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1	Section:	Microbial	and Enzy	yme Tec	chnology
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2	High versus low level expression of the lycopene biosynthesis genes
3	from Pantoea ananatis in Escherichia coli
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11	Abstract

12 The heterologous synthesis of lycopene in non-carotengenic Escherichia coli required the 13 introduction of the biosynthesis genes crtE, crtB, and crtI. Recombinant E. coli strains, 14 expressing each lycopene biosynthesis gene from Pantoea ananatis using multi-copy plasmid 15 or single-copies after stable chromosomal integration, were cultivated and the formation of lycopene was investigated. The different expression conditions significantly influenced the 16 17 lycopene formation as well as the growth behaviour. High plasmid expression levels of *crt1* 18 with a single copy background of crtE and crtB in E. coli led to a predominate synthesis of tetradehydrolycopene at 253 μ g g⁻¹ (cdw). 19

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21 Key words: chromosomal integration, heterologous carotenoid production, lycopene,22 tetradehydrolycopene

24 Introduction

25 Carotenoids are ubiquitous with important nutritional and physiological relevance for plants, algae and bacteria. Carotenoids have gained industrial importance as colorant for cosmetic-, 26 27 food-, and animal feed-products. Recent reports on carotenoids have further demonstrated that 28 carotenoids have manifold beneficial effects on human health (Nagao 2009). The simplest C_{40} 29 carotenoid, lycopene, is an effective antioxidant and has promising biological activity for the 30 prevention of several types of cancer, including breast cancer and prostate cancer (Seren et al. 31 2008). The genes responsible for the synthesis of lycopene have been isolated from the 32 epiphytic bacterium, Erwinia, and plants, and the functions of the carotenogenic genes have 33 been identified (Hundle et al. 1991; Misawa et al. 1990; To et al. 1994; Albrecht et al. 1995; 34 Sandmann 1994). The first substrate of the enzymes encoded by the Erwinia carotenoid 35 biosynthesis gene cluster is farnesyl pyrophosphate (FPP) which is the common precursor for 36 the biosynthesis of carotenoids and also of numerous other isoprenoids. The biosynthesis of 37 lycopene in *E. coli* requires the expression of the genes *crtE*, *crtB*, and *crtI*, which utilize the 38 E. coli isoprenoid precursor FPP. CrtE is a geranylgeranyl synthase that catalyzed the 39 condensation of FPP and IPP to GGPP and CrtB is a phytoene synthase (Sandmann & 40 Misawa 1992). The phytoene desaturase (CrtI) catalyzed the introduction of double bonds 41 leading to an extended conjugated double bond system. The insertion of four double bonds 42 into phytoene by CrtI from Pantoea ananatis (formerly Erwinia uredovora) results in the 43 formation of lycopene (Sandmann 2009).

44 Due to the increasing demand for carotenoids, improvements have been made in the 45 formation of carotenoids by recombinant bacteria, yeasts, and plants expressing carotenoid 46 biosynthesis genes or gene clusters (Das et al. 2007). In particular, the non-carotenogenic *E*. 47 *coli* has been widely used as a host for improved carotenoid productivity by transformation 48 with appropriate biosynthesis genes, and methods were developed for increasing the 49 biosynthesis of isoprenoid precursors in *E. coli* (Harada & Misawa, 2009).

50 In this study, the formation of lycopene by heterologous *E. coli* strains expressing each 51 biosynthesis gene from *P. ananatis* either from a multi-copy plasmid or from single copy 52 inserted into the chromosome is presented.

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54

55 Material and methods

56 Bacterial strains, growth conditions, and media

57 The bacterial strains used were *Escherichia coli* BW25113 lac⁺ and *E. coli* DH5 α (Table 1). 58 If not stated otherwise, they were grown at 37 °C in LB medium. Antibiotics used were: 59 100 µg ampicillin/ml, 50 µg chloramphenicol/ml and 50 µg kanamycin/ml. Difco MacConkey 60 agar was purchased from Nordwald (Hamburg, Germany). Carotenoid standards were 61 provided by the Institute of Technical Biochemistry, University of Stuttgart. All other 62 chemical and reagents are from Sigma-Aldrich or Roth.

63 Cloning of the biosynthesis genes in *E. coli*

64 In order to create an artificial lycopene gene cluster for expression in E. coli, the following cloning strategy was used. Modified PCR primers were used to create a BglII restriction site 65 66 upstream the start-codon of the gene, plus an artificial RBS and a BamHI or a BglII site down-67 stream of the stop-codon. crtB was amplified from plasmid pCAR16 (Misawa et al. 1990) 68 using GATGCTGGAAGATCTCATATGAATAATCCGTCG the primers: and 69 CTTCAGGCGAGGATCCGGGAAAGACATGG. The resulting PCR product was digested 70 by the restriction enzymes BglII plus BamHI and were ligated into the BamHI-hydrolyzed 71 pCAS30, resulting in plasmid pCAS56. crtI was amplified from plasmid pCAR16 using the 72 primers: CATTGCAAGATCTTATGAATTCTCATCGTTAAAGAGCGAC and CGTTTAGATCTCATGATTGAGTAACGACGGATTATTCA. The resulting PCR product 73

was digested by *Bgl*II was ligated into the *Bam*HI-hydrolyzed pCAS56, resulting in plasmid pCAS58. Restriction digestions and DNA sequencing were performed for all constructs to verify the orientations and sequences of the cloned biosynthesis genes. Takara PrimeStar DNA polymerase (Lonza, Belgium) was used for amplification. The chromosomal integration of recombinant *crt*-gene expression cassettes and elimination of antibiotic resistants gene cassettes using plasmid pCP20 (Cherepanov & Wackernagel 1995) were conduct as described by Albermann et al. (2010).

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82 Cultivation of *E. coli* cultures and analysis of carotenoids

83 Recombinant, lycopene-producing E. coli strains were cultivated at 30°C in 50 ml LB 84 medium. Plasmid carrying strains were cultivated in the presents of a corresponding 85 antibiotic. IPTG was added at an OD_{600} of 0.3. Cultures with strains that carry plasmid 86 pJOE5559 (unpublished work) were also induced with L-rhamnose at 1.2 mM. Samples (2 87 ml) were withdrawn from cultures after 24h. The cells were harvested by centrifugation, 88 washed with cold water, and subsequently extracted with acetone (500 µl) for 15 min at 50°C. Insoluble components of the extract were removed by centrifugation (20,000 x g). HPLC 89 90 analysis were performed on Dionex HPLC Instrument installed with a Chromeleon Software, 91 Gina autosampler, P580 pumps, and detection with a UV lamp. Products were analyzed by 92 loading 20 µl supernatant onto a C30-reverse-phase HPLC column (250 mm x 4.6 mm, 5 µm, 93 YMC-Europa GmbH, Dinslaken, Germany) attached with a guard column containing matrix 94 of same material as the column. The solvents used (at 1 ml/min) were A: tert-butyl ether 95 (MTBE)/methanol/water (19/80/1, by vol.) and B: MTBE/methanol/water (90/9/1, by vol.). 96 Gradient conditions: equilibration conditions at 60 % B (v/v); 0 to 40 min linear gradient from 97 60% B to 100 % B (v/v); 40 to 45 min 100 % B (v/v). Standard curves correlating areas to 98 concentration of lycopene and tetradehydrolycopene (TDHL) was used to determine the quantity of these carotenoids in the samples. HPLC-MS analysis was carried out on a HPLC
coupled to a UV-detector and a mass spectrometer (LCMS-2010EV/dual ion source
DUIS2010, Shimadzu, Germany), using identical conditions as described above.

102 For the semi-preparative isolation of TDHL, E. coli BW-EB pJF-crtI was cultivated in 400 ml minimal medium (3 g KH₂PO₄1⁻¹, 12 g K₂HPO₄1⁻¹, 5 g (NH₄)₂SO₄ 1⁻¹, 0.3 g MgSO₄.7H₂O 1⁻¹, 103 104 0.015 g CaCl₂.2H₂O l⁻¹, 0.1 g NaCl l⁻¹, 5 g Glucose monohydrate l⁻¹, 15 ml FeSO₄.7H₂O /sodium citrate l⁻¹ (from a solution of 7.5 g FeSO₄.7H₂O l⁻¹ and 100 g sodium citrate l⁻¹), 7.5 105 mg thiamine l^{-1} , 33 ml trace elements l^{-1}) at 30°C. The culture was induced with 0.5 mM 106 IPTG at OD₆₀₀ of 0.3. After 24 h, the cells were harvested by centrifugation, washed with cold 107 108 water, and subsequently extracted twice with 20 ml acetone by vigorous shaking. Insoluble 109 components of the extract were removed by centrifugation (20,000 x g). Acetone was 110 removed under a stream of nitrogen and the residual material was dissolved in MTBE. TDHL 111 was isolated by HPLC (several runs) using the same device as for analysis. The mobile phase was MTBE/methanol/water (90/9/1, by vol.) at 1.2 ml min⁻¹ for 20 min isocratic; 200 µl as 112 113 injection volume. TDHL fractions were collected, dried under a stream of nitrogen and 114 subsequently dissolved in acetone. TDHL content in acetone solution was quantified by 115 measuring the absorbance at 508 nm. Concentration of TDHL was determined using an extinction coefficient (5933 $(g/ml)^{-1}$ cm⁻¹, Unrean et al. 2010). 116

117

119 **Results and discussion**

120 To investigate the effect of single- and multi-copy expression of *crtE*, *crtB*, and *crtI* from *P*. 121 ananatis on lycopene biosynthesis in E. coli, strains with all different combinations of two 122 chromosomal and one plasmid-encoded *crt*-gene were constructed. The expression of each 123 gene is controlled by an IPTG-inducible tac-promoter. The chromosomal insertion of the 124 heterologous expression cassettes were conducted by a method described recently 125 (Albermann et al. 2010). This method is based on the λ -Red-recombineering technique (Datsenko & Wanner 2000; Zhang et al. 1999). The method allows for a fast and accurate 126 127 screening of the recombination event by differential MacConkey agar medium. The following 128 strains were received after integration of two individual *crt*-expression cassettes into the chromosome of E. coli BW25113 lac⁺: E. coli BW-EB, E. coli BW-EI, E. coli BW-BI (table 129 130 1). To allow the biosynthesis of lycopene in these strains, each of the strains was transformed with the multi-copy expression vector pJF119ΔN carrying the respective crt-gene, so that 131 132 each strain carries the heterologous genes crtE, crtB, and crtI, resulting in E. coli BW-EB pJF119-crtI, E. coli BW-EI pJF119-crtB, and E. coli BW-BI pJF119-crtE, respectively. 133 134 These strains were cultivated in LB medium and the cultures were induced with different 135 concentrations of IPTG (0 - 1 mM). E. coli BW-Lyco, that contains all three lycopene 136 biosynthesis genes on the chromosome, E. coli BW-Lyco pJF119AN, and E. coli BW25113 137 lac^+ pJF119-crtEBI were used as strains for comparison.

The lycopene content per volume as well as per g cell dry wt are given in Figure 1. *E. coli* BW-Lyco, which expresses *crtE*, *crtB*, and *crtI* from individual chromosomal copies, had the highest lycopene formation $(3.9\pm0.1 \text{ mg } 1^{-1}; 1.65\pm0.12 \text{ mg } g^{-1} \text{ cdw})$. The enhanced expression of *dxs*, *idi*, and *ispA* by *E. coli* BW-Lyco pJOE5559 resulted in the formation of 8.72±0.21 mg 1⁻¹, 4.45±0.32 mg g⁻¹ cdw lycopene showing that the enzyme activities of CrtE, CrtB, and CrtI expressed by single chromosomal gene copies is sufficient for the conversion of FPP to 144 lycopene even under conditions with increased supply of isoprenoid precursors. The induction 145 of these strains with IPTG had no significant effect either on growth or on lycopene 146 formation. *E. coli* BW-Lyco pJF119 Δ N, carrying an additional *lac1* gene on the plasmid, 147 showed an increase in lycopene formation after increasing the inducer concentration showing 148 that the expression of the chromosomal *lac1* is not sufficient to repress the tac-promoter under 149 the given conditions. A higher LacI concentration, as given in *E. coli* BW-Lyco pJF119 Δ N, 150 led to an IPTG-inducible expression of the heterologous genes.

151 Expression of lycopene biosynthesis genes by an artificial, plasmid encoded *crtEBI*-operon (E. coli BW pCAS58) vielded 1.77 ± 0.23 mg l⁻¹, 0.84 ± 0.11 mg g⁻¹ (cdw) lycopene without 152 153 induction. The amount of lycopene decreased upon induction by IPTG. The plasmid 154 expression of crtE by E. coli BW-BI pJF119-crtE under different inducer concentrations led to a similar amount of lycopene per cell $(1.35\pm0.08 \text{ mg g}^{-1} \text{ cdw})$ but the total biomass 155 156 decreased due to the high expression of crtE. The higher lycopene content in E. coli BW-BI 157 pJF119-crtE compared to E. coli BW-Lyco pJF119∆N in cultures without induction indicates 158 that the CrtE catalyzed reaction is the most limiting step in the conversion of FPP to lycopene. 159 The crtB plasmid expression by E. coli BW-EI pJF119-crtB led to a decrease in growth as 160 well as on lycopene formation. The CrtB product phytoene was not detected in the cell 161 extract. Growth retardation may occur due to the interference of CrtB with the formation of prenylquinones in E. coli (Neudert et al. 1998), but the low biomass and lycopene amount per 162 163 cell in the stationary phase (after 24 h) in induced cells (> 0.1 mM IPTG) suggests that the 164 CrtB protein also being toxic or a protein burden to E. coli. This is also supported by the 165 observation that E. coli BW-EI pJF119-crtB pJOE5559, which showed increased formation of FPP by the additional copies of dxs, idi, and ispA, had reduced growth under high crtB 166 167 expression conditions (data not shown).

168 A further effect on the plasmid overexpression of a single *crt*-gene was observed by the expression of crtl. Cultivation of E. coli BW-BE pJF119-crtI yielded, beside lycopene, 169 170 predominantly in the formation of 3,4,3',4'-tetradehydrolycopene (TDHL) (Fig. 2), which 171 was identified by LC-MS analysis (M⁺ 532) and UV/visible spectroscopy (Fig. 2H). For the 172 quantification of TDHL, E. coli BW-BE pJF119-crtI was cultivated in minimal medium and 173 the extracted TDHL was isolated by semi-preparative HPLC (Fig. 2F). The concentration of 174 TDHL in acetone was determined by photospectroscopy [extinction coefficient 5933 175 (g/100ml)⁻¹ cm⁻¹, Unrean et al. 2010]. The amount of TDHL in LB cultures of *E. coli* BW-BE 176 pJF119-crtI increased upon IPTG induction (Figs. 1 and 2). The highest TDHL concentration was after induction with 0.5 mM IPTG (253 \pm 33 µg g⁻¹ cdw, 59% of all carotenoids). 177 Induction with 1 mM IPTG gave the highest percentage of TDHL with 80% (169 \pm 27 µg g⁻¹ 178 179 cdw). Extracts of cultures with a high TDHL content as well as the purified TDHL samples 180 also reveal the existence of two further isomeric forms of TDHL (M⁺ 532) as indicated in Fig. 181 2. The formation of TDHL was not observed in any of the other tested lycopene producing 182 strains, in which crtl is expressed from single copy or by the plasmid encoded gene cluster 183 (pCAS58).

184 For the CrtI-type phytoene-desaturase from *P. ananatis* and other organisms, the general 185 ability to carry out up to six desaturation reactions on phytoene has been shown (Linden et al. 186 1991; Sandmann 2009). Additionally, the ratio of substrate and desaturase can further define 187 the degree of phytoene desaturation (Stickforth & Sandmann 2007). Sandmann and co-188 workers used a two plasmid system for the differentiated expression of *crtEB* and *crtI* in *E*. 189 coli, which resulted in TDHL at approx. >10% of all carotenoids. Here, the reported 190 combination of single-copy (crtE, crtB) and multi-copy (crtI) expression led to a TDHL 191 portion of up to 80% of the E. coli synthesized carotenoids which verifies that the kinetics of 192 CrtI from P. ananatis can determine the degree of desaturation. By the use of directed 193 evolution methods a CrtI-mutant was generated that led, compared to the wild type enzyme,

to a partly conversion of lycopene to TDHL in *E. coli* (Schmidt-Dannert et al. 2000). Due to the lack of biochemical data it is not yet clarified if the mutein has an increased catalytic activity or if the amino acid exchanges lead to a higher protein overproduction or stability that caused the formation of TDHL.

This report demonstrates that the expression level of heterologous biosynthesis pathways may have a significant impact on the product yield as well as on product specificity. The expression of single chromosomal copies of either *crtE*, *crtB* or *crtI* leads to an about 90% higher yield of lycopene compared to the plasmid expressed gene cluster. *E. coli* BW-BE pJF119-crtI produced TDHL as the predominant carotenoid, due to the high expression of *crtI*, which opens the opportunity for a preparative synthesis of this rare carotenoid.

In conclusion, this report demonstrates that an efficient heterologous *in vivo* biosynthesis of carotenoid compounds requires an adapted expression of the heterologous genes to avoid metabolic burden effects and unspecific side reactions.

207

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290 Legends to the figures

291

Figure 1: Formation of lycopene and tetradehydrolycopene (TDHL) by recombinant *E. coli* stains upon different inductor (IPTG) concentration. Green bars: cellular dry weight per volume (g cdw L⁻¹); blue bars: lycopene concentration (mg L⁻¹); black bars: lycopene concentration (mg g⁻¹ cdw); purple bars: TDHL concentration (mg L⁻¹); yellow bars: TDHL concentration (mg g⁻¹ cdw). Values represent the average of \geq 3 independent cultivations.

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299 Figure 2: HPLC-analysis of carotenoids in extracts from recombinant *E. coli* strains after

300 cultivation for 24h in LB medium. (A) E. coli BW-Lyco, (B) E. coli BW-BE pJF119-crtI w/o

301 IPTG, (C) E. coli BW-BE pJF119-crtI + 0,05 mM IPTG, (D) E. coli BW-BE pJF119-crtI +

302 0,2 mM IPTG, (E) E. coli BW-BE pJF119-crtI + 1 mM IPTG. (F) HPLC analysis of TDHL

303 after purification. UV/Vis spectrum of lycopene (G), of TDHL (H), of TDHL isomer T'(I), of

304 TDHL isomer T^{''} (J). L lycopene, T tetradehydrolycopene.

305

307 Table 1: Strains and plasmids

Strains and plasmids	Relevant genotype or sequence	Source
E. coli DH5a	F, ϕ 80d, <i>lacZ</i> Δ M15, <i>endA</i> 1, <i>recA</i> 1, <i>hsdR</i> 17($r_{K}m_{K}$), <i>supE</i> 44, <i>thi</i> -	laboratory strain
	1, gyrA96, relA1, $\Delta(lacZYA$ -argF)U169	
<i>E. coli</i> BW25113 lac^+	$rrnB_{T14}$, $hsdR514$, $\Delta araBAD_{AH33}$, $\Delta rhaBAD_{LD78}$	Albermann et al (2010)
E. coli BW-EI	E. coli BW25113 lac ⁺ , malEFG::crtE, xylAB::crtI	this study
E. coli BW-BE	E. coli BW25113 lac ⁺ , malEFG::crtE, fucIK ::crtB	Albermann et al (2010)
E. coli BW-BI	E. coli BW25113 lac ⁺ , xylAB::crtI, fucIK ::crtB	this study
E. coli BW-Lyco	E. coli BW25113 lac ⁺ , malEFG::crtE, fuclK::crtB, xylAB::crtI	this study
pKD46	$P_{araB} \gamma \beta$ exo (red recombinase), Amp^R	Datsenko Wanner (2000)
pCP20	$FLP^{+}, \lambda cI857^{+}, \lambda p_{R} Rep^{ts}, Amp^{R}, Cm^{R}$	Cherepanov Wackernagel (1995)
pCAR25	pUC19, P. ananatis crtEXYIBZ gene cluster	Misawa et al (1990)
pJOE5559	pJeM1, P _{RhaBAD} - <i>dxs-idi-ispA</i> , Km ^R	J. Altenbuchner, Universität
		Stuttgart (unpublished)
pJF119∆N	cloning vector, RBS, P _{tac} , Amp ^R	Albermann et al (2008)
pCAS58	pJF119∆N, <i>P. ananatis crtEBI</i> genes, Amp ^R	this study
pCAS30	pJF119∆N, <i>P. ananatis crtE</i> gene, Amp ^R	Vallon et al (2010)
pCAS30-FRT-cat-FRT	pJF119∆N, <i>P. ananatis crtE</i> gene, FRT-sites, Amp ^R , Cm ^R	Vallon et al (2010)
pJF119-crtB	pJF119∆N, <i>P. ananatis crtB</i> gene, Amp ^R	Albermann et al (2010)
pJF119-crtB-FRT-kan-FRT	pJF119∆N, <i>P. ananatis crtB</i> gene, FRT-sites, Amp ^R , Km ^R	Albermann et al (2010)
pJF119-crtI	pJF119∆N, <i>P. ananatis crt1</i> gene, Amp ^R	Albermann et al (2010)
pJF119-crtI-FRT-cat-FRT	pJF119ΔN, <i>P. ananatis crtI</i> gene, FRT-sites, Amp ^R , Cm ^R	Albermann et al (2010)

310 Figure 1







