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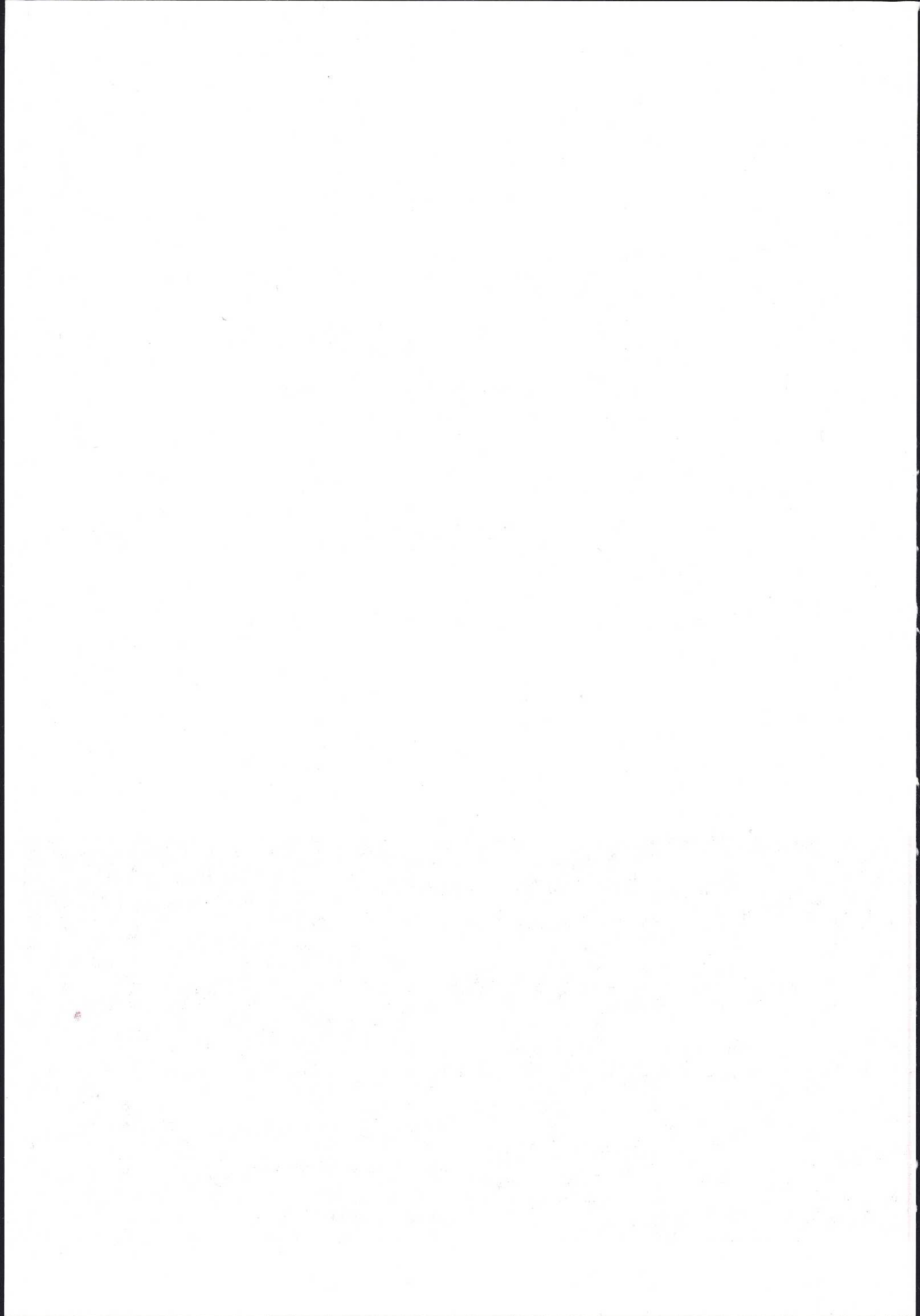
ORGANIC ACIDS IN HUMAN URINE

Biological and methodological aspects

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ORGANIC ACIDS IN HUMAN URINE
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- II Greter, J., Lindstedt, S., Seeman, H., Steen, G. 3-Hydroxydecanedioic acid and related homologues: urinary metabolites in ketoacidosis. Clin Chem 1980; **26**:261-265.
- III Greter, J., Stähle, G. Septumless injection port for capillary gas chromatography. Anal Chem 1982; **54**:1646-1647.
- IV Greter, J., Lindstedt, S., Steen, G. 2,6-Dimethyloctanedioic acid - a metabolite of phytanic acid in Refsum's disease. Clin Chem 1983; **29**:434-437.
- V Greter, J., Jacobson C-E. Urinary organic acids: isolation and quantitation for routine metabolic screening. Clin Chem 1986; manuscript.

ABSTRACT

Greter, J., Organic Acids in Human Urine. Biological and Methodological Aspects. Page 1 - 49.

Department of Clinical Chemistry, Gothenburg University, Sahlgren's Hospital, S-413 45 Gothenburg, Sweden. Thesis defended April 4, 1986.

A detailed knowledge of the qualitative and quantitative excretion pattern of organic acids in human urine is essential for the discovery of pathological metabolites of etiological and diagnostic value, especially in the field of inborn errors of metabolism.

The discovery and structure elucidation of three previously unknown urinary metabolites, a new septumless injection port for gas chromatography, and a new isolation method for urinary organic acids are described.

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Two patients lacking the capability of α -oxidation (Refsum's disease) have been found to excrete 2,6-dimethyloctanedioic acid. Structure elucidation was done by low and high resolution mass spectrometry of different derivatives. The excretion of this metabolite is best explained by the assumption that phytanic acid to a minor extent is degraded by an initial ω -oxidation and subsequent β -oxidation steps.

A new septumless injection port for on-column injection onto capillary columns was developed and tested, both for manual injection and in connection with an automatic sampler. The device has been in use for more than five years in our laboratory.

Poor recovery of polar organic acids from urine with the ether/ethyl-acetate extraction method prompted us to search for a better isolation method amenable to automation. A column chromatographic isolation method based on Porapak[®] was therefore developed and tested. This isolation method has in the past four years proven to be very useful in routine analysis of urinary organic acids for metabolic screening. Good correlation was obtained between a mass chromatographic quantitation method for organic acids and the simultaneous quantitation with a flame ionization detector.

Key words: Human urine • Cyclopropane fatty acids • Keto acidosis • Refsum's disease • ω -Oxidation • Urinary organic acids • Metabolic screening • Gas chromatography—mass spectrometry • Septumless injection port • column chromatography

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Biological and methodological aspects

Joachim Greter

Gothenburg 1986

ISBN 91-7900-012-6

To my parents

Ach! was in tiefer Brust uns da entsprungen,
was sich die Lippe schüchtern vorgelallt,
missraten jetzt und jetzt vielleicht gelungen,
verschlingt des wilden Augenblicks Gewalt.
Oft, wenn es erst durch Jahre durchgedrungen,
erscheint es in vollendeter Gestalt.
Was glänzt, ist für den Augenblick geboren;
das Echte bleibt der Nachwelt unverloren.

Goethe JW. Faust, Erster Teil

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In the following discussion these papers will be referred to by the above Roman numerals.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Mankind has long been fascinated by the vision that, if only all parts of a given system were known, the fate and history of that system would be predictable (1-4).

One such system is the human being himself who for a long time has been the subject of investigations aimed at the complete understanding of all its constituent parts (5).

Because of the bewildering complexity of the human being, investigations have focused on minor subsystems - one of these is the urine, a part of the waste disposal system of the human body (6).

Through the careful investigation of the waste disposal sites of an ancient civilization, an archaeologist may gain insight into how that community once lived (7). The investigation of one of the human body's waste disposal systems e.g. the urine, may in a similar way give some insight into how the human body works biochemically (8-10).

Although urine is only a part of the human waste disposal system its complexity has forced investigators to focus on different compound classes present in the urine, such as peptides (11,12), amino acids (13), carbohydrates (14), steroids (15), bile acids (16), and organic acids (17), as well as inorganic salts, pigments and nitrogen bases (18). The aims and results of the investigations of all these different compound classes were highly influenced by the available separation and detection methods.

The first records of human urine are those dealing with its antiseptic and healing effects, as well as those claiming that the fate of a human being could in part be foreseen by the investigation of the urine (19,20). Analysis of human urine for diagnostic purposes has certainly been practiced earlier than the first Babylonian written reports (21), but has probably been of the same level of sophistication, where separation at best meant evaporation and detection was equal to visual inspection. It took several thousand years until color reactions, solvent extractions, and crystallisations were used for the identification and quantitation of urinary compounds (8,22). Uric acid, urea, and hippuric acid are among the substances separated and characterized in those years when chemical methods were introduced for the analysis of urinary constituents (8,23). The separation of isolated compounds from impurities was tedious, time

consuming, and required large amounts of substance. The discovery of chromatography at the beginning of this century (24) drastically changed that situation, and impressive advances were made in the elucidation of urinary organic acids with the techniques of paper, thin layer, and column chromatography (17).

After those first steps towards a more specific evaluation of the urinary components for diagnostic and research purposes, it took less than fifty years to arrive at the methods used in this work.

A detailed knowledge of the qualitative and quantitative excretion pattern of organic acids in human urine is essential for the discovery of pathological metabolites of etiological and diagnostic value, especially in the field of inborn errors of metabolism. Knowledge about the structure and metabolism of the urinary constituents has increased in parallel with analytical advances, and such a symbiotic relationship is also reflected in this work, in which the main aim was to gain more knowledge about the acidic compounds of human urine in health and disease (**Papers I, II and IV**). Whilst working with the elucidation of organic acids in human urine, some methodological problems were solved to suit our needs in clinical routine analysis (**Papers III and V**).

2. BIOLOGICAL ASPECTS AND RESULTS

2.1 Metabolism

It has been known for a very long time that some compounds appear to pass the body unchanged, as revealed by the odor or color of the urine after the ingestion of certain foods, whereas others are absorbed and utilized by the body (8,25). Later it was realized that ingested foods were transformed by the body and that even endogenously produced compounds were excreted (8,26). Recently it was recognized that some compounds excreted in the urine originate from the action of the intestinal microflora (27,28).

The first experimental proof, that an ingested compound is transformed by the human body and then excreted into the urine, was made at the beginning of the nineteenth century, when it was shown that ingested benzoic acid to a very great extent could be recovered as hippuric acid from the urine (29-31). Nearly seventy years later it was shown by Knoop, that ingested compounds may not only be conjugated but also degraded

by the body before they are excreted. Knoop was the first to deduce a metabolic pathway from the analysis of urinary metabolites: looking at the excreted degradation products of ω -phenylcarboxylic acids fed to dogs, he derived the β -oxidation sequence for fatty acids (10). In the following decades the β -oxidation pathway of fatty acids in mitochondria was unraveled by numerous workers (32-34), leading to the scheme shown in **Figure 1**.

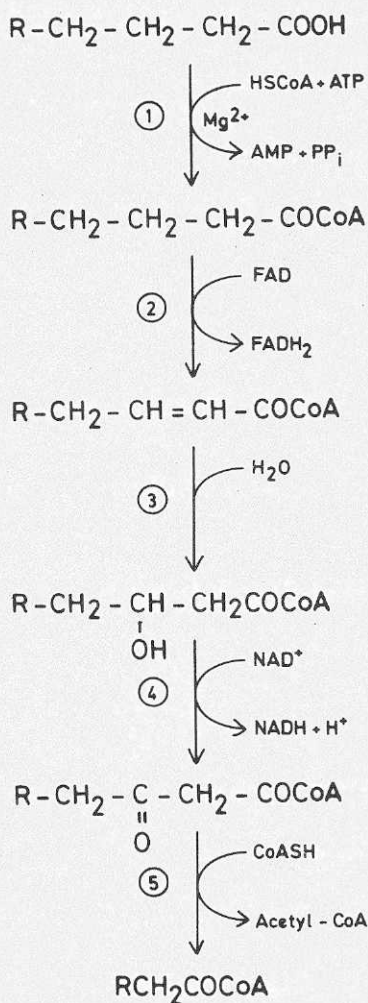


Figure 1. Single β -oxidation cycle with participating enzymes: 1. Long-chain acylthiokinase (acid:CoA ligase(AMP), EC 6.2.1.2); 2. Acyl-CoA dehydrogenase (acyl-CoA:oxidoreductase, EC 1.3.2.2); 3. Enoyl-CoA hydratase (β -3-hydroxyacyl-CoA hydrolyase, EC 4.2.1.17); 4. β -Hydroxyacyl-CoA dehydrogenase (β -3-hydroxyacyl-CoA:NAD oxidoreductase, EC 1.1.1.35); 5. β -Ketoacyl-CoA thiolase (acyl-CoA:acetyl-CoA acyl transferase, EC 2.3.1.16).

Thirty years after Knoop's discovery it was shown that long chain fatty acids are not only oxidized by β -oxidation but also by ω -oxidation (35), and another three decades later a third oxidative transformation of fatty acids,

α -oxidation, was discovered (36). The main purpose of the oxidative degradation of fatty acids by the β -oxidation pathway is the production of acetyl-CoA (Fig. 1), which may be utilized by the citric acid cycle for energy production. Neither ω -nor α -oxidation are able to degrade fatty acids, and one of their functions is to make certain fatty acids amenable to β -oxidation when structures such as methyl branches (37), an acetylenic bond (38), a cyclopropane ring (39), or a 1,2-substituted aromatic ring (unpublished results) block or impair the action of the β -oxidation enzymes. Typical examples for this role of the ω -oxidation system are the oxidative degradation of long chain cyclopropane fatty acids (Paper I) and of branched fatty acids (Paper IV).

The urine of healthy subjects and patients with different disorders was found to contain cis-3,4-methylene hexanedioic acid. The structure of this compound was elucidated from the mass spectra of different derivatives and by organic synthesis (I).

Rats, given both radioactively labeled and unlabeled cis-9,10-methylene octadecanoic acid perorally, excreted both labeled and unlabeled 3,4-methylene hexanedioic acid and homologues with six, eight, and nine carbon atoms in the urine (I). A schematic drawing of the possible oxidative degradation of cis-9,10-methylene octadecanoic acid is shown in Figure 2.

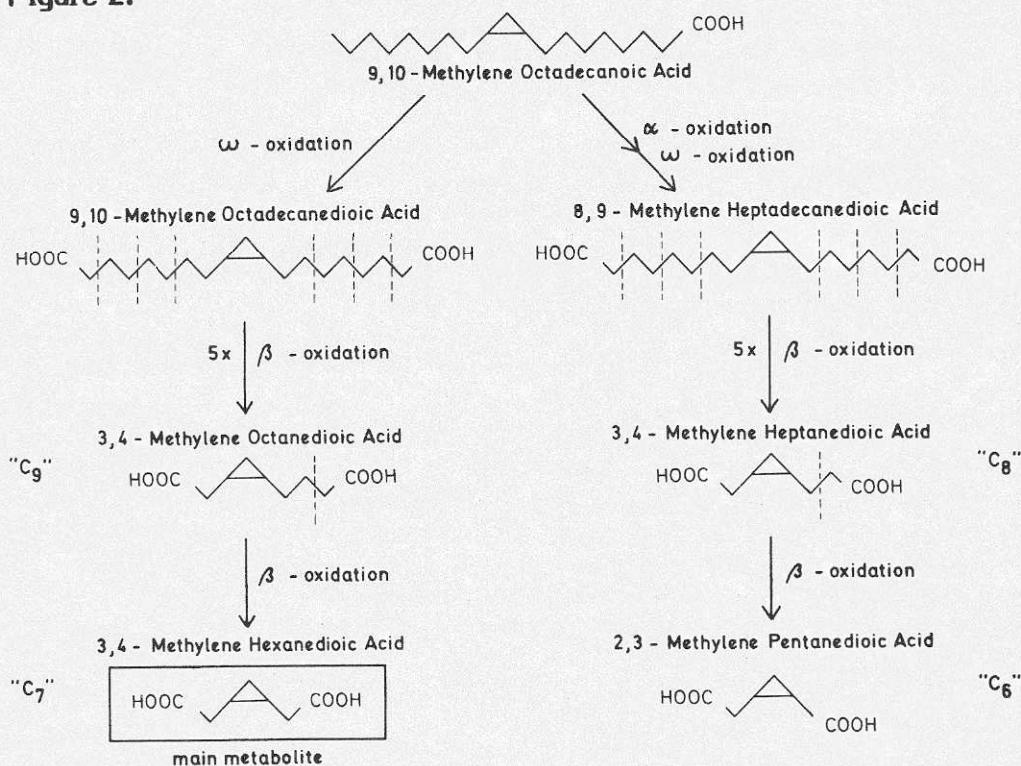


Figure 2. Oxidative degradation of 9,10-methylene octadecanoic acid.

Intraperitoneal administration of cis-9,10-methylene octadecanoic acid to rats led to the excretion of the same metabolites, although at a slower rate than after oral administration. The fact, that both oral and intraperitoneal administration of 9,10-methylene octadecanoic acid yields the same metabolites, supports the view that the short-chain cyclopropane dicarboxylic acids are degradation metabolites from the mammalian organism, and not from gut bacteria (I).

The gastrointestinal uptake of cis-9,10-methylene octanoic acid is comparable to the uptake of stearic acid as shown in **Figure 3** by the recovery of both acids from the lymph of thoracic duct cannulated rats (I).

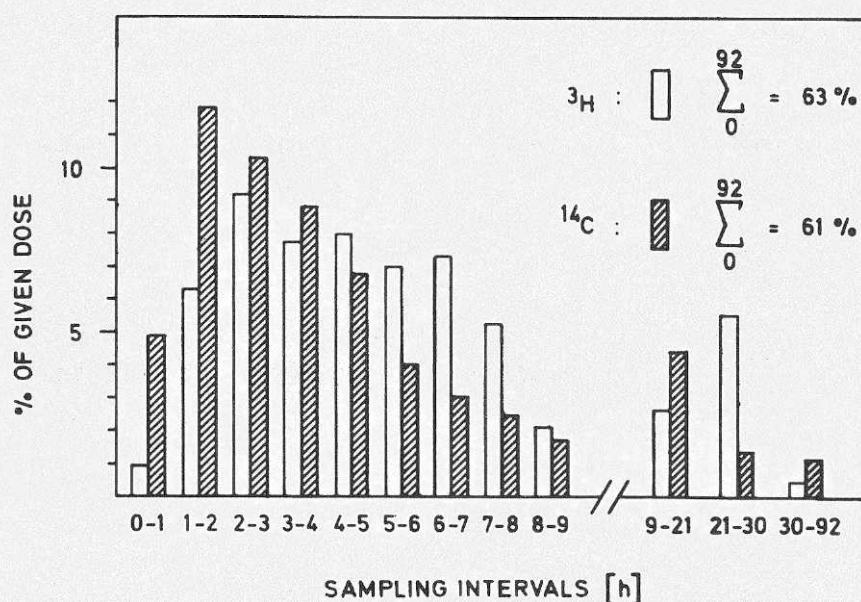


Figure 3. Amount of radioactivity recovered in rat lymph as a per cent of the given amount of [$9,10\text{-}^3\text{H}_2$] cis-9,10-methylene octadecanoic acid methyl ester and [$1\text{-}^{14}\text{C}$] stearic acid, respectively.

No metabolic pathway to generate cyclopropane fatty acids has been found in mammals, but long-chain cyclopropane fatty acids are formed in bacteria (40) and certain plants (41). The excretion of cis-3,4-methylene hexanedioic acid found in human urine is therefore most probably due to intestinal absorption of long chain cyclopropane fatty acids.

It is known that a cyclopropane ring incorporated into a long-chain fatty acid can be degraded completely by the oxidative enzymes of microorganisms (42). The large amount of tritiated water found after

administration of $[9,10-^3\text{H}_2]\text{cis-9,10-methylene octadecanoic acid}$ to rats (**Fig. 4**) may indicate the total degradation of the cyclopropane ring but is in contrast to previous findings where no degradation of the cyclopropane ring has been detected in mammals (39,43).

Although about 70% of the ingested cyclopropane fatty acids may be excreted as short-chain carboxylic acids, a minor amount seems to be incorporated into body lipids as shown in **Figure 4** by the radioactivity recovered from the rat carcass (I).

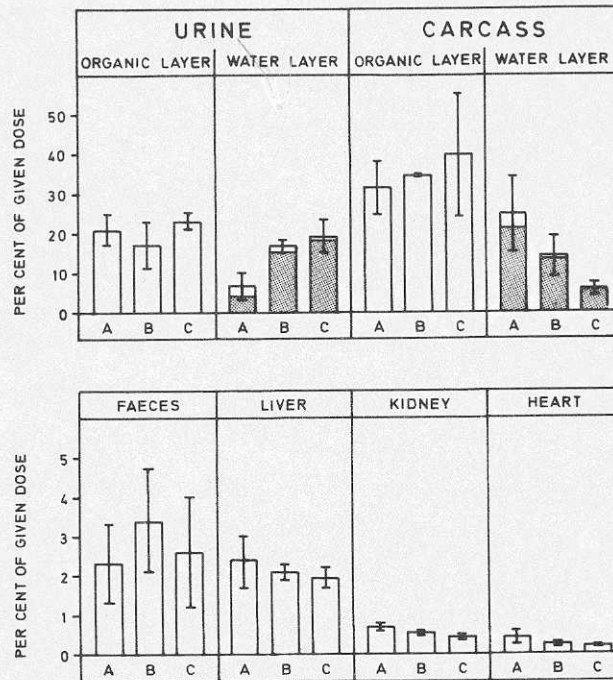


Figure 4. Radioactivity (% of given dose, mean and range of two experiments) from rats fed $[9,10-^3\text{H}_2]\text{cis-9,10-methylene octadecanoic acid methyl ester}$, and killed after one (A), two (B), and three (C) days.

The shaded areas denote the amount of labeled water found after distillation; the difference is nonvolatile residue.

It has been shown that $\underline{\underline{D}}$ -aspartic acid accumulates in brain tissues with age (44). If cyclopropane fatty acids are accumulated in a similar way in different cell membranes during a lifetime, a higher rigidity and stability of those membranes could be expected (45,46), which might contribute to the ageing of some tissues.

The excretion of the metabolite described in **Paper I**, 3,4-methylene hexanedioic acid, does not depend on the state of health. 2,6-Dimethyl-octanedioic acid, the dicarboxylic acid reported in **Paper IV**, on the other

hand is only detected in the urine of patients with a rare metabolic disorder, Refsum's disease.

Phytanic acid, formed from phytol ingested with plant-derived foods (47), can not be oxidized by the β -oxidation system until oxidized at carbon atom two by α -oxidation (48) as shown in Figure 5.

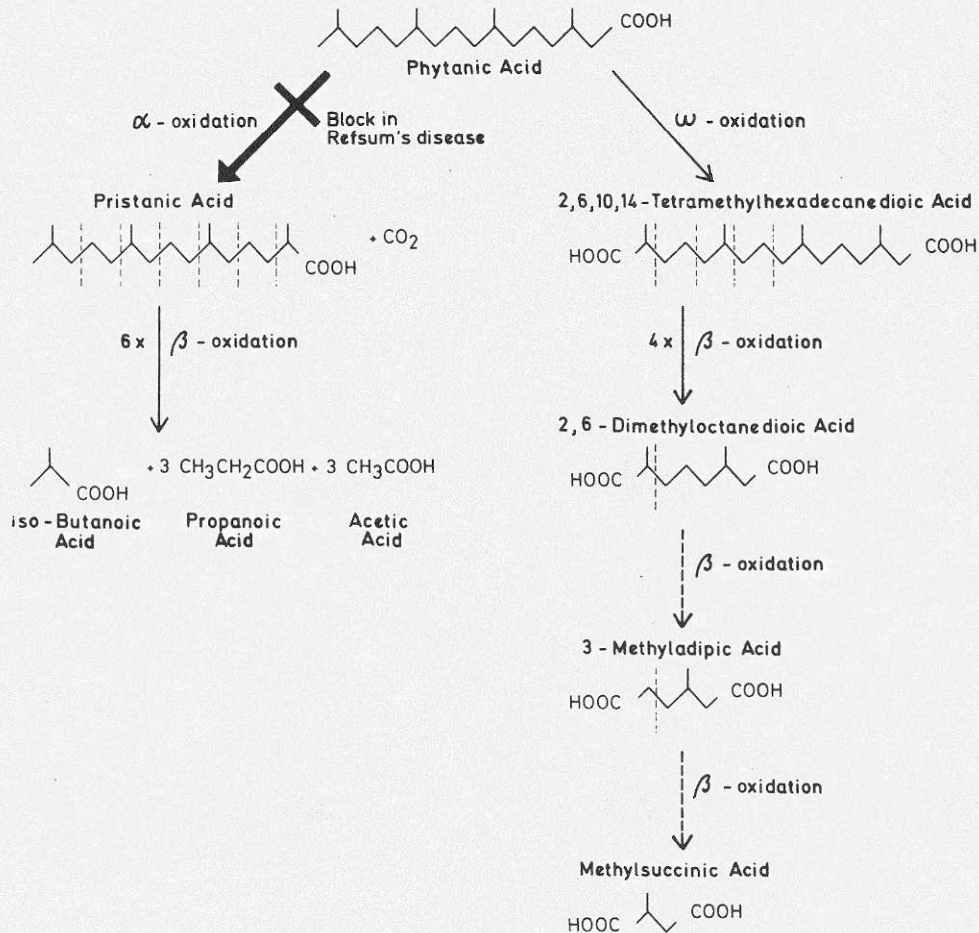


Figure 5. Oxidative degradation of phytanic acid.

In Refsum's disease (49) α -oxidation has been shown to be absent (50), leading to an accumulation of phytanic acid in different tissues. The accumulated phytanic acid impairs the normal neural functions causing symptoms such as blindness, deafness, and loss of movement control in the extremities (49).

As shown by the excretion of 2,6-dimethylsuccinic acid, phytanic acid can also be made accessible to β -oxidation by an initial ω -oxidation. Unfortunately the capacity of this minor pathway is not sufficient to prevent an accumulation of phytanic acid, if the dietary intake of phytol is not restricted.

In the formation of 3,4-methylene hexanedioic acid (I) and of 2,6-dimethyloctanedioic acid (IV) ω -oxidation becomes important because of structures blocking the β -oxidation system. ω -Oxidation also becomes important when changes of the normal metabolism occur, as in ketogenic conditions. An example for this is the dicarboxylic acid described in **Paper II**, 3-hydroxydecanedioic acid, another dicarboxylic acid normally found in human urine. In healthy subjects only minimal amounts are found, but in ketoacidosis a fifty-fold increase in the excretion may be found, reaching up to 400 $\mu\text{mol/l}$ of urine (II).

It has been shown that endogeneously produced adipic acid - also a normal constituent of urine - is excreted in much higher amounts in ketoacidosis of different etiology (51). The excretion of 3-hydroxydecanedioic acid correlates positively with the excretion of adipic acid in ketoacidosis supporting the view, that 3-hydroxydecanedioic acid is of endogeneous origin. The finding, that even saturated and unsaturated homologues of 3-hydroxydecanedioic acid with eight, twelve, and fourteen carbon atoms can be detected in ketoacidosis (II), is a strong indication for an accumulation caused by an overloading of the β -oxidation system. This shows that in spite of the activation observed for the oxidative degradation of fatty acids in ketotic conditions (52-56), the capacity of the β -oxidation system is not sufficient to cope with the increased availability of long and medium chain fatty acids in ketoacidosis.

2.2 Diagnosis

Already in those times, from which no written records can be found, "physicians" may have noticed urines that have a sweet taste, turn dark on storage, or have a peculiar odor, without knowing the nature or the metabolic origin of the compounds leading to the observed deviations from normal urines. A modern physician would have realized that these patients may suffer from diabetes mellitus, alcaptonuria, or possibly phenylketonuria.

The chemical nature of the compounds leading to these peculiarities of the urine of certain patients have been identified. Thus, in 1815 glucose was identified in the urine of patients with diabetes mellitus (57), in 1891 homogentisic acid was shown to be the compound leading to the darkening of the urine of patients with alcaptonuria (58), and in 1934 phenylpyruvic acid was identified in the urine of patients now known to suffer from phenylketonuria (59).

Among the above mentioned diseases alkaptonuria was one of the disorders for which the term "inborn error of metabolism" was coined by Garrod (60). The concept of the inborn errors of metabolism and the development of the chromatographic methods, especially paper chromatography, lead to the discovery of several errors of amino acids and carbohydrate metabolism (13,14). Later the development of gas chromatography and especially gas chromatography-mass spectrometry and their application to the analysis of organic acids in blood and urine (61) led to the discovery of several inborn errors of metabolism such as isovaleric acidemia (62), methylmalonic aciduria (63), propionic acidemia (64), pyroglutamic aciduria (65), and 3-methylcrotonylglycinuria (66,67).

Metabolic diseases may be detected because of the secondary effects of the underlying genetic disorders, even if the exact genetic location and nature of the defect are not known (68-70). The genetic defect may lead to increased concentrations of metabolites detectable in amniotic fluid, blood, or even urine of the mother, or may be measured as deficient or impaired enzymatic activity in fetal cell cultures (71). Examples of inborn errors detected prenatally in this way are methylmalonic aciduria (72-74), maple syrup urine disease (75,76), propionic acidemia (77,78), 3-hydroxy-3-methylglutaric aciduria (79,80), glutaric aciduria type I (81), and tyrosinemia (82-84).

The pre- and post-natal diagnosis of the above mentioned metabolic disorders leading to abnormal excretion patterns, rely in part on the techniques discussed in the following methodological part of this presentation.

3. METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS AND RESULTS

3.1 Collection

Already in ancient times physicians knew that the time of collection and storage time of the urine had an effect on the examination results (20). The use of freshly cast morning urine was already advocated in the middle ages as being best for analysis (85), and is still regarded as optimal for analysis, when the total daily amount excreted is not needed for analysis (86).

The analysis should be performed as soon as possible after collection and no preservatives should be added, except when this is required for special analyses. If storage or transport are unavoidable the urine should be kept frozen until analyzed to prevent bacterial growth or chemical decomposition.

3.2 Isolation

The simplest non-selective isolation method for the soluble compounds of the human urine - sediments are not dealt with in this presentation - is the evaporation of urinary water (8). Precipitation (87) may give better selectivity, but the most selective isolation methods are all based on the partition equilibria of the dissolved urinary compounds with a solid, liquid, or gaseous phase.

Purging the urine with an inert gas and subsequent trapping of the compounds carried over is still the method of choice for the analysis of volatile compounds (88-90), although a method for the direct separation and detection of volatiles in aqueous samples has been published (91).

The oldest method for the isolation of the non-volatile urinary organic acids, based on liquid-liquid partition equilibria (92), is still the most widely used because of its simplicity and speed (93,94). Methods depending on liquid-solid partition equilibria have traditionally been based on oxidized silica or alumina to adsorb the non-volatile solutes (95-98). Now a large number of workers use ionic and non-ionic organic polymeric materials to isolate organic acids from human urine (93,94).

When our laboratory started analyzing urinary organic acids for metabolic screening in late 1974, the solvent extraction method was adopted. Because of the known limitations of the solvent extraction method to recover very polar acidic compounds (99,100) we started to search for a better isolation method amenable to automation. After a lot of disappointing experiments with different organic materials we started to evaluate the different Porapak (Trademark of Waters Ass.) materials, and developed the isolation procedure presented in **Paper V**, which is based on a 1:1 by volume mixture of Porapak T and Porapak Q. Acidified samples are applied to the acid-washed columns and eluted with acetonitrile. Good recoveries for unpolar and polar compounds are obtained as shown in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Recovery of selected organic acids as a percent of initial radioactivity (mean \pm SD)

	Porapak n=10	Solvent extraction n=10	Ion exchange n=3
Oxalic acid	30.6 \pm 5.8	31.3 \pm 1.4	94.2 \pm 2.0
Lactic acid	34.1 \pm 5.4	22.6 \pm 0.9	81.1 \pm 2.4
Succinic acid	93.6 \pm 2.2	74.0 \pm 3.2	94.4 \pm 1.8
2-Oxoglutaric acid	97.0 \pm 1.2	58.4 \pm 2.5	83.9 \pm 2.2
Citric acid	66.3 \pm 4.5	8.7 \pm 0.5	85.5 \pm 1.1
Cinnamic acid	94.5 \pm 3.1	95.4 \pm 3.6	99.2 \pm 3.8

The main advantages of the isolation of acidic compounds from urine with the method based on Porapak material over the solvent extraction method with ethyl acetate is illustrated in **Figure 6**. The most prominent features are the reduced recovery of urea and phosphoric acid (peaks 4 and 5 in **Figure 6**), and the increased recovery of polar compounds e.g. citric acid (peak 12 in **Figure 6**).

The Porapak columns are regenerated by washing with acetone and water, and may be reused more than fifty times. Deterioration of the material is shown by a decreased recovery of such polar compound as the tetrionic acids. The column material is routinely replaced once each month in our laboratory.

The adsorption mechanism on the Porapak material has not been studied in detail but the most likely explanation is a combination of hydrophobic forces of the ethylvinylbenzene-dimethylbenzene co-polymer with hydrophilic forces of the enclosed water molecules.

Even compounds other than organic acids are recovered from the Porapak columns such as glycerol (101), 3-methylcrotonylglycine (102), tyrosine (V), and orotic acid (V).

Simple separations through gradient elution can also be achieved on these materials, but that possibility has not been investigated in detail.

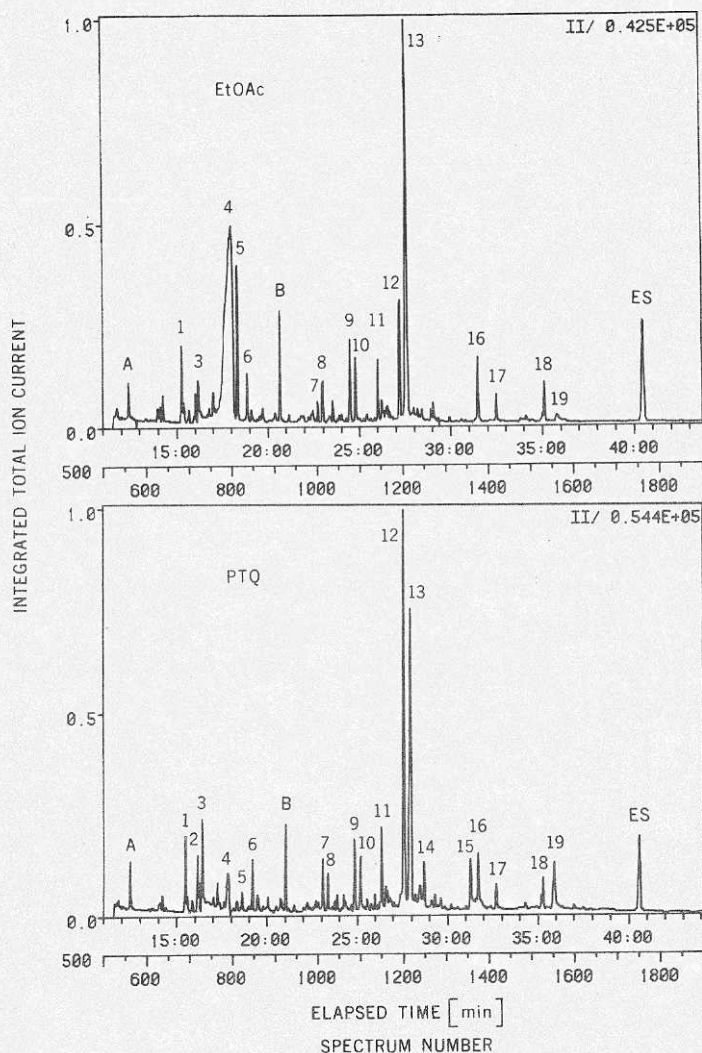


Figure 6. Total ion current traces of methoxymated and silylated compounds isolated from 2 ml of pooled normal urine with ethyl acetate extraction (EtOAc, upper trace) and with adsorption on Porapak^R (PTQ, lower trace). Prominent peaks are: 1 procedural artifact; 2 p-cresole; 3 sulfuric acid; 4 urea; 5 phosphoric acid; 6 succinic acid; 7 pyroglutamic acid; 8 furane-5-hydroxymethyl-2-carboxylic acid; 9 4-hydroxyphenylacetic acid; 10 glycyfurane-2-carboxylic acid; 11 aconitic acid; 12 citric acid; 13 hippuric acid; 14 unidentified hexose; 15 uric acid; 16 3-hydroxyhippuric acid; 17 4-hydroxyhippuric acid; 18 unidentified hexonic acid; 19 *N*-phenylacetylglutamine; A 4-pentynoic acid (internal standard); B 3-chlorobenzoic acid (internal standard); ES tetracosanoic acid (external standard).

Chromatographic conditions: 23 cm/s He carrier gas; 20 m, 0.5 mm I.D. pyrex-glass capillary column coated with 1.2 μ m of cross linked SE-54; temperature programmed from 50°C, held for 2 min, up to 290°C, held for 9 min, at a rate of 7°C/min.

3.3 Separation

The early attempts to separate the soluble urinary compounds isolated were made by distillation, consecutive selective solvent extractions, or recrystallisations after proper chemical modifications (8,31). A still ongoing revolutionary development was started with the first papers on column chromatographic separation (24,103-106). Other milestones were the development of paper chromatography (107), thin layer chromatography (108-110), and especially gas chromatography (111-115).

Although most of the urinary organic acids may be separated in their native form by liquid chromatography (116,117), it is often advantageous to modify them chemically before chromatography is started. The chemically modified organic acids may give a better detection sensitivity, or may have better chromatographic properties. Most organic acids must be derivatized to increase their volatility and stability for gas chromatographic separation, which has become the accepted standard method for the analysis of urinary organic acids, first with packed columns (118,119), and then with capillary columns (93,94,120).

A schematic illustration of a gas chromatograph (GC) is shown in **Figure 7** (detail G), and consists of a pressurized carrier-gas delivery system, a sample application port, a chromatographic column, and a detector. The electric signal from the detector is amplified and transferred to a recorder or data system.

Capillary columns may be prepared from metals, plastics, different glasses, and from pure fused silica (121). Different ways to apply the chromatographic phase onto the unmodified or modified inner wall of the capillary column have been described (122). The most common is now the static coating method where a solution of the chromatographic phase is introduced into the capillary column. After the subsequent evaporation of the solvent the chromatographic phase remains as a thin homogeneous coating on the inner wall of the capillary column (123). It is essential to make the coating non-extractable for on-column injections, and several methods to stabilize the chromatographic phase by crosslinking have been published (124-129). A careful selection of the material and internal diameter of the capillary column as well as the thickness and nature of the coating is crucial for each application (121,122).

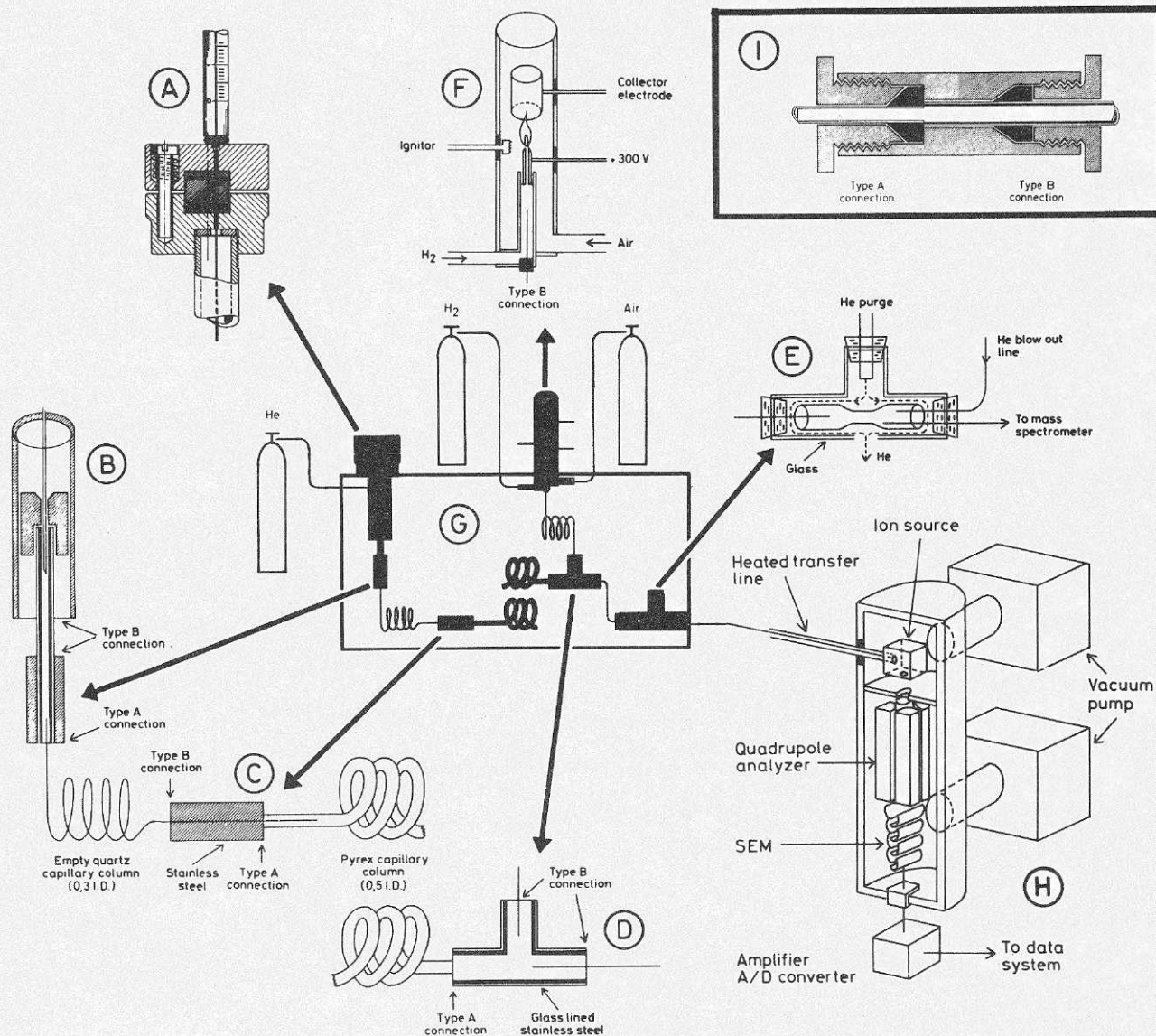


Figure 7. Schematic drawing of a combined gas chromatograph - mass spectrometer. **A:** septumless injection port; **B:** "quasi on column" glass-lined stainless-steel injector; **C:** coupling of empty fused silica precolumn (0.3 mm I.D.) to analytical wide bore (0.5 mm I.D.) pyrex glass column; **D:** glass-lined stainless steel effluent splitter; **E:** open-split coupling; **F:** flame ionization detector; **G:** gas chromatograph; **H:** quadrupole mass spectrometer; **I:** detail of the dead volume free connection used.

Because of their higher sample capacity wide-bore capillary columns with a thick-film coating appeared to be the best choice for us to use in the routine analysis of organic acids in urine (130,131). When we started to analyze organic acids in urine, appropriate wide-bore capillary columns were not available commercially, and were therefore prepared in our

laboratory. Although different cross-linked thick-film wide-bore capillary columns are now commercially available, we still prefer to prepare the columns in our laboratory because of economic and didactic considerations (132).

The step from packed columns to wide-bore (0.5 mm I.D.) capillary columns illustrated in **Figure 8** was done in 1978 in our laboratory and led to the development of the septumless injection port described in **Paper III**. This injection port eliminated all the problems we previously had with the injection membrane, especially bleeding and particles torn from the membrane which were flushed into the capillary column, leading to a severe impairment of the chromatographic performance.

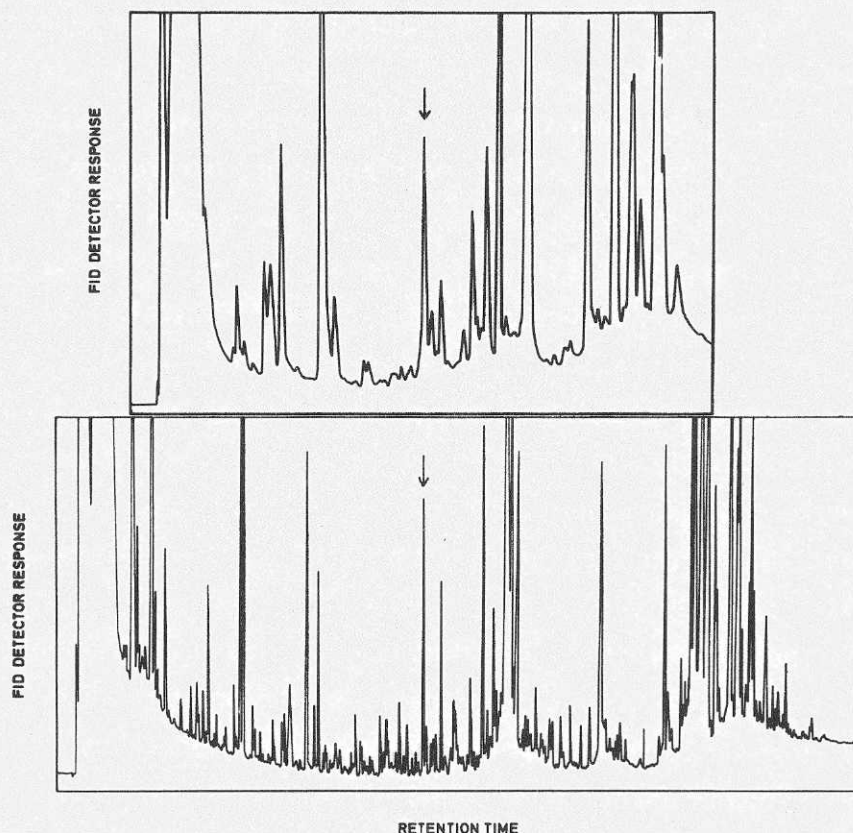


Figure 8. Comparison of packed (upper) and capillary (lower) column chromatogram of a patients urine after isolation, methoxymation, and silylation. The arrow indicates the position of the internal standard.

The injection port (**Fig. 7**, detail **A**) was interfaced to a modified autosampler and fitted with a wide bore (0.7 mm I.D.) glass-lined stainless-steel tubing to enable "quasi on column" injection (**Fig. 7**, detail **B**). This set

up facilitates the connection of all sorts of capillary columns to a given injector configuration thus eliminating the need for special on column injection devices. The shown set up has been in use in our laboratory for manual injection since 1978 and for autosampler injection since 1981 for both flash heated as well as cold "quasi on column" injections.

3.4 Detection

Before the advent of chromatographic separation techniques the detection of urinary constituents has since ancient times relied on the inspection of the urines color, transparency, odor, and taste (133,134).

The introduction of the chromatographic techniques made it possible to separate a large number of urinary compounds, most of them colorless. The inability to detect the separated compounds while they eluted from the chromatographic column catalyzed the development of different detectors. Some of the detectors now in use in liquid column chromatography are the refractive index detector (135), the UV-detector (136-138), the fluorescence detector (139), and the electrochemical detector (140,141).

Two gas chromatographic detectors of historical interest are Martin's gas density balance, and Cook's argon detector (142). Now the most widely used detector in gas chromatography has become the flame ionization detector (113,143-146). Other detectors used in gas chromatography are the thermal conductivity detector (147,148), the electron capture detector (149), the photoionization detector (150), and the infrared spectrometer (151-153).

The UV-detector, the fluorescence detector, the electro-chemical detector, the electron-capture detector, the photoionization detector, and the infrared spectrometer can be operated to specifically detect certain compounds or compound classes. All other detectors mentioned have no special compound specificity, and are thus useful for the detection of nearly all urinary organic compounds.

The most versatile detector so far developed suitable for eluents in liquid and gas chromatography is the mass spectrometer (154-162). The mass spectrometer is unique because it combines high sensitivity with the ability to generate very specific spectra for nearly all compounds, either in their native state or as suitable derivatives (163-172). One disadvantage of

the mass-spectrometric detector shared by the flame ionization detector is that it is a destructive detector, and thus a compound detected with a mass spectrometer or a flame ionization detector can not be recovered as it was introduced.

For the analysis of urinary organic acids we have chosen to evaluate the effluent of the gas chromatographic column with two independent detectors simultaneously by splitting the effluent through a glass-lined stainless-steel T-piece to a flame ionization detector and to a mass spectrometer. Details of the effluent splitter and of the slightly modified open-split coupling to the mass spectrometer are shown in **Figure 7** (details D and E, respectively).

The flame ionization detector (FID) consists of a hydrogen flame into which the effluent from the gas-chromatographic column is directed for combustion at a temperature between 1000 and 2000°C (173). At this flame temperature ions are formed, which can be detected by a cylindrical electrode surrounding the flame, and held at a potential of approximately 300 V against ground (**Figure 7**, detail F). The current detected is amplified and recorded. Stable operating conditions are obtained for each detector design at certain flow rates of hydrogen gas, air and carrier gas for a given temperature which should be high enough to prevent condensation of material eluting from the chromatographic column.

A dynamic range of six to eight orders of magnitude may be attained depending on the detected compound (174). The lowest detectable amount for favorable detection conditions is in the order of 10^{-12} g/sec (174). This means that a given amount of eluate will yield a higher detector response when passing the detector in a shorter period of time, as long as the time constants of the amplifying and recording systems are sufficiently short. This differential property of the flame ionization detector is shared by the mass-spectrometric detector which has about the same sensitivity and dynamic range of detection (175).

A mass spectrometer (MS) is a device that generates volatile ions and separates them in vacuo according to their mass to charge ratio. A schematic diagram of a quadrupole mass spectrometer is shown in **Figure 7** (detail H). Ions produced in the source are separated in the mass analyzer section and accelerated against the conversion dynode of a secondary electron multiplier (SEM). The amplified signal from each ion hitting the

conversion dynode is transmitted to a galvanometric recorder or to a data system. Several mass spectrometric analyzers are available, but only the quadrupole and the magnetic sector analyzer in combination with a gas chromatograph are widely used for the analysis of organic acids in urine (93,94,176).

In the ion source both positive and negative ions are formed, usually in favor of the positive ions by a factor of a thousand (156). For some electron-capturing compounds or derivatives the proportion of negative ions may increase considerably and their detection instead of the positive ions can be advantageous (177,178). Ions may be generated in several ways. The most common way is still the electron impact ionization with thermal electrons from a metal filament (often Rh). The thermal electrons are usually accelerated to an energy of about 70 eV. Additional ionization methods used are chemical ionization (179,180), fast atom bombardment (181,182), field ionization and field desorption (183,184), atmospheric pressure ionization (185), and thermo-spray ionization (186,187). Only electron impact and chemical ionization methods are commonly used in the gas chromatographic-mass spectrometric analysis of urinary organic acids.

The combination of gas chromatography with mass spectrometry (GC-MS) generates some specific problems (157,175). Gas chromatography is a high pressure technique (about atmospheric pressure at the column outlet), whereas mass spectrometry depends on a very low pressure (about 10^{-8} torr in the analyzer section). Differential pumping systems have solved that problem. Another mismatch was, that the gas flow rate of a packed gas chromatographic column is in the order of 30 ml/min, whereas the mass spectrometer is able to handle a flow rate in the order of 3 ml/min. Early solutions to that problem were gas separators (157), which have become unnecessary after the advent of capillary columns commonly operating at flow rates below 3 ml/min. Direct introduction of the effluent of the gas chromatographic capillary column into the ion source of the mass spectrometer is thus possible, but has the disadvantage that even solvents and reagents applied with the sample onto the column are pumped into the mass spectrometer. Column effluent diverting systems, such as the open-split coupling shown in **Figure 7** (detail E), are therefore used in many laboratories (188-191).

Another problem is that high performance capillary columns are able to resolve about ten components per second, whereas modern mass spectrometers can at present only sample three full spectra (from m/z 50 to 800) of good quality per second. The chromatographic separation must thus be run below optimal speed which leads to a lower detectability because of sample adsorption and degradation, as well as because of the differential nature of the mass-spectrometric detector (192). This problem is not encountered when the mass spectrometer is operated to detect only certain ions instead of full mass spectra.

3.5 Identification

In the same way as detection of urinary compounds has long relied on specific colors, odors, or tastes for unseparated as well as separated compounds, so has identification (8).

The development of specific separation techniques such as precipitation, distillation, recrystallisation, and especially chromatography enabled the purification of individual urinary components. Once purified a compound could be identified by its physical and chemical properties, such as melting point, boiling point, chemical reactivity towards different reagents, ability to give crystalline products, spectroscopic properties, elemental analysis, and finally by its identity with a synthesized compound showing the same chemical and physical properties.

Although the combined application of physical methods such as infrared spectrometry (IR), nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR), and mass spectrometry (MS) are often sufficient to characterize a compound, the synthetic proof is still the most definitive (193,194).

In the field of urinary organic acid analysis, capillary gas chromatography-mass spectrometry has become the method of choice for fast identification of isolated compounds, simultaneously to the chromatographic separation (195). Liquid chromatography-mass spectrometry might become an alternative to gas chromatography - mass spectrometry because of some recent developments made in the coupling of liquid chromatography with mass spectrometry (196-198). Using the techniques of low and high resolution gas chromatography-mass spectrometry the knowledge about urinary organic acids has increased considerably during the last ten years through the efforts of numerous workers (93,94,199-210).

Because of the large amount of analytical data generated by a gas chromatograph - mass spectrometer the combination with a data system has been essential for data reduction and evaluation (157,175,211-220). Nevertheless many of the early results were obtained without the help of a data system. Datorized gas chromatographic-mass spectrometric equipment is now commercially available from a number of vendors with different types of mass analyzers and with a high degree of reliability and versatility.

Although sophisticated datorized gas chromatographic-mass spectrometric equipment has revolutionized the identification of e.g. organic acids in urine, the analyst will always be needed because of problems with unresolved eluents (221), impurities (222,223) and procedural artifacts (224-226).

3.6 Quantitation

Qualitative data are often sufficient for the correct diagnosis of a disease, but when comparisons, evaluation of severity, and prediction of outcome are to be made quantitative data are indispensable. Quantitative methods introduced very early were gravimetry (8,31), titration (227,228) and colorimetry (229) which are still in use parallel to the newer physical methods. All the detectors mentioned in the previous section are useful for quantitative estimations.

The flame ionization detector and the mass spectrometer have gained worldwide acceptance for the quantitative estimation of urinary organic acids, and are also used in our laboratory. The following discussion will therefore be restricted to the methods of gas chromatography-flame ionization detection and gas chromatography-mass spectrometry.

The mass spectrometric detector may be operated either in the full scan mode or in the single or multiple ion detection mode, usually computer controlled. Higher sensitivity is obtained in the latter operating mode which is thus used for qualitative and quantitative trace analysis (230-233). The full scan mode is used for the structure elucidation of unknown compounds but can be used for quantitative analysis as well, although with lower precision and sensitivity (234,235).

The reliability of quantitative results depends more or less on several factors such as care in the preparation of samples and standards, chroma-

tographic conditions, type, condition and operating mode of the detector, mode of data evaluation, as well as skills and experience of the analyst. Following published recommendations from good laboratory practice (230-239) will prevent the most serious errors in sample and standard handling procedures. The chromatographic conditions must be optimized for each analytical problem by the proper choice of carrier gas, injection method, type of column, type of chromatographic phase, temperature of separation, as well as type and temperature of the connection to the detector. Following the manufacturers installation, test and maintenance procedures for the chosen detector will in most cases be sufficient to obtain satisfactory quantitative results.

Quantitative results from mass spectrometers are highly affected by improper threshold settings, which in addition may be unstable and thus make day to day comparisons difficult. New standard curves are therefore necessary for each measuring sequence (232). Other problems when attempting quantitation of complex biological samples may arise from non linearity of standard curves (240,241), isotope effects (242), choice of internal standard (243,244), as well as instrumental set up and measuring conditions (245).

Even a correct quantitation may be difficult to interpret because of day to day variations in excretion (246-250), excretional changes due to medication (251) or diet (252), and difficulties with interpatient comparisons mainly because of creatinine excretion variances (253-260).

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

A detailed knowledge of normal metabolic pathways and the variation of normal and pathological urinary excretion patterns is essential for the correct diagnosis and treatment of many inborn errors of metabolism.

Several computer programs for the automatic identification and quantitation of gas chromatographic-mass spectrometric data have been developed (199,212,217). Even programs for the automatic diagnosis of diseases based on gas chromatographic-mass spectrometric data have been published (261). Unfortunately these data programs have not to a significant extent found their way into routine clinical laboratories and seem to work best in the hands of those who developed them.

Other analytical improvements such as sophisticated combinations of different analytical techniques (262), e.g. gas chromatography-fourier transform infrared spectrometry-mass spectrometry-data system (263), which have a great potential for the elucidation of unknown compounds and can with great reliability be used to identify known ones, are too expensive or too complicated for routine clinical laboratories.

It seems therefore unlikely that the "manual" evaluation of analytical data for the purpose of identification and diagnosis of inborn errors of metabolism will be replaced by fully automated computerized methods in the near future.

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