the addition of excess oxidoreductase may also lead to enzyme inhibition due to an uncoupled adventitious oxidation of NAD(P)H (34,35), which apparently occurred when large amounts of the Rv3230c lysate were used.

Summary

The present results demonstrate that Rv3230c is a biologically relevant electron transfer partner for DesA3, providing biochemical verification of the genome annotation, operon prediction and expression array studies of others (8,9). Knowledge of the individual protein components of this complex provides a basis for a more detailed examination of the properties of this plausible mycobacterial drug target.

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Figure 1.

Schematic representation of the domain structure of Rv3230c and related oxidoreductases with different arrangements of flavin binding, NAD binding and [2Fe-2S] ferredoxin domains. A, phthalate dioxygenase reductase. B, Rv3230c. C, benzoate 1,2-dioxygenase reductase. D, toluene 4-monooxygenase reductase. E, corn root ferredoxin reductase and *Anabaena* [2Fe-2S] ferredoxin.

Figure 2.

Results of a bioinformatics analyses of membrane protein structure. A, human SCD isoform 1, 359 residues long, GI:2190404. B, AlkB from *Pseudomonas putida* Gpo1, 401 residues long, GI:113639. C, DesA3 from *M. tuberculosis* H37Rv, 427 residues long, GI:57117078. The *red* lines show the probability that the residue is part of a trans-membrane sequence; the *blue* lines show the probability that a given residue position is on the interior of the membrane and the *green* lines shows the probability that the residue position is on the exterior. Each analysis includes the location of the diagnostic eight His metal binding motif (His motif, *black* boxes) and long hydrophobic stretches predicted by Kyte-Doolittle hydropathy analyses (KD, *orange* boxes).

Figure 3.

Protein expression detected by Western blotting. A, expression of Rv3230c in *E. coli* Rosetta2. Lane 1 contains molecular weight markers. Lane 2 is a sample taken immediately before induction. Lane 3 is the induced sample. Lane 4 is the supernatant fraction obtained from the induced cells. Lane 5 is the pellet fraction of the lysate. B, localization of DesA3 expressed in *M. smegmatis*. An anti-His₆-tag antibody was used to detect recombinant DesA3 containing a C-terminal His₆-tag. Lane 1 contains molecular weight markers. Lane 2 contains total cellular lysate. Lane 3 contains the supernatant fraction. Lane 4 contains the resuspended pellet fraction.

A. Rv3230c

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1   MRGSHHHHHH GSACELGTIE GRskkhttlN
31  asiidtrrpt vagadrHPGW HALRKiaarI
61  TTPLLPDDYL HLANPLWSAR elrgrilgvr
91  retedsatlf ikpgwgfsfd yqpggyigig
121 llvdgrwrwr sysltsspaa sgsarmvtvt
151 vkampegfls thlvagvkpg tivrlaapqg
181 nfvlpdapp lilfltagsg itpvmsmlrt
211 lvrrNQITDV VHLHSAPTAA DVMFGAELAA
241 LAADHPGYRl svretraqgr ldltrigqqv
271 pdwrerqtwc cgpegvlnqa dkwssagas
301 drlhlerfav sktapagagg tvtfarsgks
331 vAADAATSLM DAGEGAGVQL PFGCRMGICQ
361 SCVVDLVEGH Vrdlrtgqrh epgrtrvqtcv
391 saasgdcvld i

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B. Rv3229c

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1   maitdvdvfa hltdadienl aaeldairrd
31  veesrgerda ryirrtiaaq rALEVSGRLL
61  LAGSSRrlaw wtgaltlgva kiienmeigh
91  nvmhggwdwm ndpeihsstw ewdmsgsskh
121 wrYTHNFVHH Kytnilgmdd dvgygmlrvt
151 rdqrwkryni fnvwwntila igfewgvalq
181 hleigkifkg radreaaktr lrefsakagr
211 qvfkDYVAFP ALTSLSPGAT YRstltanvv
241 anvirnvwsn avifcghfpd gaekftktm
271 igepkGQWYL RQMLGSANFN AGPALRfmsg
301 nlchqiehl ypdpsnrLH EISVRvrevc
331 drydlpyttg sflvqygktw rtlaklsldp
361 kylrdnadda petrserMFA GLGPGFAGAD
391 PVTGRrrglk TAIAAVRgrr rskrmaksvt
421 epddlaakKL HHHHHH

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C. flavin and NADPH binding

	55	79	120	196	222
2PIA	RtYS	grggS	GiGITP	vycCGP	fEsF
consensus	r ys	g s	GtG	p y cGp	f
Rv3230c	RsYS	egflS	GsGITP	twaCGP	lErF
	109	135	177	257	284

Figure 4.

Primary sequences of Rv3230c and DesA3 including the N- and C-terminal modifications used to add the His₆ tags (shown in *upper case*). A, primary sequence of Rv3230c with peptides identified by tryptic digest and MALDI-MS analyses indicated in **bold** and peptides confirmed by MS/MS analysis indicated by **bold** and *italics*. The experimental and calculated masses of the identified peptides are shown in Table 3. B, primary sequence of DesA3 with peptides identified by tryptic digest and MALDI-MS analyses indicated in **bold**. The experimental and calculated masses of the identified peptides are shown in Table 3. C, residues contributing to flavin and NADPH binding in phthalate dioxygenase reductase, the consensus sequence motif

proposed for the ferredoxin NADP⁺ reductase family (43,58,59) and the corresponding residues in Rv3230c.

Figure 5.

The effect of Rv3230c on stearoyl-CoA Δ^9 desaturase activity of DesA3. In this figure, T, S and P correspond to the total, supernatant and pellet fractions of *M. smegmatis* lysate, respectively. The positions of migration of the substrate (18:0), product (18:1) and a side product in the thin-layer chromatography separation are also indicated (see Table 4). A, reactions of *M. smegmatis* pVV16 control lysates lacking DesA3. In three separate trials, equal volumes of buffer, an *E. coli* pQE80 control lysate and an *E. coli* pQE80-Rv3230c containing expressed Rv3230c were studied. B, reactions using lysates of *M. smegmatis* pVV16-DesA3 containing DesA3. In three separate trials, equal volumes of buffer, an *E. coli* pQE80 control

lysate and an *E. coli* pQE80-Rv3230c containing expressed Rv3230c were studied. Results from the phosphorimaging of both *A* and *B* are summarized in Table 4.

Figure 6.

Dependence of DesA3 activity upon addition of increasing amounts of lysate containing Rv3230c. *Solid squares*, addition of lysates made from *E. coli* pQE80-Rv3230c (0 to 128 µL of a lysate with total protein concentration of 10 mg/mL). The percentage conversion of 18:0-CoA to 18:1-CoA was determined by the same fixed time assay as used for the experiments of Figure 5 and Table 4, which contained 15 µL of *E. coli* pQE80-Rv3230c lysate. *Open circles*, addition of lysate made from *E. coli* pQE80. The protein concentration of the pQE80 and pQE80-Rv3230c lysates were normalized before the start of the experiment.

Figure 7.

Structural relationship in the multi-domain oxidoreductase subfamily defined by phthalate dioxygenase reductase. A, the X-ray structure of phthalate dioxygenase reductase [2PIA, (42)]. The cartoon representation of the protein backbone is shown as a color gradient from *blue* at the N-terminal to *red* at the C-terminal. The flavin binding domain is predominantly *blue* in color, the NADPH binding domain is *green* and *yellow* in color and the [2Fe-2S] domain is *orange* and *red*. The positions of conserved Cys ligands to the [2Fe-2S] center are shown as *black* sticks, the [2Fe-2S] center is shown as *grey* and *yellow* spheres and the bound FMN is shown as *yellow* sticks. B, a predicted structure of Rv3230c determined by molecular threading of the Rv3230c primary sequence onto the X-ray structure of phthalate dioxygenase reductase. The first modeled atom at the N-terminal, Ala-58 N, is shown as a *white* sphere. The predicted positions of loops that deviate from the positions in 2PIA are shown as *orange* tubes. The positions of conserved Cys residues that may ligate the [2Fe-2S] center are shown as *blue* sticks. In the Rv3230c threaded structure, the positions of the [2Fe-2S] center and the isoalloxazine ring were transferred from the aligned phthalate dioxygenase reductase structure for reference only.

Table 1

Bacterial strains and DNA constructs used in this study.

Strain or plasmid	Relevant characteristics	Source or Reference
Strains		
<i>Escherichia coli</i> strain TOP10	F ⁻ <i>mcrA</i> (<i>mrr-hsdRMS-mcrBC</i>) 80 <i>lacZ</i> M15 <i>lacX</i> 74 <i>recA</i> 1 <i>araD</i> 139 (<i>ara-leu</i>)7697 <i>galU galK rpsL</i> (Str ^R) <i>endA</i> 1 <i>nupG</i> {P3: Kan ^R , Amp ^R (Amber), Tet ^R (amber)}	Invitrogen
<i>E. coli</i> Rosetta2	F ⁻ <i>ompT hsdS_B</i> (r _B ⁻ m _B ⁻) <i>gal dcm</i> pRARE2 (<i>cam</i> ^R and tRNA genes <i>argU</i> , <i>argW</i> , <i>argX</i> , <i>ileX</i> , <i>glyT</i> , <i>leuW</i> , <i>proL</i> , <i>metT</i> , <i>thrT</i> , <i>tyrU</i> , and <i>thrU</i>)	Novagen
<i>Mycobacterium smegmatis</i> mc ² 155	Mycobacterial expression host with high transformation efficiency	ATCC 700084 (68)
Plasmids		
pQE80	Commercially available <i>E. coli</i> expression vector	Qiagen
pVV16	Shuttle vector and mycobacterial expression vector	(29)
pQE80-Rv3230c	<i>rv3230c</i> in pQE80	This work
pVV16-DesA3	<i>desa3</i> in pVV16	This work

Table 2Correlation of fold-change expression of DesA3 and Rv3230c from genome-level studies of *M. tuberculosis*.^a

Growth condition	Gene	
	rv3329c (desA3)	rv3230c
Nutrient starvation 4 h	−8.55	−3.21
Nutrient starvation 24 h	−5.41	−2.39
Nutrient starvation 96 h	−6.62	−3.08
Palmitic acid (0.05 mM)	+ 11.6	+ 2.6
H ₂ O ₂ (5 mM)	+ 7.2	+ 6.2

^aResults selected from expression studies undertaken by others (8,9).

Table 3
Diagnostic peptides of Rv3230c and DesA3 identified by tryptic digest and MALDI-MS.

Mr(expt) ^a	Mr(calc) ^b	Delta ^c	Sequence ^d
Rv3230c			
1100.5409	1100.5992	-0.0583	HPGWHALRK
2406.2249	2406.2583	-0.0334	ITTPLLPDDYLHLANPLWSAR ^e
3658.7488	3658.7837	-0.0349	NQITDVVHLHSAPTAADV MFGAELAALAADHPGYR
2551.1299	2551.1682	-0.0383	SVAADAATSLMDAGEGAGVOLPFGCR ^e
1958.877	1958.9012	-0.0242	MGICOSCVVDLVEGHVR
DesA3			
730.4927	730.3973	0.0954	ALEVSGR
815.6927	815.4864	0.2063	LLLAGSSR
1181.7927	1181.573	0.2197	YTHNFVHHK
1928.2927	1927.9679	0.3248	DYVAFPALTSLSPGATYR
821.5927	821.4184	0.1743	GQWYLR
1545.9927	1545.7721	0.2206	QMLGSANFNAGPALR
852.6927	852.4817	0.211	LHEISVR
1720.1927	1719.8402	0.3525	MFAGLGPGFAGADPVTGR
700.4927	700.4231	0.0696	TAIAAVR

^aExperimental mass determined by MALDI-MS.

^bCalculated mass from the primary sequence.

^cDifference between the experimental and calculated masses.

^dSequence of the identified peptide deduced from the combination of tryptic digest and mass results. The positions of these peptides in either Rv3230c or DesA3 are shown in Figure 4.

^eThe primary sequence of these peptides was confirmed by MS/MS analysis.

Table 4
Percentage of the total phosphorimager signal^a determined for the different lanes shown in Figure 5.

	Lanes from Figure 4								
	L1	L2	L3	L4	L5	L6	L7	L8	L9
<i>M. smegmatis</i> fraction ^b	total	Soluble	pellet	Total	soluble	pellet	Total	soluble	pellet
<i>E. coli</i> pOE80 lysate	—	—	—	+	+	+	—	—	—
<i>E. coli</i> pOE80-Rv3230c lysate	—	—	—	—	—	—	+	+	+
<i>M. smegmatis</i> pVV16 ^c									
% 18:0	82%	91%	86%	84%	95%	91%	84%	95%	93%
% 18:1	6%	3%	3%	4%	3%	4%	4%	3%	3%
% side product ^d	12%	6%	11%	12%	2%	5%	12%	2%	4%
<i>M. smegmatis</i> pVV16-DesA3 ^e									
% 18:0	74%	91%	74%	77%	94%	83%	66%	83%	63%
% 18:1	13%	3%	4%	7%	4%	9%	20%	14%	28%
% side product	13%	6%	22%	16%	2%	8%	14%	3%	9%
Fold-increase in 18:1 ^f	2.2	1.0	1.3	1.8	1.3	2.5	5.0	4.7	9.3

^a Samples were analyzed by phosphorimaging as described in Experimental Procedures.

^b The subcellular fraction of *M. smegmatis* used in the experiment: total cell lysate, soluble fraction or pellet fraction prepared as described in Experimental Procedures.

^c Control studies using *M. smegmatis* pVV16 not able to express DesA3.

^d This pattern of separation of radiolabeled 18:0 from total cellular lipids has been observed in other studies [e.g., see Figure 3 of reference (31)]. Our MALDI and GC/MS analysis of the side product obtained from unlabeled reactions showed that this band contained a mixture of 16:0, 16:1, 18:0 and 18:1 fatty acids, with 16:1 predominant, 16:0 and 18:0 present in small amounts and 18:1 present in a trace amount. Among these products, only the 18:0 and 18:1 would be detected by the radioisotope method. GC/MS analysis of the dimethyl disulfide treated, unlabeled side product showed that the abundant 16:1 was desaturated at the Δ^7 position, while the trace amount of 18:1 failed to yield a diagnostic product. Based on the co-migration with Δ^7 -16:1, it is plausible that the radiolabeled side product is Δ^7 -18:1.

^e Desaturase reaction studies using *M. smegmatis* pVV16-DesA3 expressing DesA3.

^f The fold increase in 18:1 production relative to the comparable control studies.