

# COPPER EFFECT ON CYTOCHROME $b_{559}$ OF PHOTOSYSTEM II UNDER PHOTOINHIBITORY CONDITIONS

by

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## ABSTRACT

Toxic Cu(II) effect on Cytochrome  $b_{559}$  under aerobic photoinhibitory conditions was examined in two different PSII membrane preparations active in oxygen evolution. The preparations differ in the content of Cytochrome  $b_{559}$  redox potential forms. Difference absorption spectra showed that the presence of Cu(II) induced the oxidation of the high-potential form of Cytochrome  $b_{559}$  in the dark. Addition of hydroquinone reduced the total oxidised high-potential form of Cytochrome  $b_{559}$  present in Cu(II)-treated PSII membranes indicating that no conversion to the low-potential form took place. Spectroscopic determinations of Cytochrome  $b_{559}$  during photoinhibitory treatment showed slower kinetics of Cu(II) effect on Cytochrome  $b_{559}$  as compared to the rapid loss of oxygen evolution activity in the same conditions. This result indicates that Cytochrome  $b_{559}$  is affected after PSII centers are photoinhibited. The high-potential form was more

sensitive to toxic Cu(II) action than the low-potential form under illumination at pH 6.0. The content of the high-potential form of Cytochrome  $b_{559}$  was completely lost, however the low-potential content was unaffected in these conditions. This loss did not involve cytochrome protein degradation. Results are discussed in terms of different binding properties of the heme iron to the protonated or unprotonated histidine ligand in the high-potential and low-potential forms of Cytochrome  $b_{559}$ , respectively.

**Keywords:** cytochrome  $b_{559}$ , copper, photosystem II, photoinhibition, redox potential

**Abbreviations:** Cyt, cytochrome; DCBQ, dichlorobenzoquinone ; D1, polypeptide of the photosystem II reaction centre ; HP, high potential; LP, low potential; MES, 2-(N-morpholino) ethane-sulfonic acid; PAGE, polyacrilamide gel electrophoresis; PS, photosystem; RC, reaction center; SDS, sodium dodecyl sulphate ; Tris, Tris(hydroxymethyl)aminomethane.

## INTRODUCTION

Several heavy metals are essential for plant growth and development, but their excess can easily lead to toxic effects. Among them Cu(II) is known to be toxic at high concentrations for photosynthetic organisms (Clijsters and van Asche, 1985; Maksymiec, 1997). Extensive *in vitro* studies have shown that photosystem II (PSII) is more susceptible to copper toxicity (for review see Droppa and Horváth, 1990; Barón et al. 1995) than photosystem I (PSI) (Ouzounidou et al. 1997). Both acceptor and donor sides of PSII have been proposed as copper-inhibitory sites. At the acceptor side, the Q<sub>B</sub> binding site (Mohanty et al. 1989) and the Pheo-Fe-Q<sub>A</sub> domain (Yruela et al. 1991, 1992, 1993, 1996a) have been reported. Evidences that copper ion impairs the function of the oxidising side has been reported (Cedeño-Maldonado et al. 1972; Vierke and Struckmeier, 1977; Shioi et al. 1978a,b; Bohner et al. 1980; Samuelsson and Öquist, 1980). It has been shown that the electron flow from Tyr<sub>Z</sub> to P680<sup>+</sup> is blocked by Cu(II) (Schröder et al. 1994; Arellano et al. 1995). Indeed, Králova et al. (1994) and Sersen et al. (1997) have proposed that Cu(II) interacts not only with Tyr<sub>Z</sub> but also with Tyr<sub>D</sub> on D2 protein. A possible direct interaction between copper and calcium at the oxidising side of PSII was also shown both *in vitro* (Sabat, 1996) and *in vivo* (Maksymiec and Baszynski, 1999). Additional effects of Cu(II) toxicity on both donor and acceptor sides have been reported using higher copper concentrations. In such conditions the Mn-cluster and the extrinsic proteins on the donor side can be affected. Interaction of copper with the non-heme Fe<sup>2+</sup> and cytochrome (Cyt) *b*<sub>559</sub> on the acceptor side has been also reported. (Renger et al. 1993; Sersen et al. 1997; Jegerschöld et al. 1995, 1999).

The photosynthetic activity decreases when oxygenic organisms are exposed to prolonged illumination with high light intensities. This process which includes the functional impairment of PSII electron transport and the structural damage of the PSII reaction centre is known as photoinhibition (Aro et al. 1993). The influence of Cu(II) toxicity on photoinhibition has also been investigated (Yruela et al. 1996b; Pätsikkä et al. 1998) demonstrating that Cu(II) enhances the adverse effects of excess light on PSII. Over the past 10 years the participation of Cyt  $b_{559}$  in a redox mechanism to protect PSII against donor and acceptor side photoinhibition has been proposed (for review see Stewart and Brudvig, 1998). Evidence that Cyt  $b_{559}$  prevents the overreduction of PSII acceptor side have been reported (Nedbal et al. 1992; Poulson, 1995). On the other hand, it was postulated that the role of this heme protein is to act as an auxiliary electron donor delivering electrons to oxidised chlorophylls in the PSII reaction centre (Buser et al. 1992; Faller et al. 2001).

Cytochrome  $b_{559}$  can exhibit several redox potential forms, a labile high-potential (HP) form with a midpoint redox potential ( $E_m$ ) around +400 mV, a intermediate potential (IP) form ranging from +200 to +150 mV and a low-potential (LP) form with an  $E_m$  value from +70 to +20 mV (Stewart and Brudvig, 1998; Kaminskaya et al. 1999; Mizusawa et al. 1999; Roncel et al. 2001). The IP form has been proposed to be a protonated LP form (Roncel et al. 2001). The HP form dominates in thylakoids and PSII membranes with an intact water-oxidizing complex. Several authors have reported that photoinhibition induces changes in the redox properties of Cyt  $b_{559}$  (Styring et al. 1990; Allakhverdiev et al. 1997; Ortega et al. 1999). The conversion of the HP to the LP form has been observed during photoinhibitory illumination in native PSII membranes (Ortega et al. 1999).

Cu(II) interaction with Cyt  $b_{559}$  has been reported earlier (Jegerschöld et al. 1995; Yruela et al. 1996b), however no data on its specific action during photoinhibition have been shown. The aim of this work is to investigate the changes of Cyt  $b_{559}$  caused by photoinhibition under low toxic Cu(II) conditions. The results show that HP Cyt  $b_{559}$  form is very sensitive to toxic Cu(II) action during photoinhibitory illumination whereas LP Cyt  $b_{559}$  form is not affected under the same experimental conditions.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

**Biological material.-** *Beta vulgaris* cv Monohill was grown hydroponically in a growth chamber in half-Hoagland nutrient solution under  $325 \mu\text{mol quanta.m}^{-2}.\text{s}^{-1}$  from fluorescent and incandescent lamps at 25 °C, 80% humidity and 16-h photoperiod. Spinach was obtained from local market.

**Photosystem II membrane isolation.-** Highly enriched PSII membranes with a rate of oxygen evolution activity of *c.a.*  $500 \mu\text{mol O}_2 \text{ mg Chl}^{-1} \text{ h}^{-1}$ , using dichlorobenzoquinone (DCBQ) as artificial electron acceptor, were prepared from market spinach and sugar beet according to Berthold et al. (1981). Samples were suspended in 0.4 M sucrose, 15 mM NaCl, 5 mM  $\text{MgCl}_2$  and 50 mM 2-(N-morpholino) ethanesulphonic acid (Mes-NaOH), pH 6.0, frozen in liquid nitrogen and stored at  $-80 \text{ }^\circ\text{C}$  until use.

**Photoinhibition.-** Photoinhibitory treatment was done using intact and Cu(II)-treated oxygen-evolving PSII membranes preparations. PSII membranes at 200

$\mu\text{g Chl ml}^{-1}$  resuspended in 3.5 ml buffer containing 0.4 M sucrose, 15 mM NaCl and 50 mM Mes-NaOH, pH 5.0-6.0 or 50 mM Tris(hydroxymethyl)aminomethane (Tris-HCl), pH 7.8, were incubated with 125  $\mu\text{M CuCl}_2$  (equivalent to a Cu(II)/PSII ratio of 137). To calculate the Cu(II) per PSII unit ratio in PSII membranes a content of 250 Chl per RC was assumed (Berthold et al. 1981). Incubations with Cu(II) were done at 23 °C for 1 min under constant stirring in the dark before exposing the samples to heat-filtered white light ( $3,000 \mu\text{mol quanta m}^{-2}\text{s}^{-1}$ ) to induce photoinhibitory conditions. The temperature was maintained at 23 °C by circulating water from a temperature-controlled waterbath around the photoinhibition cell. The temperature increment inside of reaction cell was less than 1 °C after 20 min illumination. Control samples were kept in the dark under identical conditions to the illuminated samples in order to monitor dark inactivation processes unrelated to photoinhibition. After treatment all of the samples were washed twice with 15 mM NaCl and 50 mM Mes-NaOH, pH 5.0-6.0 or 50 mM Tris-HCl, pH 7.8. The pellets obtained by centrifugation at 23,000 x g were resuspended in the same buffer plus 0.3 M sucrose and then, oxygen-evolution activity was measured.

**Oxygen evolution activity.-** Oxygen evolution activity was measured with a Clark-type oxygen electrode in the presence of 0.5 mM DCBQ as artificial electron acceptor. The light intensity on the surface of the cuvette was  $3,000 \mu\text{mol quanta m}^{-2}\text{s}^{-1}$ . Samples were diluted in 3 ml buffer containing 25 mM Mes-NaOH, pH 6.5, 10 mM NaCl and 0.3 M sucrose. The Chl concentration was  $10 \mu\text{gml}^{-1}$ .

**Gel Electrophoresis and Immunoblotting.**- The electrophoretic separation of PSII proteins was performed by SDS-PAGE on 12.5% (w/v) or 12-20% (w/v) acrylamide linear gradient gels containing 6 M urea according basically to Laemmli (1970). The gels were either stained with Coomassie B-Blue 250 or electroblotted to identify D1 and  $\alpha$ -subunit of Cyt  $b_{559}$  proteins, respectively. After transferring to a nitrocellulose membrane, proteins were detected with a rabbit anti-D1 or anti-Cyt  $b_{559}$   $\alpha$ -subunit. To do that, the nitrocellulose membrane was cut across in two parts. Upper and lower parts of the membrane revealed the D1 and  $\alpha$ -subunit of Cyt  $b_{559}$ , respectively, using goat anti-rabbit IgG coupled to horseradish peroxidase as a secondary antibody. To obtain extrinsic protein markers the spinach PSII membranes at  $0.5 \text{ mg mL}^{-1}$  were suspended in 0.8 M Tris-HCl (pH 9.1), 5 mM EDTA and incubated for two hours in darkness. Then, the membranes were treated with 1.5 M NaCl for 30 min in darkness, centrifuged at  $35,000 \times g$  for 20 min and washed twice with 20 mM NaCl, 0.4 M sucrose and 50 mM Mes-NaOH (pH 6.5). The supernatants containing the extrinsic proteins were concentrated with Centriprep tubes (Amicon, cut-off 10,000 kDa) and used as marker in electrophoresis assays (Mizusawa et al. 1999).

**Optical measurements.**- Difference absorption spectra were recorded using 1-cm optical pathlength cuvettes at  $10^{\circ}\text{C}$  with a Beckman DU 640 spectrophotometer. The content of HP and LP forms of Cyt  $b_{559}$  was determined from the difference absorption spectra in the 510-600 nm region. A differential extinction coefficient of  $21 \text{ mM}^{-1}\cdot\text{cm}^{-1}$  at the maximum at 559 nm *minus* the minimum at around 570 nm (Stewart and Brudvig, 1998) was used. Samples at  $50 \mu\text{g Chl ml}^{-1}$  in 25 mM Mes-NaOH, pH 6.5, 10 mM NaCl and 0.3 M sucrose were

oxidised with 2 mM ferricyanide ( $HP_{red}$ ) and then reduced with 4 mM hydroquinone ( $HP_{ox}$ ) and 2 mM sodium dithionite ( $LP_{ox}$ ). Sodium dithionite solution was freshly prepared in 0.5 M Tricine, pH 7.5.

Potentiometric redox titrations of PSII membrane suspensions were carried out at 20°C under argon by following the absorbance changes at 559 nm *minus* 570 nm in the difference absorption spectra obtained by the sequential addition of aliquots of 0.1 M sodium dithionite. Spectra were recorded in an Aminco DW-2000 UV-Vis spectrophotometer. Samples were previously oxidized with 25  $\mu$ M potassium ferricyanide. The redox potential in the reaction cell was simultaneously measured with a potentiometer (Methrom Herisau, Switzerland) provided with a combined Pt-Ag/AgCl microelectrode (Crison Instruments, Allela, Spain) previously calibrated against a saturated solution of quinhydrone ( $E'_m$ , pH7, +280 mV at 20°C). Redox mediators used and midpoint redox potential determinations were as described in Roncel et al. (2001).



## RESULTS

### *Effect of Cu(II) on Cytochrome $b_{559}$ in the dark.*

Firstly, Cyt  $b_{559}$  was examined in control PSII-enriched membranes active in oxygen evolution from spinach and sugar beet plants. The amounts of HP and LP forms of Cyt  $b_{559}$  under aerobic conditions were obtained from reduced *minus* oxidised difference absorption spectra in the 510-600 nm region (for details see Materials and Methods). Upon addition of ferricyanide to a dark incubated sample the initially reduced HP form becomes oxidised (Fig. 1). Then, it can be reduced by hydroquinone. A further addition of dithionite resulted in the reduction of the oxidised LP form present. Data show that PSII membranes from spinach and sugar beet differed in the content of Cyt  $b_{559}$  redox potential forms. Thus, spinach PSII membrane preparations contain around 20-50% reduced HP form and 80-50% oxidised LP form of Cyt  $b_{559}$  depending on the pH. It is worth mentioning that LP form assignment is given to all the Cyt  $b_{559}$  species that cannot be reduced by hydroquinone. The values are similar to that reported by others in these kinds of preparations (Ortega et al. 1999; Gadjieva et al. 1999). A marked difference is observed in PSII membranes from sugar beet where only the LP form of Cyt  $b_{559}$  was present at any pH value investigated. The absence of the HP form of Cyt  $b_{559}$  in oxygen-evolving PSII membranes was also found by others in preparations from pea (Roncel et al. 2001). Reductive potentiometric redox titrations at pH 6.0 showed clearly the existence of two different components with  $E_m$  of +397 mV and +206 mV in spinach PSII membranes; the named HP and LP potential forms (Fig. 2). In the case of sugar beet preparations, only one redox component with an  $E_m$  of +162 mV was found.

Cu(II)-treatment in the dark under aerobic conditions induced the oxidation of the reduced HP Cyt  $b_{559}$  form present in control PSII membranes at all the pH used (Table I). No significant modifications were observed in the Cyt  $b_{559}$  redox components of PSII preparations (Fig. 2). Only a slight shifted of  $E'_m$  values took place in spinach PSII membrane preparations. The HP and LP forms exhibited a  $E'_m$  of +352 mV and +172 mV, respectively. Thus, Cu(II) in the dark did not transform the HP form into the LP form under aerobic conditions. On the other hand, the LP Cyt  $b_{559}$  was not affected by Cu(II) in these conditions. It is worth mentioning that the oxidised HP present in the presence of Cu(II) can be reduced by hydroquinone indicating that the redox properties of HP Cyt  $b_{559}$  were not altered by this treatment. The Cu(II) concentrations used in the experiments correspond to a 40-50% inactivation of photosynthetic electron transport at pH 6.5 after 1 min incubation in the dark at 23 °C (Yruela et al. 1991,1993).

*Effect of Cu(II) on oxygen-evolution activity during illumination.*

The effect of photoinhibitory illumination on the oxygen evolution activity was examined in both spinach and sugar beet PSII membrane preparations treated with toxic Cu(II) concentrations at different pH conditions. The Cu(II) concentrations used were the same as described above. The results were compared with those obtained in control preparations with no addition of copper. The time course of oxygen evolution activity was similar in both spinach and sugar beet PSII membranes during illumination treatment at pH 5.0-7.8 (Fig. 3). The loss of activity was markedly faster in Cu(II)-treated than in untreated samples consistent with previous results (Yruela et al. 1996b). The data also indicate that

damage caused by illumination is faster at slightly acid (pH 5.0) or basic (pH 7.8) conditions than at pH 6.0.

*Effect of Cu(II) on redox potential forms of Cytochrome  $b_{559}$  during illumination.*

The effect of Cu(II) on total Cyt  $b_{559}$  under photoinhibitory conditions was investigated by measuring the changes in the reduced (dithionite) *minus* oxidised (ferricyanide) difference absorption spectra after illumination treatment. At pH 5.0 the total content of Cyt  $b_{559}$  did not change in the presence of Cu(II) during illumination in the two kinds of PSII preparations investigated (Fig. 4A). The same result was observed at this pH in control conditions. At pH 6.0, however, differences were found between spinach and sugar beet PSII preparations. The total content of Cyt  $b_{559}$  decreased by 30% in spinach PSII membranes treated with Cu(II) (Fig. 4B) compared to the control. On the other hand, no Cu(II) effect on Cyt  $b_{559}$  was observed in sugar beet PSII preparations. At pH 7.8 the behaviour of Cyt  $b_{559}$  in both PSII membrane samples was independent of Cu(II) treatment (Fig. 4C). At this pH value the photoinhibitory effect on Cyt  $b_{559}$  was clearly more pronounced in spinach PSII membranes than in sugar beet ones where the total content of Cyt  $b_{559}$  decreases *c.a.* 60% and 20%, respectively. Therefore, it seems that Cyt  $b_{559}$  is more stable in PSII membranes from sugar beet where the HP form is absent (Table I). The data obtained at pH 6.0 suggest that the HP form of Cyt  $b_{559}$  gets lost after illumination in Cu(II)-treated samples. The results would also indicate that at pH 7.8 the HP form and a portion of the LP form is affected in these conditions.

In order to better investigate if the HP form is more sensitive to toxic Cu(II) than the LP Cyt  $b_{559}$  and considering that at pH 7.8 both HP and LP forms are

affected we measured the absorption spectral changes in the 510-600 nm region induced by the sequential addition of ferricyanide, hydroquinone and dithionite at pH 5.0 and 6.0. At pH 6.0, the initially reduced HP Cyt  $b_{559}$  in the control PSII membranes from spinach (Table I) decreased by 40% after 5 min of illumination being almost lost after 20 min (Fig. 5B). However, the total content of Cyt  $b_{559}$ , inferred from the absorbance difference at 559 nm *minus* 570 nm between the fully oxidised and fully reduced state of Cyt  $b_{559}$ , remained almost constant indicating that the HP Cyt  $b_{559}$  loss was not accompanied by a significant decrease of the total Cyt  $b_{559}$  content. This finding demonstrates that a conversion of the HP form to other Cyt  $b_{559}$  forms with lower redox potential occurs in the control PSII membranes under photoinhibitory conditions. A distinct feature was observed in Cu(II)-treated samples. The oxidised HP form of Cyt  $b_{559}$  present in the Cu(II)-treated PSII samples in darkness (Table I) was completely lost after 20 min illumination but the initial decrease was faster than in the control, i.e., the HP form diminished by 50% after 1-2 min illumination. The HP Cyt  $b_{559}$  lost was accompanied by a *c.a.* 30% decrease of the total Cyt  $b_{559}$  content during this time, remaining stable after that. The results indicate that contrary to what occurs in control PSII membranes an irreversible damage to the HP form takes place in the Cu(II)-treated preparations. At this point the question arises if the faster HP Cyt  $b_{559}$  decrease in the presence of Cu(II) is due to the fact that HP form is in the oxidised state in Cu(II)-treated PSII membranes or it is due to a direct Cu(II) interaction with the cytochrome. To elucidate that, photoinhibition experiments were done in pre-illuminated PSII membranes in order to photooxidise the HP<sub>red</sub> form of Cyt  $b_{559}$  (Buser et al. 1992). The results were the same as those obtained in control conditions where HP was reduced (data not shown). This finding

indicates that HP form is highly sensitive to photoinhibition in the presence of Cu(II) independently of its redox state. The data also show that the LP Cyt  $b_{559}$  form is stable during illumination under toxic Cu(II) conditions at pH 6.0.

Similar results were obtained at pH 5.0 in the control PSII samples (Fig. 5A) but a different Cyt  $b_{559}$  behaviour was found in Cu(II)-treated preparations. The HP content decreased by approximately 30% after 5 min of illumination, much less value than at pH 6.0 where a 65% decrease was observed. At pH 5.0 the total Cyt  $b_{559}$  content did not vary during this time. The results would indicate that at this pH the Cu(II) interaction with Cyt  $b_{559}$  is prevented.

#### *Effect of Cu(II) on polypeptide composition of PSII during illumination.*

Taking into account that at pH 5.0-6.0 more intact PSII complexes exist than at pH 7.8, in terms of the donor side of PSII, and data at these pH values provide more selective information on the Cu(II) effect on Cyt  $b_{559}$ , we checked the integrity of the PSII complexes and Cyt  $b_{559}$  during photoinhibition under those pH values. To do that the polypeptide composition of control and Cu(II)-treated spinach PSII membranes in the dark and after illumination at pH 5.0 and 6.0 was assayed. In the dark both samples had the same electrophoretic profile at pH 6.0 (Fig. 6A) indicating that the Cu(II) concentrations used in our experiments did not affect the integrity of the PSII complexes in the dark. After illumination the major observed difference was that the 23 kDa protein was removed faster from the Cu(II)-treated samples than from the control. The 23 kDa protein is one of the extrinsic proteins of the oxidising side of PSII. It has been reported that this protein is very sensitive to high concentrations of Cu(II) and photoinhibitory treatment (Yruela et al. 2000; Pätsikkä et al. 2001). The 33 and 17 kDa extrinsic

proteins and the 47 and 43 kDa PSII intrinsic antenna complexes were unaffected after 20 min illumination. At pH 5.0 the results were similar (data not shown).

In order to know if the 30% decrease of total Cyt  $b_{559}$  content observed in the spectroscopic determinations at pH 6.0 (Fig. 4B,5B) corresponds to degradation of the heme-protein, immunoblot assays were done. Data show that  $\alpha$ -subunit of Cyt  $b_{559}$  was not degraded under these conditions and Cu(II) does not stimulate the degradation of this heme protein (Fig. 6B). We also observed that D1 protein of the PSII reaction centre is not degraded during illumination indicating the extend of the photoinhibitory treatment applied.

## DISCUSSION

In this work we report the photoinhibition effect on Cyt  $b_{559}$  of oxygen-evolving PSII membranes treated with toxic copper at pH within the 5.0-7.8 range under aerobic conditions. We have taken special care in controlling the Cu(II) concentrations used in our experiments in order to avoid secondary effects on the integrity of PSII complexes (Yruela et al. 2000). Two different types of oxygen-evolving PSII membrane preparations were investigated that differed in the content of the HP and LP forms of Cyt  $b_{559}$  (Fig. 2). This allowed the comparison of photoinhibition effects on both types of preparations in control conditions (absence of copper). The different content of Cyt  $b_{559}$  redox forms could be due to a different action in both biological materials of the detergent Triton X-100 used to isolate the PSII membranes (Roncel et al. 2001). Concerning the experiments performed in the presence of Cu(II) it is worth of noting that Cu(II) concentrations used in this work did not cause any apparent damage to the polypeptide integrity of the PSII complexes in the dark at pH 5.0-6.0 and in particular to the oxidising side of PSII as revealed by protein electrophoretic analysis of samples. In respect to Cyt  $b_{559}$ , Cu(II) treatment induced the oxidation of the reduced HP form in the dark, but no conversion to the LP form was observed. The same observation was reported by Burda et al. (2003). Furthermore, total Cyt  $b_{559}$  content was maintained in the dark. Other authors have observed that toxic Cu(II) cause the complete conversion of the HP to the LP form (Jegerschöld et al. 1995). In fact, these authors reported the release of the 16 kDa extrinsic subunit during copper treatment. Such differences can be explained by the much lower Cu(II) concentrations used in our experiments. The mechanism of the Cyt  $b_{559}$  oxidation

by Cu(II) is difficult to explain precisely. It should be mentioned that a direct oxidation of the HP Cyt  $b_{559}$  form by Cu(II) is thermodynamically unfavourable because the midpoint redox potential of Cu(I)/Cu(II) ( $E'_{m,7} = +167$  mV) is markedly lower than that of HP Cyt  $b_{559}$  form ( $E'_{m,7} = +350 - +400$  mV). This phenomenon could only be possible if *i)*  $E_m$  of Cyt  $b_{559}$  is not any longer in HP form; *ii)*  $E_m$  of copper redox couple is increased; *iii)* a non-direct oxidation mechanism takes place. The former is discarded based on our results (Fig. 2); the second one in thermodynamic terms might be if the oxidizing agent were the redox couple Cu(I)/Cu ( $E'_{m,7} = +521$  mV). Cu(II) can be reduced *via* oxygen radical species ( $O_2^-$ ) to Cu(I) under aerobic conditions. However, our results do not support this possibility since we do not observed that the redox potential of the medium to become more positive than +400 mV by addition of Cu(II). Thus, another oxidation mechanism should be considered. Recently, we have obtained information about the structure and the electronic distribution of Cyt  $b_{559}$  heme group in PSII reaction center preparations based on CW-EPR and HYSCORE experiments (Yruela et al. 2003; García-Rubio et al. 2003). Our results indicate that the exchangeable electron is localized in a confined iron orbital with a negligible mixture of nitrogen *p*-orbitals in the heme group of Cyt  $b_{559}$ . This makes very unlikely that any substrate or reactant can be located close enough to the active site for a direct one-step electron exchange. The transfer mechanism could be better understood if it were a multistage complex process where the iron acts as a final reservoir. Our investigations suggest that redox processes will depend in a complex way on the whole protein conformation.

Interestingly, we observed the rapid loss of oxygen evolution activity as compared to slower kinetics of Cu(II) effect on Cyt  $b_{559}$  suggesting the Cu(II)-



induced effects on Cyt  $b_{559}$  do not contribute to the fast rate of photoinhibition. It is also worth mentioning that at pH 5.0 the loss of oxygen evolution was faster than at pH 6.0 whereas the contrary was observed with respect to the Cyt  $b_{559}$  in the Cu(II)-treated samples during illumination. These findings indicate that Cyt  $b_{559}$  is affected after PSII centers are photoinhibited. The mechanisms underlying the Cu(II)-induced effect on oxygen evolution and Cyt  $b_{559}$  should be independent. It has been proposed that the protective role of Cyt  $b_{559}$  against photoinhibition is based on a conversion mechanism involving different redox components of this heme protein (Gadjieva et al. 1999; Ortega et al. 1999). In this sense our results show similar rate of oxygen evolution during photoinhibition in the two kinds of PSII preparations examined either in the absence or presence of Cu(II). Therefore the participation of Cyt  $b_{559}$  preventing photoinhibition process is not clear in our experiments. On the other hand, since any loss of Cyt  $b_{559}$  heme content was observed by addition of Cu(II) in the dark as well as in control conditions under illumination the results indicate that Cu(II) is probably acting directly on Cyt  $b_{559}$  in the light inducing the destabilisation of heme group.

The data show a pH-dependent behaviour of Cyt  $b_{559}$  during illumination in the presence of Cu(II). At pH 5.0, no Cu(II) effect on total Cyt  $b_{559}$  content was observed, however at pH 6.0-7.8 total Cyt  $b_{559}$  was rapidly affected (Fig. 4). This pH-dependence suggests that Cu(II) interaction with Cyt  $b_{559}$  takes place at a protonatable amino acid residue. It is well established that the His residue has a high affinity to bind copper, and evidence that Cu(II) inhibits photosynthetic complexes from purple bacteria by binding to His residues have been reported (Utschig et al. 2000, 2001; Rao et al. 2000). It has been suggested that in the HP form one of the two His ligands of heme group is protonated and forms a

hydrogen bond with a carbonyl group of the protein backbone providing a highly hydrophobic environment surrounding the heme group. Such ambience is considered essential for the maintenance of the unstable HP form of Cyt *b*<sub>559</sub> (Berthomieu et al. 1992; Roncel et al. 2001). These authors also proposed that His residues in the LP form of Cyt *b*<sub>559</sub> were unprotonated. Since the protonation of His weakens the bond between the heme iron and imidazole N<sup>δ</sup> compared to the case of unprotonated His, the destabilisation of the heme group coordination by Cu(II) can be favoured in the HP form. Recently, Burda et al. (2003) have proposed that HP Cyt *b*<sub>559</sub> oxidation in the dark probably occurs by deprotonation of His ligands. Such oxidation could make the HP form more sensitive to photoinhibition. However, we observed the HP Cyt *b*<sub>559</sub> damage takes place independently of its redox state.

Interestingly, at pH 6.0-7.8 the HP form of Cyt *b*<sub>559</sub> was more sensitive to toxic Cu(II) action than the LP form and irreversible damage to the HP form took place during photoinhibition contrary to what occurs in control PSII membranes where a conversion of the HP into the LP form was observed. Similar results were reported by others in fresh preparations (Styring et al. 1990; Mor et al. 1997), although the molecular mechanism involved in the conversion between the Cyt *b*<sub>559</sub> forms is not clear at present. These findings indicate that Cu(II) interaction with Cyt *b*<sub>559</sub> could impair the conversion process to the more stable LP form. The LP form was not affected (spinach and sugar beet preparations) in both control and Cu(II)-treated preparations during illumination at pH 5.0-6.0. Surprisingly, at pH 5.0 the extent of Cu(II) effect on the HP form was less than at pH 6.0 although this finding could be due to a protein conformational change at this low pH preventing the Cu(II)-induced damaging effect. In view of these considerations,

we suggest that the higher sensitivity of the HP form of Cyt  $b_{559}$  to photoinhibition in the presence of Cu(II) could be due to blocking of its conversion to the LP form. The destabilisation of the heme group did not involve cytochrome protein degradation.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors are grateful to Maria V. Ramiro for skilful technical assistance. We are indebted to Drs. A.K. Matto and R. Barbato for their kind gifts of antibody against the D1 and  $\alpha$ -subunit of Cyt  $b_{559}$  polypeptides of PSII, respectively. M. Bernal was recipient of an I3P Programme fellowship from Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas. This work was supported by the Dirección General de Investigación (Grant BMC2002-00031) to R.P. and Gobierno de Aragón (Grant P015/2001) to I.Y., and it has been done within GC DGA 2002 Program of Gobierno de Aragón.

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**TABLE I**Cytochrome  $b_{559}$  content in control and Cu(II)-treated PSII membranes in the dark

PSII membrane preparation <sup>1</sup>	Cyt $b_{599}$ redox potential forms		
	HP <sub>red</sub> (%)	HP <sub>ox</sub> (%)	LP (%)
Spinach, pH 5.0			
Control	47 ± 3	–	53 ± 3
Cu(II)-treated	–	40 ± 4	60 ± 4
Spinach, pH 6.0			
Control	37 ± 5	–	63 ± 3
Cu(II)-treated	–	30 ± 3	70 ± 5
Spinach, pH 7.8			
Control	25 ± 3	–	72 ± 4
Cu(II)-treated	–	19 ± 5	83 ± 3
Sugar Beet, pH 5.0-7.8			
Control	–	–	100 ± 3
Cu(II)-treated	–	–	100 ± 3

<sup>1</sup> PSII membranes at 200  $\mu\text{g Chl ml}^{-1}$  were incubated without or with 125  $\mu\text{M}$   $\text{CuCl}_2$  for 1 min in the dark at 23°C and subsequently washed twice with 15 mM NaCl and 50 mM Mes-NaOH, pH 5.0-6.0 or 50 mM Tris-HCl, pH 7.8.

## FIGURE LEGENDS

Figure 1.- Chemically-induced difference absorption spectra in the  $\alpha$ -band region of Cyt  $b_{559}$  in oxygen-evolving PSII membranes from spinach (A) and sugar beet (B) incubated for 20 min at 20 °C in the dark at pH 6.0. Difference spectra are shown as follows: (a) control *minus* ferricyanide (2 mM); (b) hydroquinone (4 mM) *minus* ferricyanide (2 mM); (c) dithionite (2 mM) *minus* ferricyanide (2 mM).

Figure 2.- Reductive potentiometric redox titrations of Cyt  $b_{559}$  in oxygen-evolving PSII membranes from spinach (A) and sugar beet (B) at pH 6.0. Control (○), Cu(II)-treated samples (●). Solid curves through the points are the best fits of exponential data to the Nerst equation in accordance with one-electron processes ( $n=1$ ). For details see Materials and Methods.

Figure 3.- Inhibition of oxygen evolution activity during aerobic illumination in the absence (○,△) and presence (●,▲) of 125  $\mu\text{M}$   $\text{CuCl}_2$  [Cu(II) per PSII unit = 135] at 23 °C. (A) pH 5.0; (B) pH 6.0; (C) pH 7.8. PSII membranes at 200  $\mu\text{g}$  of Chl  $\text{ml}^{-1}$  from spinach (○,●) and sugar beet (△,▲) were illuminated with 3,000  $\mu\text{mol quanta}\cdot\text{m}^{-2}\cdot\text{s}^{-1}$  in the absence and presence of  $\text{CuCl}_2$  and then washed twice before measurements (for details see Materials and Methods). 100% activity corresponded to 320, 435 and 67  $\mu\text{mol O}_2\cdot\text{mg Chl}^{-1}\cdot\text{h}^{-1}$  and 350, 390 and 59 at pH 5.0,

6.0 and 7.8 in control spinach and sugar beet PSII membranes, respectively. 100% activity corresponded to 223, 230 and 36  $\mu\text{mol O}_2 \cdot \text{mg Chl}^{-1} \cdot \text{h}^{-1}$  and 280, 187 and 23 at pH 5.0, 6.0 and 7.8 in Cu(II)-treated spinach and sugar beet PSII membranes, respectively.

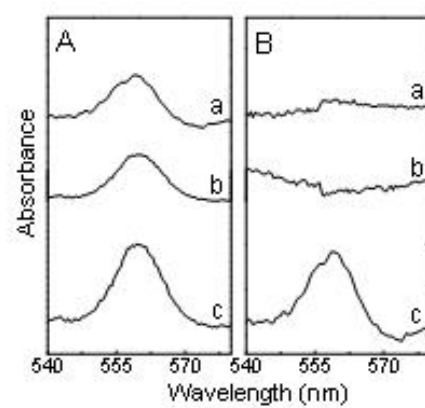
Figure 4.- Time course of Cyt  $b_{559}$  content in oxygen-evolving PSII membranes from spinach ( $\circ, \bullet$ ) and sugar beet ( $\triangle, \blacktriangle$ ) during photoinhibitory treatment in the absence ( $\circ, \triangle$ ) and presence ( $\bullet, \blacktriangle$ ) of 125  $\mu\text{M}$   $\text{CuCl}_2$  [Cu(II) per PSII unit = 135] at 23 °C. (A) pH 5.0; (B) pH 6.0; (C) pH 7.8. Other experimental conditions as in Fig. 3.

Figure 5.- Time course of Cyt  $b_{559}$  content in oxygen-evolving PSII membranes from spinach during photoinhibitory illumination treatment in the absence ( $\circ, \triangle$ ) and presence ( $\bullet, \blacktriangle$ ) of 125  $\mu\text{M}$   $\text{CuCl}_2$  [Cu(II) per PSII unit = 135] at 23 °C. (A) pH 5.0; (B) pH 6.0.  $\blacktriangle, \triangle$  content of HP form;  $\bullet, \circ$  content of total Cyt  $b_{559}$ . Other experimental conditions as in Fig. 3.

Figure 6.- A) SDS-PAGE analysis of PSII membrane preparations from spinach incubated with 125  $\mu\text{M}$   $\text{CuCl}_2$  [Cu(II) per PSII unit = 135] after photoinhibitory illumination treatment at pH 6.0. *Lanes* 1-4: control PSII membranes illuminated for 0, 5, 10, 20 min; *lanes* 5-8: Cu(II)-treated PSII membranes illuminated for 0, 5, 10, 20 min. B) Immunoblots with serum anti-D1 subunit and anti- $\alpha$ -subunit of Cyt  $b_{559}$  of PSII membrane



preparation from spinach incubated with 125  $\mu\text{M}$   $\text{CuCl}_2$  [Cu(II) per PSII unit = 135] at 23 °C after photoinhibitory illumination treatment at pH 6.0. *Lanes* 1-4: control PSII membranes illuminated for 0, 5, 10, 20 min; *lanes* 5-8: Cu(II)-treated PSII membranes illuminated for 0, 5, 10, 20 min.



**Fig.1**

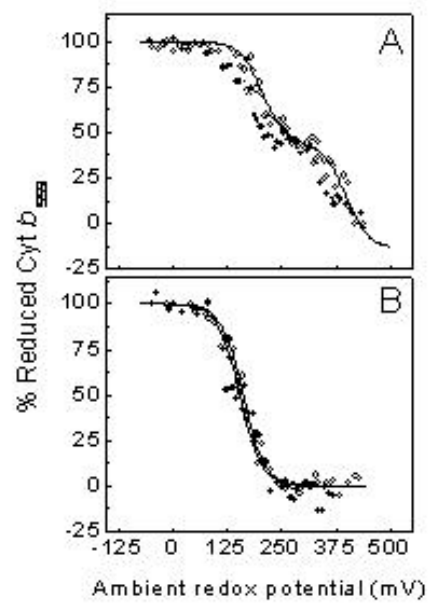


Fig. 2

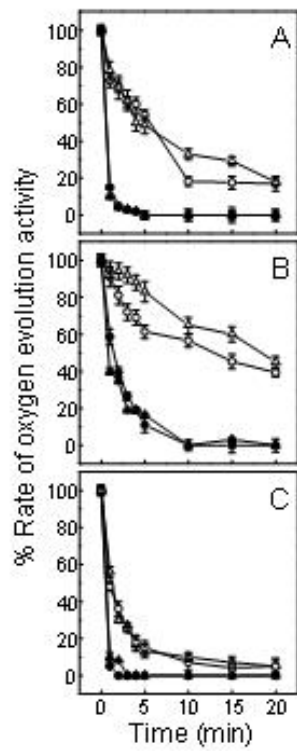


Fig.3

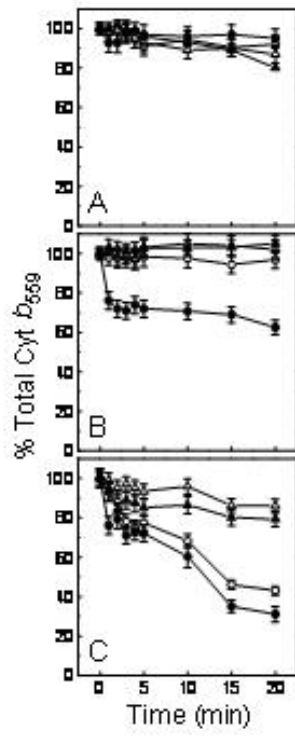


Fig. 4

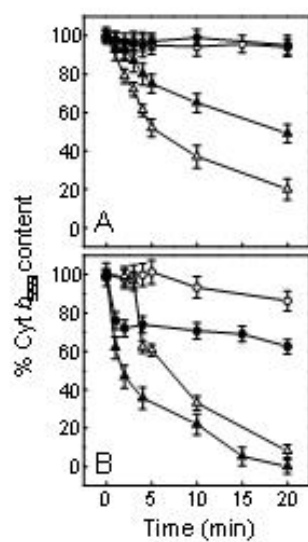


Fig. 5

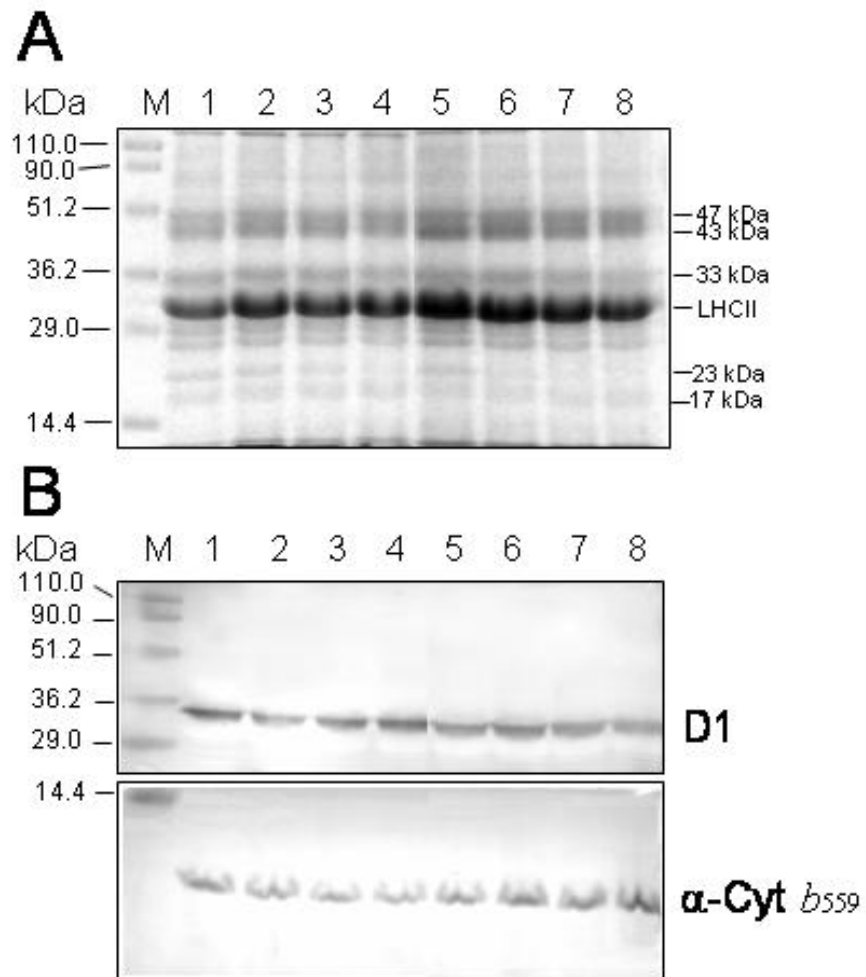


Fig. 6