



Enhanced pigmentation effecting decreased protein secretion and pathogenicity in spontaneous melanin variants of *Gaeumannomyces graminis* var. *tritici*
by Tresa Len Quoss Goins

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Microbiology
Montana State University
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Abstract:

Gaeumannomyces graminis var. *tritici* is the phytopathogenic agent of take-all, a severe root disease of wheat and barley. It is a member of the *Gaeumannomyces-Phialophora* complex of closely related homothallic, filamentous ascomycetes that are differentiated by pathogenicity and the ability to undergo meiosis. The population of *Gaeumannomyces* and *Phialophora* in native grasslands and take-all decline soils, where disease severity is absent or depressed, is characterized by darkly pigmented isolates. The parameters dictating this population dynamic have not been identified and there is no established relationship between fungal pigmentation and fungal virulence.

The spontaneous melanin variants of a virulent *Gaeumannomyces graminis* var. *tritici* isolate demonstrated *Phialophora*-like characteristics, loss of virulence and the progressive loss of the ability to undergo meiosis. *G. graminis* var. *tritici* effects penetration of intact host tissue by enzymatic means requiring the secretion of lytic enzymes for the extracellular degradation of macromolecules. The relationship between the secretion of fungal proteins [cellulases, pectinases, proteinases (plant-cell-wall degrading enzymes) and a polyphenol oxidase] and the melanin variant phenotype (enhanced pigmentation) was assessed in the wild-type, two spontaneous melanin variants, and two meiotically derived white-derivatives of the melanin variants. The effect of DHN-melanin biosynthesis inhibition on protein secretion was determined in melanin variants treated with tricyclazole.

The correlation between the melanin variant phenotype and pathogenicity was assessed in *Triticum aestivum* by shoot and root mass assay, root stelar lesion assay and root histopathology. A laccase-like polyphenol oxidase, not previously reported in *G. graminis* var. *tritici*, was assessed for plant phenolic detoxification (p-coumaric and caffeic acids) and lignin degradative (Poly B-411 decolorization) capacity and was identified as a putative fungal virulence factor. Results indicated 1) an inverse correlation between fungal pigmentation and protein secretion, 2) an inverse correlation between fungal pigmentation and pathogenicity and 3) an inferred direct correlation between protein secretion and pathogenicity.

The presentation of *Phialophora*-Yike characteristics by the spontaneous melanin variants is the first report of a sexual/asexual conversion in *Gaeumannomyces*. This observed phenotypic switching no doubt contributes to classification difficulties among members of the *Gaeumannomyces-Phialophora* complex.

ENHANCED PIGMENTATION EFFECTING DECREASED PROTEIN
SECRETION AND PATHOGENICITY IN SPONTANEOUS MELANIN
VARIANTS OF *GAEUMANNOMYCES GRAMINIS* VAR *TRITICI*

by

Tresa Len Quoss Goins

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES.....	vi
LIST OF FIGURES	vii
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	ix
ABSTRACT	x
INTRODUCTION	1
The <i>Gaeumannomyces-Phialophora</i> Complex	1
<i>Gaeumannomyces graminis</i> var. <i>tritici</i>	3
Factors of Host Resistance	8
Factors of Fungal Pathogenicity	10
Fungal Phenotype and Pathogenicity	14
Statement of Thesis.....	16
MATERIALS AND METHODS.....	18
Fungal Strain Selection.....	18
Fungal Strain Characterization.....	20
Restriction Fragment Length Polymorphism Analysis.....	20
Linear Growth Rates.....	20
Methylation Determination	20
Phialospore Formation.....	21
Protein Secretion and Enhanced Melanization	22
Relative Total Protein Secretion	22
Plant-Cell-Wall Degrading Enzyme Secretion	22
Phenolic Detoxifying Enzymes.....	24
Polyphenol Oxidase	24
Spot Test Reagents	24
Quantitative Reagent	25
Effect of Redox Agents on Polyphenol Oxidase Activity.....	26
Dependence of Polyphenol Oxidase Secretion on Culture Age.....	26
Effect of Tricyclazole on Polyphenol Oxidase Secretion	27

Polyphenol Oxidase Characterization	27
Induction Medium for Polyphenol Oxidase Production	27
Crude Polyphenol Oxidase Preparation	28
SDS-PAGE Electrophoresis	29
Preparative SDS-PAGE for Polyphenol Oxidase Characterization	29
Polyphenol Oxidase Deglycosylation	30
pH Range of Polyphenol Oxidase Activity	30
Determination of Polyphenol Oxidase Isoelectric Point	30
Temperature Range of Polyphenol Oxidase Activity	31
Determination of Polyphenol Oxidase K_m	31
Lignin Degradation	31
Pathogenicity and Enhanced Pigmentation	32
<i>G. graminis</i> var. <i>tritici</i> Host	32
Plant Mass Assay	32
Root Lesion Assay	33
Histopathology	33
RESULTS	34
Fungal Strain Selection	34
Protein Secretion and Enhanced Pigmentation	39
Relative Total Protein Secretion	39
Plant-Cell-Wall Degrading Enzyme Secretion	40
Phenolic Detoxifying Enzymes	42
Polyphenol Oxidase Secretion	45
Identification of the Polyphenol Oxidase	45
Dependence of Polyphenol Oxidase Secretion on Culture Age	49
Effect of Tricyclazole on Polyphenol Oxidase Secretion	50
Characterization of the Polyphenol Oxidase	51
Lignin Degradation	60
Pathogenicity and Enhanced Pigmentation	61
Protein Secretion and Pathogenicity	67
DISCUSSION	69
The Fungal Strains	69
Protein Secretion and Enhanced Pigmentation	73
Polyphenol Oxidase Characterization	76
Pathogenicity and Enhanced Pigmentation	77
Protein Secretion and Pathogenicity	78
CONCLUSIONS	79
BIBLIOGRAPHY	81

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Effect of Tricyclazole on Plant-Cell-Wall Degrading Enzyme Secretion	42
2. Effect of Fungitoxic Phenolic Compounds on Fungal Growth Rates	43
3. Effect of Fungitoxic Phenolic Compounds on Fungal Morphology.....	45
4. Characteristics of the Ggt Polyphenol Oxidase	59

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Isolation of Spontaneous Melanin Variants	35
2. RFLP Analysis to Verify Parental Ggt as Source of Melanin Variant Strains	36
3. Fungal Linear Growth Rates	37
4. Phialospore Formation in the Green Variant Strains	38
5. Effect of Enhanced Pigmentation of Relative Total Protein Secretion	40
6. Effect of Tricyclazole on Relative Total Protein Secretion	41
7. Relative Fungal Growth Rates in the Presence of Fungitoxic Phenolic Compounds	44
8. Calibration of the DMOP Colorimetric Assay for Determination of PPO Concentration (0 to .50 units).....	47
9. Calibration of the DMOP Colorimetric Assay for Determination of PPO Concentration (.50 to 2.0 units).....	48
10. Effect of Potential Inhibitors and a Peroxidase Cofactor on the Oxidation of DMOP by the Enzyme(s) Secreted by Ggt into the Culture Filtrate	49
11. Dependence of Polyphenol Oxidase Secretion on Culture Age and Visual Detection of the Enhanced Pigment Phenotype	50
12. The Effect of Tricyclazole on Polyphenol Oxidase Secretion.....	51
13. Dependence of Polyphenol Oxidase Secretion on Culture Age in Static and Shaken Defined Induction Medium	52
14. Effect of Copper Sulfate Concentration on the Secretion of Polyphenol Oxidase by <i>Ggt</i> in Defined Induction Medium	53

15. Determination of Molecular Weight of the Native Polyphenol Oxidase	54
16. Determination of Proteins Present in the 60% and 100% Fractions by SDS-PAGE and Silver Staining	55
17. Molecular Weight Determination and Deglycosylation of the PPO Recovered from Preparative SDS-PAGE.....	56
18. pH Range of Polyphenol Oxidase Activity	57
19. Determination of Polyphenol Oxidase Km	58
20. Effect of Freezing on Polyphenol Oxidase Activity	59
21. Effect of Elevated Temperature on Polyphenol Oxidase Activity	60
22. Assessment of Lignin Degradative Capability by Poly B-411 Decolorization.....	61
23. Pathogenicity Assay - Shoot Mass	62
24. Pathogenicity Assay - Root Mass	64
25. Pathogenicity Assay - Root Stellar Lesions	65
26. Cryostat Sections of Wheat Root Tissue	66
27. Direct Correlation Between Polyphenol Oxidase Activity and Pathogenicity (Root Stellar Lesion Assay).....	67
28. Direct Correlation Between Polyphenol Oxidase Activity and Pathogenicity (Plant Mass Assay)	68

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CTAB	Cetyltrimethylammonium Bromide
DHN	Dihydroxynaphthalene
DMOP	2,6-Dimethoxyphenol
<i>Ggt</i>	<i>Gaeumannomyces graminis</i> var. <i>tritici</i>
MV	Melanin Variant
PAL	Phenylalanine Ammonia-Lyase
PDA	Potato Dextrose Agar
PGU	Polygalacturonase
PL	Pectin Lyase
PPO	Polyphenol Oxidase
PVP	Polyvinylpyrrolidone
RFLP	Restriction Fragment Length Polymorphism
TAD	Take-All Decline
TAL	Tyrosine Ammonia-Lyase

ABSTRACT

Gaeumannomyces graminis var. *tritici* is the phytopathogenic agent of take-all, a severe root disease of wheat and barley. It is a member of the *Gaeumannomyces-Phialophora* complex of closely related homothallic, filamentous ascomycetes that are differentiated by pathogenicity and the ability to undergo meiosis. The population of *Gaeumannomyces* and *Phialophora* in native grasslands and take-all decline soils, where disease severity is absent or depressed, is characterized by darkly pigmented isolates. The parameters dictating this population dynamic have not been identified and there is no established relationship between fungal pigmentation and fungal virulence.

The spontaneous melanin variants of a virulent *Gaeumannomyces graminis* var. *tritici* isolate demonstrated *Phialophora*-like characteristics, loss of virulence and the progressive loss of the ability to undergo meiosis. *G. graminis* var. *tritici* effects penetration of intact host tissue by enzymatic means requiring the secretion of lytic enzymes for the extracellular degradation of macromolecules. The relationship between the secretion of fungal proteins [cellulases, pectinases, proteinases (plant-cell-wall degrading enzymes) and a polyphenol oxidase] and the melanin variant phenotype (enhanced pigmentation) was assessed in the wild-type, two spontaneous melanin variants, and two meiotically derived white-derivatives of the melanin variants. The effect of DHN-melanin biosynthesis inhibition on protein secretion was determined in melanin variants treated with tricyclazole.

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INTRODUCTION

The *Gaeumannomyces-Phialophora* Complex

The *Gaeumannomyces-Phialophora* complex embraces phenotypically similar fungi isolated from the roots of grasses and cereals (145, 253). Members of the complex include non-pathogenic *Phialophora* (anamorph) and pathogenic and non-pathogenic *Gaeumannomyces* (teleomorph). It is postulated that the *Phialophora* members have teleomorph states in *Gaeumannomyces* that are undetected due to the inability to induce meiosis *in vitro*. In an exceptional case, a *Phialophora graminicola* var. *graminicola* isolate was induced to produce perithecia on laboratory grown wheat and barley (114) and the identification of the sexual state, *Gaeumannomyces cylindrosporus*, resulted in the discontinued use of the asexual varietal name which inaccurately depicted the isolate as imperfect. Even in this exceptional case, the holomorph (104) was not demonstrated; the ascospores germinated to form only the anamorph and the phialospores failed to germinate (116). As the *Phialophora* reproduce asexually via a uniform mechanism of conidiogenesis, phialospores produced in phialides supported on a phialophore, the identification of such phenotypically similar isolates is problematic; the name *Phialophora radiculicola* was misapplied so frequently throughout the literature to a variety of isolates that its use was discontinued (239). It was therefore proposed

that the anamorphic members of the *Gaeumannomyces-Phialophora* complex be referred to as *Phialophora*-like without a specific or varietal name (239, 262).

Most *Phialophora* isolates readily produce phialospores *in vitro*, but phialospore production and germination is inconsistent (65, 131). Some isolates of *Gaeumannomyces* produce two types of phialospores; non-germinating lunate spores observed *in vivo* and germinating ovate to cylindrical spores observed only in culture (36, 66, 67, 239, 252, 262). The production of ascospores by *Gaeumannomyces* is inconsistent among isolates and within the same isolate (65) and contributes to classification uncertainty among members of the *Gaeumannomyces-Phialophora* complex.

The initial identification of members in the complex is based on the sometimes ambiguous phenotypic characteristics of growth rate, pathogenicity and the ability to produce perithecia; *Phialophora* are generally slower growing, are non-pathogenic and are unable to undergo meiosis (65, 218). Despite its limitations, classification of complex members by phenotypic differences has been confirmed by molecular characterization. Nucleic acid sequence analysis reveals some *Phialophora* species are more closely related to *Gaeumannomyces* than they are to other *Phialophora* (37, 244) and gives credence to the member grouping in the *Gaeumannomyces-Phialophora* complex and indicates that the *Phialophora*-like members are not simply a form-taxa of genetically unrelated fungi. *G. graminis* varieties include a relatively benign parasite of grasses and rice, *G. graminis* var. *graminis*, and two closely related varieties, *G. graminis* var. *tritici* (Walker) and *G. graminis* var. *avenae* (Turner) which are pathogenic to wheat, barley, rye and oats

(1, 111, 239). Classification of the *Gaeumannomyces* members of the complex based on host susceptibility and the morphology of specialized fungal structures has also been augmented by molecular characterization. Restriction fragment length polymorphisms in families of repeated DNA sequences have recently been used to confirm the variety pathotypes (176, 223). All three varieties produce hyphopodia, attachment and penetration structures, however, those of *G. graminis* vars. *tritici* and *avenae* are simple (unlobed) whereas those of *G. graminis* var. *graminis* are both simple and lobed (111). Sequence homology analysis of ribosomal RNA genes and the internal transcribed spacer regions (37) and random amplified polymorphic DNA (85) confirms relatedness based on hyphopodial structure; the pathogens *G. graminis* var. *tritici* and *G. graminis* var. *avenae* being more closely related than the parasitic *G. graminis* var. *graminis*. The *Phialophora*-like members of the complex produce both simple and lobed hyphopodia (239) and may be correlated to hyphopodial form of its proposed sexual state. The closely related varieties *tritici* and *avenae* can also be differentiated by ascospore length. While the ranges of spore length overlap in the two varieties, those of var. *tritici* are shorter overall (230, 239).

Gaeumannomyces graminis var. *tritici*

Gaeumannomyces graminis (Sacc.) von Arx & Olivier are plant parasitic ascomycetes that infect the roots, crowns and lower portions of stems and leaf sheaths of *Poaceae* and *Cyperaceae*. *G. graminis* (Sacc.) Arx & Olivier var. *tritici* (Walker) exhibits a wide host range in wild grasses in global temperate regions. It

causes a severe root disease, take-all, of wheat (*Triticum*) and barley (*Hordeum*) (237), and is the most damaging disease of cultivated wheat worldwide (120). The term take-all is a graphic description of the disease: a loss of crop yield due to decreased number of tillers per plant, decreased grain weight and fewer grains per tiller (10, 24). The intensive cultivation of wheat prompted early recognition of the disease in South Australia in the 1850's and identification of the fungal etiological agent in France in 1890 (193). Much of the early literature refers to *G. graminis* var. *tritici* as *Ophiobolus graminis*, a Loculoascomycete. The misapplication of the genus name *Ophiobolus* remained in use into the 1970's despite the designation of the new genus, *Gaeumannomyces*, by von Arx & Olivier in 1952 to reflect the organisms correct identification as a Pyrenomycete (113, 126).

G. graminis var. *tritici* is homothallic but capable of out-crossing among compatible anastomosis groups. Repeated hyphal fusion results in multinucleate conjugate cells (analogous to the female ascogonium) which give rise to numerous ascogenous hyphae (126). Repeated crozier formation and septal separation between nuclei pairs in the ascogenous hypha forms transient diploid cells which undergo meiosis immediately after karyogamy occurs. Four haploid daughter cells undergo mitosis forming four pairs of genetically identical unordered haploid ascospores within the ascus. The mature ostiolate perithecium contains scattered unitunicate asci that germinate to form a haploid vegetative mycelium with predominately uninucleate hyphal cells (45, 162).

Wild grasses, e.g. *Agropyron*, *Bromus*, and *Hordeum*, are natural hosts of *G. graminis* var. *tritici* and are a source of fungal inoculum in pastures cleared for

cultivation and are responsible for "edge" or "border" outbreaks of take-all that occur along the perimeter of a cultivated plot (210, 211). In the perennial wild grass hosts, *Ggt* exists as a parasite year-round in the living rhizome (236, 211). In a monoculture, the life cycle of *G. graminis* var. *tritici* alternates between the parasitic phase when it acts as a pathogen and the saprophytic phase when it must survive between susceptible host crops. Plowing under infected plant debris that contains hyphal fragments provides inoculum for subsequent monoculture and the planting of sequential susceptible crops may result in an increase in take-all severity unless non-susceptible break-crops are planted in rotation (57, 203). The "spontaneous" outbreak of take-all in a field not previously cultivated in a susceptible crop is attributed to fungal dispersal by wind blown infected plant material (89, 161). Ascospores are produced in the field and may be disseminated by rainfall (98) but are very susceptible to environmental conditions where survival, as determined by germination *in vitro*, ranges from two days to two years (83, 116). Also, ascospore maturation rarely coincides with the optimum time to perpetuate infection in the subsequent crop (211) and ascospores fail to germinate in non-sterile soil (34, 89). The production of germinable phialospores has never been observed in the field.

The pathogen has a very low competitive saprophytic ability and demonstrates highly restricted colonization of sterile straw which is further diminished in the presence of antagonistic soil microflora (115, 210, 211). Antagonistic microflora alter the wheat rhizosphere chemistry by depleting specific plant exudates and producing inhibitory metabolites (208, 222). Up to 0.15% of total

plant assimilated carbon is lost to the soil as root exudates containing polysaccharides, mucopolysaccharides, proteins, amino acids, organic acids and sugars (43). *G. graminis* var. *tritici* responds chemotactically to root exudates as a nutrient source and responds to the chemical gradient to direct fungal growth toward its host target (94, 115, 191). Pseudomonads compete for nutrients with *G. graminis* var. *tritici* but also secrete antibiotics inhibitory to the pathogens growth (160, 188) and act as a biocontrol agent to suppress take-all (159, 160).

A spontaneous reduction in take-all severity and an increase in crop yield is a phenomenon known as take-all decline (96, 115). Take-all decline (TAD) soils have a greater population of antagonistic microflora than non-TAD soils. *G. graminis* var. *tritici* responds chemotactically to root exudates if the fungus is located within a rhizosphere response zone of 9-14 mm (94, 191, 261). The *G. graminis* var. *tritici* rhizosphere chemotactic response zone in TAD soils is reduced by nearly fifty-percent (12, 115, 191, 213, 261). Numerous *G. graminis* var. *tritici* isolates produce a self-inhibiting Q-factor (163) but its growth inhibiting activity is believed to function during the saprophytic rather than the pathogenic phase of the *G. graminis* var. *tritici* life cycle. Debate on the causes of take-all decline continues, and theories that have lost favor include the loss of fungal virulence (56, 58) and hypovirulence associated with the presence of a mycovirus (87, 146, 195). The take-all decline phenomenon observed in monoculture may merely be a reflection of the complex balance evolved between *G. graminis* var. *tritici* and its wild grass hosts. There are few reports of severe take-all in native or long term grasslands (238) and the severity of take-all symptoms in TAD soils diminish without a concomitant

decrease in the incidence of infected plants (210). The *Gaeumannomyces* and *Phialophora* isolates from monocultures displaying TAD and native grasses are typically darkly pigmented (51, 63, 65).

At the rhizoplane, *G. graminis* var. *tritici* demonstrates an initial extensive ectotrophic growth habit which is indistinguishable from that of non-pathogenic *Gaeumannomyces* and *Phialophora*-like species (114, 215). This shared manifestation of root surface colonization by pigmented runner-hyphae (macrohyphae) makes it impossible to assess risk from take-all by inspecting root systems (68, 215). The presence of *G. graminis* var. *tritici* should be verified by the development of perithecia on wheat culms, but diagnostic results are variable and require four to ten weeks (114, 253, 260). As the *G. graminis* var. *tritici* infection of wheat progresses, the pigmented runner hyphae originate hyaline infection hyphae (non-pigmented microhyphae) (126, 154) that penetrate the root cortex layers and endodermis and culminates in colonization of the root stele (215). It is the colonization of the root stele containing the phloem and xylem that cause plant wilting and death by interrupting root transport functions (53, 215). Non-pathogenic *Gaeumannomyces* and *Phialophora*-like species are unable to penetrate the stele and form darkly pigmented growth cessation structures against the endodermis or in any of the six cortex layers where penetration has been halted (65, 68, 109).

Factors of Host Resistance

There are no wheat cultivars that are highly resistant to *G. graminis* var. *tritici* (186). No host resistance genes have been identified and reported cases of resistance may result from an ill-defined interaction between environmental conditions and the cultivar genotype (112, 185). A good deal of non-specific plant disease resistance to fungal infection is imparted by fungitoxic plant phenolic compounds (121, 123, 232, 233). These low molecular weight phenolics are inhibitory metabolites that accumulate at wound or penetration sites to inhibit fungal growth by disrupting fungal plasma membrane function and fungal cell wall synthesis (216). Fungitoxic phenolic compounds include phytoalexins that are synthesized *de novo* in cells adjacent to those damaged by physical wounding, phytoanticipins that are present in plant tissue prior to infection (97, 182, 233, 243), and phenolic lignin precursors and intermediates that occur as normal plant constituents for the synthesis of lignin, a macromolecule that imparts rigidity and compression strength to all higher plant cell walls. No phytoalexin response has been detected in wheat infected with *G. graminis* var. *tritici* (231), however, resistant oat (*Avena sativa* L.) cultivars produce avenacin in response to infection with *G. graminis* var. *avenae* (32, 62, 179). Cultivars of oat that are susceptible to *G. graminis* var. *avenae* do not produce avenacin (178) and are also susceptible to infection with *G. graminis* var. *tritici* (180). Wheat tissue contains a relatively high concentration of the phenylpropanoid lignin precursor caffeic acid (60) that may act as a phytoanticipin. This fungitoxic monolignol precursor acts as a phytoalexin in

potato cultivars resistant to *Phytophthora infestans* where it occurs at high concentrations in damaged tissue (204).

The production of lignified zones in response to infection or wounding is a common phenomenon (135, 257). Lignification in wheat is specific for filamentous fungal infections regardless if the infecting agent is saprophytic or pathogenic (149, 183, 231). In the *G. graminis* var. *tritici* infection of wheat, cortical lignitubers (82), or lignin impregnated papillae, are formed around the advancing hyphal tip as a physical barrier to fungal penetration (9, 82, 201). Induced lignification may be accompanied by the *de novo* synthesis of phenylalanine ammonia-lyase (PAL) and tyrosine ammonia-lyase (TAL), enzymes that catalyze the deamination of the respective amino acids to form *p*-coumaric acid (61, 148). PAL activity has been detected in all plant systems but lignification via TAL is unique to cereals and grasses (61). *p*-Coumaric acid is the substrate for the hydroxylated and methylated derivatives, caffeic, ferulic and sinapic acids. The reduction of *p*-coumaric, ferulic and sinapic acids yields the three lignin precursors, *p*-coumaryl, guaiacyl, and syringyl alcohol, respectively. The formation of ether bridges between the monolignols is catalyzed by plant peroxidase (149, 231, 257).

The proportion of *p*-coumaryl, guaiacyl, and syringyl alcohol units present in the mature lignin structure, and the prevalence of specific intermolecular bond types, is determined by phylogenetic origin (86, 170, 209). *Poaceae* lignin is composed of approximately equal numbers of all three monolignol derivatives but contains a comparatively high concentration of *p*-coumaric acid bound in ester

bridges to plant cell-wall arabinoxylans (144, 146) with a free hydroxyl group that is not covalently bound to lignin in an ether bridge.

Factors of Fungal Pathogenicity

G. graminis var. *tritici* effects penetration of intact host tissue and infection does not require the presence of a wound or lesion. *G. graminis* var. *tritici* secretes lytic enzymes for the extracellular degradation of cellulose in the plant primary wall and pectin and protein complexes in the middle lamella (20, 76, 156). Filamentous fungal protein secretion is believed to be restricted to nascent hyphal tips (184, 212, 247). The fungal cell wall is composed of a rigid microfibrillar network of chitin, a linear polymer of $\beta(1\rightarrow4)$ -linked *N*-acetyl glucosamine, and glucan, polymers of $\beta(1\rightarrow3)$ -linked and $\beta(1\rightarrow6)$ -linked glucose residues (14), that become increasingly cross-linked as the cell wall matures to form a rigid structure that is impermeable to large proteins, demonstrated by molecular sieving (166, 227) and by immunogold labeling of specific proteins (267). Cell wall rigidity is further increased with the onset of secondary metabolism and the deposition of melanin in the fungal cell wall. Fungal melanins are synthesized in a variety of biosynthetic pathways shared across phyla; DOPA melanin formed by the oxidation of tyrosine (40), DGHB melanin synthesized from γ -glutaminy-3,4-dihydroxybenzene (194), catechol melanin formed by the oxidation of catechol (16), and 1,8-dihydroxynaphthalene (DHN) melanin synthesized from pentaketides (16, 254, 255). The synthesis of DHN-melanin is differentially expressed among members of the *Gaeumannomyces*-

Phialophora complex and in specialized structures within a single *Gaeumannomyces* strain (78).

The deposition of melanin, resulting in a pigmented phenotype, is frequently observed during fruit body formation in the sexual (perithecia) and asexual (conidia) phases of reproduction (54, 272) and imparts structural integrity to fungal elements requiring rigidity (226, 246, 248, 264). In the phytopathogenic fungi *Colletotrichum lagenarium* (137, 138) and *Magnaporthe grisea* (52, 118), melanization of appressoria is required for virulence. The appressoria are specialized attachment and penetration structures with an internal high turgor pressure that effects the mechanical penetration of intact host plants. Melanin-deficient mutants of these fungal cells are not sufficiently rigid to attain the turgor pressure required to mechanically breach the plant cell wall (52). However, no melanized penetrative structure has been identified in *G. graminis* var. *tritici* and transmission electron microscopy of *Gaeumannomyces* cell walls reveals DHN-melanin deposited as an amorphous granular layer (41) that is indicative of a protective rather than a penetrative function where the melanin is deposited as a smooth homogeneous layer (136). Melanin may enhance fungal survival and competitive ability by protecting melanized (pigmented) fungal structures from dehydration (16), solar irradiation (16) microbial lysis (23, 39, 190, 192, 229), lytic activity of soil constituents (152) and insect predation (33).

Melanin synthesis is associated with fungal morphological changes during growth and development (40, 138) and melanization of *G. graminis* var. *tritici* ectotrophic runner hyphae may impart protection from adverse environmental

conditions in the rhizosphere during the pathogen's initial colonization of the root surface and in the soil where hyphal fragments persist in plant tissue debris and function as an important inoculum source (16, 207, 256). However, during the parasitic phase, repressed melanin deposition in the infection hyphae may be required to facilitate lytic enzyme secretion for the penetration and colonization of root tissue.

To establish an infection, the successful *G. graminis* var. *tritici* pathogen must counter the effect of fungitoxic plant phenolic compounds and breach the intact host tissue and lignituber barriers. The fungal polyphenol oxidases (157, 158), laccase (*para*-diphenol: oxygen oxidoreductase, EC 1.10.3.2) (197) and tyrosinase (inclusive of cresolase, EC 1.14.18.1, and catecholase, EC 1.10.3.2, with monophenolase and diphenolase activities respectively) (202) are copper containing metalloenzymes that catalyze the detoxification of plant phenolic compounds. The phytoalexins (pisatin and cucurbitacin) produced by the pea and the cucumber in response to infection with *Fusarium solani* and *Botrytis cinerea*, are detoxified by laccase via enzymatic demethylation (232, 233) and the formation of phenoxy radicals which undergo spontaneous transformation or condensation reactions (5, 29, 221, 228, 245). The onion (*Allium cepa*) phytoalexin, catechol, is a precursor of fungal catechol melanin and is detoxified by *Colletotrichum circinans* tyrosinase (182). Fungitoxic phytoalexins and phytoanticipins are susceptible to oxidation by fungal polyphenol oxidases due to their inherent cyclic conjugated structures (5, 29, 31, 107, 129, 130, 228, 271). Even in the absence of an identified phytoalexin/fungal detoxification interaction between wheat and *G. graminis* var. *tritici*, the

importance of plant phenolic detoxification in the establishment of a successful infection can not be ruled out. Virulent *G. graminis* var. *avenae* strains produce avenacinase, a secretory protein that detoxifies oat avenacin. Virulent *G. graminis* var. *avenae* mutants that lose avenacinase activity also lose their pathogenicity on oats (178).

Laccase catalytic activity has also been associated with the depolymerization of the high molecular weight lignin macromolecule. Lignin degradation has been most extensively studied in the white-rot basidiomycetes that are defined on the basis of their ability to degrade all components of the plant cell wall leaving a white residue indicative of lignin mineralization. Fungal enzymes participating in lignin mineralization include two heme peroxidases, lignin peroxidase and manganese dependent lignin peroxidase, and laccase. Ascomycetes are soft-rot fungi (21) that were once considered capable of only limited chemical modification of lignin due to the absence of one or more of the lignin degradative enzymes. However, the elucidation of variable and highly complex lignin degradation pathways have demonstrated the important contribution of soft-rot fungi to lignin mineralization (44).

Degradation assays using ^{14}C -labeled dehydrogenation polymers (128, 132, 174) and processed natural lignins (124) have demonstrated that the phenylpropanoid is susceptible to $\text{C}\alpha$ -oxidation, demethoxylation, aryl- $\text{C}\alpha$ cleavage and $\text{C}\alpha$ - $\text{C}\beta$ cleavage in reactions initiated by laccase oxidation (31, 107, 122, 133, 147, 271). The enzymatic abstraction of one electron from phenol hydroxyl groups by laccase (107, 130, 271) yields spontaneously reactive radicals that cause the

demethylation, side chain cleavage and ring opening in residues of the lignin polymer (107, 130, 147). *In vivo* evidence of the role of laccase in lignin degradation is provided by a laccase-minus mutant strain of *Sporotrichum pulverulentum* (4). The mutant was unable to degrade a natural processed lignin substrate unless supplemented with exogenous laccase and a laccase-plus revertant regained lignolytic ability. Previous characterization of the extracellular enzymes produced by *G. graminis* var. *tritici* failed to detect enzymes that may be involved in lignin degradation (250, 251).

Fungal polyphenol oxidase activity is also associated with cellular differentiation (157, 158) and the synthesis of melanin. Rhizomorph formation, aggregations of hyphae covered with a rind of thick-walled pigmented cells, by *Armillaria* species is proportional to laccase activity (264). Melanization of the zoopathogenic fungi *Wangiella dermatitidis* (72, 73, 74,) and *Cryptococcus neoformans* (141, 142, 199, 242) is associated with polyphenol oxidase activity and fungal dimorphism required for virulence. Laccase is required for DHN-melanin biosynthesis in *Aspergillus nidulans* (42, 54, 106, 140) and strongly implicated in DHN-melanin biosynthesis in *Cochliobolus heterostrophus* (224).

Fungal Phenotype and Pathogenicity

The classification of members of the *Gaeumannomyces-Phialophora* complex remains somewhat dependent on the assessment of phenotypic characteristics because the genetics of these Ascomycetes remains ill-defined. The non-pathogenic

Phialophora generally grow more slowly in culture than *Gaeumannomyces* (65), however, growth rate in culture rarely reflects growth rates observed on root tissue (11) and can not be used to rationalize pathogenicity differences among fungal isolates (19). The assessment of pathogenicity is also complicated by the sometimes rapid and significant loss of virulence in culture. Predominantly virulent field isolates can exhibit an 80% loss of virulence after serial transfer (47, 56, 168, 169) and a 50% loss of virulence if ascosporeogenesis occurs in culture or on dead versus living host tissue (47).

All complex members establish an initial extensive ectotrophic colonization of the root rhizoplane with melanized runner hyphae and root surface colonization can not be used to assess risk from disease. Differences in the non-pathogen/pathogen infection processes become evident only after the fungal isolate initiates an endotrophic infection. Pathogenic *Gaeumannomyces* penetrate the stele causing intense vascular discoloration whereas non-pathogenic members of the complex present darkly-pigmented growth cessation structures within the cortex (65, 68). The absence of darkly-pigmented growth cessation structures in the *G. graminis* var. *tritici* infection may be indicative of required repression of melanin deposition in infection hyphae to facilitate lytic enzyme secretion for effective penetration of root tissue and colonization of the stele. With age, *G. graminis* var. *tritici* hyaline microhyphae differentiate into melanized macrohyphae (126,153) and suggest the chemical composition of the non-melanized and melanized fungal cell walls are identical prior to the onset of secondary metabolism and the deposition of DHN-melanin (40). The absence of melanin in the infection hyphae (microhyphae)

would facilitate increased lytic enzyme secretion and invasive capability during the pathogenic phase while the presence of melanin in the runner hyphae (macrohyphae) would offer protection to pigmented fungal structures during colonization of the root surface.

A relationship between *G. graminis* var. *tritici* pigmentation and pathogenicity has been assessed but has not been demonstrated. Virulence analysis in the out-cross progeny of light and dark field isolates indicated that pigmentation and pathogenicity were independently inherited (12, 19, 259). However, ascosporeogenesis was induced in culture and cold incubation for an extended period of time was sometimes required for development of pigmentation differences. In a survey of 115 *G. graminis* var. *tritici* field isolates, it was reported that "dark mycelial color was not essential for pathogenicity" and therefore "correlation between the two characteristics was poor" (267). The survey results also described two highly virulent isolates which were not pigmented and an isolate with more pigment that was less pathogenic. The possible significance of this observed inverse correlation between pigmentation and pathogenicity may have been ignored due to accepted bias of the basic tenet that fungal melanization enhances pathogenicity.

Statement of Thesis

This study was undertaken to establish a correlation between *G. graminis* var. *tritici* pigmentation and virulence consistent with the *G. graminis* var. *tritici* infection process and the observed predominance of darkly-pigmented isolates from sources displaying little or no disease symptoms (51, 63, 65). Filamentous fungal

protein secretion is limited to non-melanized hyphal elements (184, 212, 247) and the deposition of melanin in the *G. graminis* var. *tritici* cell wall would result in decreased protein secretion efficiency with a concomitant decrease in fungal virulence.

To minimize the influence of variable genetic backgrounds on phenotype presentation, a single virulent *G. graminis* var. *tritici* isolate and its isogenic melanin variant strains were assessed *in vitro* for pigment phenotype and protein secretion capacity. The fungal strains were then assessed *in vivo* for pathogenicity on wheat to test the hypothesis that protein secretion efficiency is directly related to virulence and pigment phenotype.

The occurrence of the enhanced pigment phenotype and the presentation of *Phialophora*-like characteristics is noted and discussed.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Fungal Strain Selection

Four strains of non-melanized *Gaeumannomyces graminis* (Sacc.) Arx & Olivier var. *tritici* (Walker) from discontinuous geographical sources were screened for enhanced pigmentation following protoplast formation and regeneration. The strains, from Denmark (H. Shultz, 1868), England (D. Hornby, 1805), France (P. Lucas, 1819) and the United States (D. Mathre, DM528), were all field isolates from wheat (*Triticum aestivum* L.) that had been purified by single ascospore isolation. Protoplasts were prepared as described (220), with the exception of a shortened cell-wall-digest incubation period (45 minutes), and regenerated on protoplast regeneration medium (103). Enhanced pigmentation in the melanin variant strains became evident within 7-14 days at room temperature (24-26 °C). The rates of occurrence of the enhanced pigment phenotype were determined in the four strains based on total number of regenerated protoplasts for that individual strain.

The wild-type strain selected for further study (D. Mathre, DM528) was isolated from Montana wheat and maintained in culture for more than eight years without apparent loss of pathogenicity. Wild-type morphology on maintenance LB agar [LB medium plus 1% (w/v) agar; 165] was characterized by non-pigmented hyphae lacking aerial growth. When grown on potato dextrose agar (PDA, Difco), which enhances pigmentation of *G. graminis* var. *tritici* (*Ggt*) strains, the culture

color remained ecru through four days but darkened slightly upon prolonged incubation (10-14 days) or refrigeration (4 °C). This wild-type *Ggt* strain undergoes meiosis to produce mature perithecia and fertile ascospores but phialospore production has never been observed.

Enhanced pigmentation was presented as melanin variant colonies with abundant aerial hyphae; the melanin variant strains (designated MV01, MV02, etc.) were isolated by transfer of the aerial hyphae to LB agar. The isolation plates were incubated for three days and the cultures transferred to LB maintenance plates by hyphal tipping to ensure the selected variant strains are homokaryotic (162).

Mitotic stability of the melanin variants was assessed by sequential serial transfer every 3-4 days on PDA. To assess meiotic stability, perithecia were produced on autoclaved wheat leaves on the surface of sterile Whatman no.1 filter papers on 1% (w/v) water-agar plates, and incubated for more than thirty days. Ascospores were harvested from individual perithecia and spread plated onto LB agar for germination. After 1-2 days incubation, the germinated ascospores were transferred to PDA to assess pigment phenotype. Post-meiotic, non-pigmented derivatives of the melanin variant strains (designated MV01-W, MV02-W, etc.) were purified by hyphal tipping and assessed for mitotic stability as described above.

All incubations, regardless of media type, were carried out at room temperature (24-26 °C). Maintenance plates were stored at 4 °C for up to two weeks. The source plates for all assays done in the characterization of the wild-type and variant strains were 3-4 day old plates that were not previously refrigerated.

Fungal Strain Characterization

Restriction Fragment Length Polymorphism Analysis

To verify *Ggt* as the source of the phenotypically dissimilar melanin variant strains, restriction fragment length polymorphism (RFLP) analysis was done with the restriction endonucleases *Sau3A*, *DpnII*, *MspI*, *HpaII*, *XhoI*, *XbaI*, and *BglII* (all from New England Biolabs). Agarose gels (0.6%; Type I-A: Low EEO, Sigma) were run at 60 volts and stained with ethidium bromide for detection of the DNA bands.

Linear Growth Rates

To compare the linear growth rates of the five strains selected, 80 ml of LB medium in a 300-ml Erlenmeyer flask were inoculated with twelve plugs of fungal hyphae transferred from the margin of a four-day old LB agar maintenance plate using a sterile Pasteur pipette. Flasks were incubated at room temperature on a rotary shaker and mycelia were harvested by vacuum filtration through Whatman no. 1 filter paper supported in a Buchner funnel. Mycelial dry weights of lyophilized cultures were determined after 3-6 days incubation in triplicate trials.

Methylation Determination

To determine if the *Ggt* "melanin" gene(s) were silenced via DNA methylation, the strains were treated with 5-azacytidine (Sigma) to inhibit DNA methylation (75, 125). Protoplasts of *Ggt*, MV01 and MV01-W are suspended in protoplast buffer containing 150, 300, 500 and 800 μM 5-azacytidine and incubated

overnight on a rotary shaker at room temperature. Aliquots of the treated protoplasts were plated onto regeneration medium and incubated at room temperature for 7-8 days. Control plates consisted of untreated protoplasts and dilution plates were done to determine protoplast recovery for the control treatment and at all 5-azacytidine concentrations. In an alternate treatment, protoplasts of *Ggt* and MV01 were recovered on regeneration medium containing 500 μ M 5-azacytidine. Individual regenerated colonies were transferred to PDA and incubated for 7-10 days to assess the pigment phenotype.

Phialospore Formation

Agar plugs from the colony margin of 4-day old LB maintenance plates were transferred to 1% (w/v) water-agar plates with or without surface-sterilized pre-germinated wheat seeds. The wheat (*Triticum aestivum* L.) seeds were surface-sterilized with 1% AgNO₃ for three minutes, rinsed once with 2.5 M NaCl and three times with sterile distilled H₂O, and pre-germinated for 48 hours on moistened sterile Whatman no. 1 filter paper. The water agar plates were incubated in natural light at room temperature for five days. The inoculation plugs were removed and placed in a drop of sterile distilled H₂O on a slide and cover slipped. Gentle pressure applied to the cover slip released phialospores into suspension for transfer to water-agar plates to assess germination. Germinated phialospores were transferred to PDA and incubated at room temperature for 5 days to assess pigment phenotype.

Protein Secretion and Enhanced Pigmentation

Relative Total Protein Secretion

Relative total protein secretion was assessed for the five strains grown in 80-ml LB as described. Aliquots of the culture filtrates were removed at 24-hour intervals and frozen at -20 °C until assayed for relative total protein content by SDS-PAGE (3-10% gradient) (143) and silver staining (22). The cultures were harvested on day 6 and the fungal mass was determined.

The effect of enhanced pigmentation on relative total protein secretion was assessed in the wild-type and the melanin variant strains MV01 and MV02. Duplicate cultures were grown in 80-ml LB as described and tricyclazole was added at 8 µg/ml on day two and day three to one set of LB culture flasks. On day four, the fungal mycelia were harvested and lyophilized to determine dry weights and the culture filtrate samples were analyzed by SDS-PAGE and silver stained to determine relative total proteins secreted. The volume of the culture filtrate sample assayed for each individual strain was adjusted to compensate for fungal mass differences.

Plant-Cell-Wall Degrading Enzyme Secretion

The plant-cell-wall degrading enzymes secreted by *Ggt* are well characterized and the effect of enhanced pigmentation on their secretion was assessed. Base medium to assess pectinase secretion contained 0.1% yeast extract, 0.125% each

biotin and thiamin, and 2% agar. To detect pectin lyase (PL, EC 4.2.2.2), the base medium was supplemented with 1% apple pectin (Sigma) and prepared with 10-mM citrate-phosphate and 10-mM glycine buffers to maintain the pH required, pH 5.0 (250), and pH 9.0 (156), respectively. Secretion of PL was assessed by positive hydrolysis indicated by a clear halo surrounding the colony after flooding the plates with 1% cetyltrimethylammonium bromide (CTAB; Sigma). To assess polygalacturonase (PGU, EC 3.2.1.15) secretion, the base medium contained 1% sodium-polypectate (Sigma) at pH 6.5 in 10-mM sodium-phosphate buffer and positive hydrolysis was detected as a cleared zone after flooding the plates with 5 N hydrochloric acid (250).

Base medium for the detection of cellulases contained 2.5% Czapek Dox Broth (Difco), .125% each biotin and thiamin, and 2% agar. The endo- β -glucanase substrate was provided as 1% carboxymethyl cellulose (Sigma) and hydrolysis was detected by flooding plates with 0.5% Congo red, rinsing with 1M NaCl and measuring the cleared area (2). The cellobiohydrolase substrate was supplied as 1% α -cellulose and hydrolysis was detected as a cleared yellow zone after developing the plates with Lugol's solution (Sigma, St. Louis, MO) (269).

Media used to detect the enzymatic hydrolysis of skim milk protein (234) and gelatin (100) were prepared and developed as described in the references cited.

To assess the effect of DHN-melanin biosynthesis inhibition on the secretion of plant-cell-wall degrading enzymes, the above plating media were prepared with tricyclazole (16). Tricyclazole, 5-methyl-1,2,4-triazolo-(3,4-6)-benzothiazole (Eli Lilly Research Laboratories, Greenfield, IN.) was dissolved in 100% ethanol (2.5 mg/ml

stock), filter-sterilized and added to cooled, autoclaved medium to a final concentration of 16 $\mu\text{g/ml}$. Hydrolysis of the test substrate was assessed as described above and positive reaction area was determined and compared to that observed on identical media without added tricyclazole.

Phenolic Detoxifying Enzymes

The growth of *Ggt* within the host tissue may require the secretion of phenolic detoxifying enzymes. Therefore, the effect of enhanced pigmentation on fungal growth rates was assessed on PDA supplemented with the fungitoxic phenolic compounds *p*-coumaric acid and caffeic acid (Sigma). Stock phenolics were prepared as 0.25 M solutions in 95% ethanol, filter sterilized and added to autoclaved media after cooling to final concentrations of 1.0 mM. The plates were centrally inoculated with a 0.5-cm plug from the margin of a four-day old PDA culture and incubated in the dark at room temperature for eight days. The mycelium was harvested by liquefying the agar in 100 ml water in a microwave and collecting the mycelia by filtration through a Whatman no. 1 filter. Dry fungal weight was determined after lyophilization as an indication of fungal growth rate. The control plates consisted of PDA without added phenolic compounds.

Polyphenol Oxidase

Spot Test Reagents. A polyphenol oxidase (PPO) has not been previously reported in *Ggt* and several potential substrates were used as spot test reagents to

screen four-day old cultures on LB plates. Syringaldazine, (N,N'-bis-3,5-dimethoxy-4-hydroxybenzylidene hydrazine, Sigma) (100), prepared as a 0.1% solution in 95% ethanol, α -Naphthol (1-hydroxy naphthalene) (155, 258), L-tyrosine and *p*-cresol (64) (both from Sigma) prepared as 1.44%, 0.5% and 1% aqueous solutions, respectively, and 2,6-dimethoxyphenol (DMOP, Fluka Chemika, Switzerland) prepared as a 1.25 mM solution in 10 mM citrate phosphate buffer, pH 5.0, were dropped onto the agar surface after the fungal mass was removed and color development determined over a range of time periods specific to each spot test reagent.

Quantitative Reagent. PPO activity was quantitated with the DMOP colorimetric assay where the colorless monohydroxyphenol substrate is oxidized to an orange product, 3,5,3',5'-tetramethoxydiphenoquinone (25, 26). Reaction duration and color intensity limits were determined at a range of PPO concentrations so that the colorimetric reaction accurately reflected the concentration of PPO present. The sample volume containing the range of PPO concentrations was kept constant at 0.5 ml by premixing the culture filtrate with an appropriate volume of LB. All cuvettes containing the DMOP substrate were blanked to zero absorbance at 468 nm prior to the addition of the enzyme solution and all assays at each enzyme concentration are done in triplicate. One unit of enzyme activity was defined as that amount that catalyzed a change in absorbance of 1.0 at 468 nm over a one minute interval.

Ggt culture filtrates were prepared in 300-ml Erlenmeyer flasks containing 80-ml LB medium inoculated and incubated as described for determination of fungal growth rates. After four days, the culture filtrate was harvested by filtration through a Whatman no. 1 filter. The assay mixture consists of 2.5 ml of 1.25 mM DMOP in 10 mM citric phosphate buffer, pH 5.0, plus 0.5 ml culture filtrate.

Effect of Redox Agents on Polyphenol Oxidase Activity. Due to the lack of PPO substrate specificity, the effect of redox agents on activity was determined to facilitate PPO identification. The DMOP assay was used to determine the effects of pretreatment of the culture filtrate with oxidation inhibitors specific for laccase (sodium azide and cetyltrimethylammonium bromide), tyrosinase (polyvinylpyrrolidone) and peroxidase (catalase) (all from Sigma). NaN_3 inactivates laccase by forming an azide bridge between copper sites 2 and 3 (157) and cetyltrimethylammonium bromide (CTAB) inhibits oxidation by laccase (13, 241), possibly by altering the tertiary structure to lessen its catalytic activity (240) or anionic inactivation of the Type 2 Cu^{2+} (7). Polyvinylpyrrolidone (PVP) acts as a competitive inhibitor of tyrosinase activity (240). Catalase was added to the culture filtrate to remove endogenous H_2O_2 , a cofactor required by peroxidase for catalytic activity. Exogenous H_2O_2 was added to culture filtrates to stimulate peroxidase catalytic activity (101, 102). Controls consisted of untreated culture filtrate and all assays are done in triplicate.

Dependence of Polyphenol Oxidase Secretion on Culture Age. The temporal pattern of PPO secretion by the selected fungal strains was determined in triplicate

LB cultures. A 2-ml aliquot of culture filtrate was removed from each flask on days three through six and frozen at -20 °C until processed. The collected culture filtrates were warmed to 4 °C and PPO activity was determined using DMOP as substrate.

Effect of Tricyclazole on Polyphenol Oxidase Secretion. The effect of enhanced pigmentation on the secretion of PPO by MV01 was assessed using tricyclazole to inhibit DHN-melanin biosynthesis. Wild-type *Ggt* and MV01 were grown in 80 ml LB as described and tricyclazole was added at 8 µg/ml on day two and day three to one set of triplicate LB cultures. The culture filtrate and the fungal mycelia were harvested on day four to determine PPO activities, using DMOP as substrate, and to determine dry fungal weights, respectively.

Polyphenol Oxidase Characterization

Induction Medium for Polyphenol Oxidase Production.

For the production of PPO, *Ggt* was grown in a defined medium containing per liter: KH_2PO_4 (1.0g), $\text{Na}_2\text{HPO}_4 \cdot 2\text{H}_2\text{O}$ (0.1g), L-asparagine (0.5g), D-phenylalanine (0.1g), L-phenylalanine (0.1g), adenine hemisulfate (.04g), sucrose (20g) $\text{FeSO}_4 \cdot 7\text{H}_2\text{O}$ (200µg), thiamin-HCl (100µg), $\text{MgSO}_4 \cdot 7\text{H}_2\text{O}$ (0.5g), $\text{MnSO}_4 \cdot \text{H}_2\text{O}$ (100µg), $\text{ZnSO}_4 \cdot 7\text{H}_2\text{O}$ (100 µg), biotin (800µg), and $\text{CuSO}_4 \cdot 5\text{H}_2\text{O}$ (.01g) (modified from 80, 81). The salts and vitamin supplements were autoclaved separately and added after cooling to prevent precipitation. Eighty ml of medium in a 300-ml Erlenmeyer flask was inoculated and incubated as described for linear growth

determination. Two days after inoculation, additional $\text{CuSO}_4 \cdot 5\text{H}_2\text{O}$ was added to a final concentration of $400\mu\text{M}$. The cultures were induced to secrete PPO by adding 2,5-xylidine (2,5-dimethylaniline, Aldrich Chemical Co., Milwaukee, WI) to a final concentration of $200\mu\text{M}$ on day four and adding half that amount on day six (80). Culture filtrates were harvested on day eight by filtration through Whatman no. 1 filter paper and either processed immediately or frozen at -20°C until processed.

The concentration of copper sulfate to be added for maximal PPO production without inhibiting fungal growth was determined by supplementing the media with variable copper sulfate concentrations at day two. PPO secretion was determined in both static (195, 225) and shaken cultures (27, 263) over a nine day period using the optimal copper concentration.

Crude Polyphenol Oxidase Preparation.

Defined medium culture filtrate harvested at day-8 was cooled to 4°C and 361 g/l ammonium sulfate (Sigma) was added (60% saturation) and the solution was equilibrated for 30 minutes on ice with gentle stirring. The preparation was centrifuged at $15,000\text{ rpm}$ for 20 minutes to remove precipitated protein. The supernatant was collected and an additional 279 g/l ammonium sulfate (100% saturated) was added with gentle stirring for 30 minutes and equilibrated overnight at 4°C . Centrifugation was repeated to collect the protein fraction containing the PPO. No pH adjustment was required during the salting out procedure. The precipitates from the 60% and 100% saturation steps, 60% and 100% fractions respectively, were resuspended in a minimal volume of 10 mM citrate phosphate

buffer, pH 5.0, and dialyzed extensively at 4 °C against the same buffer using a Spectra/Por 6 Membrane with a 25,000 molecular-weight-cut-off rating.

SDS-PAGE Electrophoresis.

Polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis was done according to Laemmli on 3-10% gradient SDS-PAGE gels. To accommodate the different polymerization rates of the 3% and 10% bis-acrylamide solutions (Acrylamide/bis-Acrylamide 40% Stock, 37:1 Ratio, Sigma), ammonium persulfate (Bio Rad) was added at .06% and .03% (w/v), respectively, prior to mixing the gradient. The protein standard used was SDS-6H (Sigma) with a molecular weight range of 29-205 kDa. The gels were run at 60V for 18 hours at 4°C and the protein bands were localized with either the silver stain as described (22) or activity stained by immersing the gel in a 1.25 mM solution of DMOP in 10 mM citrate phosphate buffer, pH 5.0, for 15 to 20 minutes. Samples included both native and denatured (heated to 100 °C for 90 seconds) PPO preparations as indicated in the results.

Preparative SDS-PAGE for Polyphenol Oxidase Characterization

The 100% fraction (defined in Crude Polyphenol Oxidase Preparation) was subjected to SDS-PAGE (3-10% gradient) and a portion of the gel was immersed in DMOP to locate PPO activity. A strip from the gel corresponding to the enzyme's location was cut from the untreated portion of the gel and the PPO was eluted into 10 mM citrate phosphate buffer, pH 5.0, by placing the gel strip in dialysis tubing (Spectra/Por 6 Membrane, 25,000 MWCO) in distilled H₂O at 4 °C for 72 hours.

This enzyme preparation was concentrated by centrifugation in an Ultrafree-4, Biomax 30 (Millipore), for 5 minutes at 2,000 g.

Polyphenol Oxidase Deglycosylation

The proteins present in the 60% fraction, the 100% fraction, and the PAGE-eluent were deglycosylated using PNGase F (New England Biolabs) per manufacturer's instructions. The protein bands were localized with silver staining.

pH Range of Polyphenol Oxidase Activity

The pH optimum for PPO activity was determined using 1.25 mM DMOP in 10 mM citric acid (pH 2.6 - pH 6.0), citrate phosphate (pH 3.8 - pH 6.8), and phosphate (pH 6.2 - pH 8.2) buffers.

Determination of Polyphenol Oxidase Isoelectric Point

The isoelectric point of the *Ggt* PPO was determined using a Rotofor Prep IEF CELL (Bio Rad) per manufacturers' instructions. Briefly, ampholytes pH 3-10 (Sigma) were prefocused for one hour at constant power, 12 W, using 0.1 M H_3PO_4 anode electrolyte and 0.1 M NaOH cathode electrolyte. The minimal induction medium culture filtrate (4 ml) was added at port number seven and separation was run at 12 W for three hours. The fractions were collected and PPO activity detected using syringaldazine as substrate.

Temperature Range of Polyphenol Oxidase Activity

To determine if PPO activity was lost during sample storage at -20 °C, activity was measured using DMOP as substrate at various time points after freezing. Temperature lability of the PPO was also determined after preincubation at various elevated temperatures.

Determination of Polyphenol Oxidase K_m

The K_m of the PPO was determined by Lineweaver-Burke plot using 0.1 - 3.0 mM DMOP, 10 mM citrate phosphate buffer, pH 5.0, as substrate. All colorimetric assays were done in duplicate as described within the range .02 - .20 units of PPO activity per reaction.

Lignin Degradation

The secretion of lignin degradative enzymes by *Ggt* was assessed by the Poly B-411 [Sigma (Poly B-411 is a trademark of Dynapol)] decolorization assay (49, 59, 95). There exists a good correlation between Poly B-411 decolorization and lignin degradative capability (49, 59). The decolorization of Poly B-411 is indicated by a decrease in absorbance at 593 nm (blue) with a concomitant increase in absorbance at 483 nm (brown). Decolorization is expressed as the ratio A_{593}/A_{483} .

Poly B-411 (a generous gift from L.J. Cookson; 0.2% w/v in water) was added to a final concentration of 0.01% to triplicate aliquots of LB culture filtrate (harvested after four days) and incubated at room temperature. The control

consisted of culture filtrate treated with 1 mM sodium azide prior to the addition of Poly B-411 at time point zero. At predetermined time intervals, 0.5 ml of the culture filtrate was removed and diluted 4-fold in 1 mM aqueous sodium azide and the absorbance ratio A_{593}/A_{483} was determined using a Gilford Instrument 2600.

Pathogenicity and Enhanced Pigmentation

G. graminis var. *tritici* Host

Wheat (*Triticum aestivum* L.) seeds were surface-sterilized with 1% AgNO₃ for three minutes, rinsed once with 2.5 M NaCl and three times with sterile distilled water. The seeds were placed on moistened sterile Whatman no. 1 filter paper and pre-germinated for 48 hours at room temperature in natural light.

Plant Mass Assay

As an indirect measure of infection (10, 84), wheat shoot mass assays were replicated five times in 10-cm pots filled in layers from the bottom of the pot as follows: 50 mm vermiculite, nine 4-mm agar disks taken from the colony margin of a four day old LB culture, 15 ml vermiculite, 20 pre-germinated wheat seeds and 15 mm vermiculite. Sterile agar disks were used as the control treatment. Plants were watered to saturation with one-quarter strength Hoagland's solution (108) once a week, harvested after 23 days and lyophilized to determine the dry shoot and dry root weights.

Root Lesion Assay

As a direct measure of infection, the total length of root-stelar lesions in infected wheat plants was determined for nine replicates in a tube assay as described (198, 217). Conical 15-ml centrifuge tubes were filled to the 9 ml mark with vermiculite and an agar plug from the edge of a four-day old LB culture was added and covered with 4 ml vermiculite. Finally, a pre-germinated wheat seed was added and covered with 1 ml vermiculite. Plants were watered to saturation with sterile water two times a week and harvested after 14 days. All plants were grown at room temperature (22-25°C) with a 12- hour photo-period using a GE Grow-Lite providing 3000 Lux.

Histopathology

To assess infection patterns and histological changes in infected roots, cryostat sections were prepared (2800 Frigocut N, Reichert-Jung) of FAA preserved tissue sections embedded in O.C.T. Compound 4583 (Tissue Tek, Miles Inc. Elkhart, IN). To ensure adequate embedding, the FAA solution was replaced with O.C.T. Compound and allowed to sit at room temperature for 24 hours prior to embedding with fresh O.C.T. Compound. The root area in closest proximity to fungal inoculation depth was selected for embedding. Sections (12- μ m) were stained with Toluidine Blue-O (.05% w/v in 0.1 mM phosphate buffer, pH 6.8) (175) and examined microscopically.

RESULTS

Fungal Strain Selection

Enhanced pigmentation resulting in the melanin variant (MV) phenotype was not unique to a single *G. graminis* var. *tritici* isolate but occurred in three of the four *Ggt* strains tested at a mean rate of 2 per 10^7 regenerated protoplasts. No melanin variants were detected in the wheat isolate from Denmark (H. Shultz, 1868). The rate of occurrence of the melanin variant phenotype in the Montana wheat isolate (D. Mathre, DM528) selected for further study was not significantly different at 4.5 per 10^7 regenerated protoplasts. Melanin variants were evident as heavily-melanized colonies producing abundant aerial hyphae in an ecru background lacking aerial growth (Fig. 1a).

The isolated melanin variants are not phenotypically identical (Fig. 1b) but the respective pigment phenotype remained stable for twelve isolates tested through fifteen serial transfers over a 55 day period. Meiotic stability of the enhanced pigment phenotype was assessed in self-crosses with 460 ascospores harvested from 19 perithecia. The ascospores yielded 254 (55%) melanin variant and 206 (45%) non-melanized colony types. Phenotypic mitotic stability was confirmed for thirty-nine of the post-meiotic melanin variant isolates through twelve serial transfers over a 42 day period. In contrast, many non-melanized derivatives displayed poor growth rates from serial transfer four and 2% died by transfer twelve.

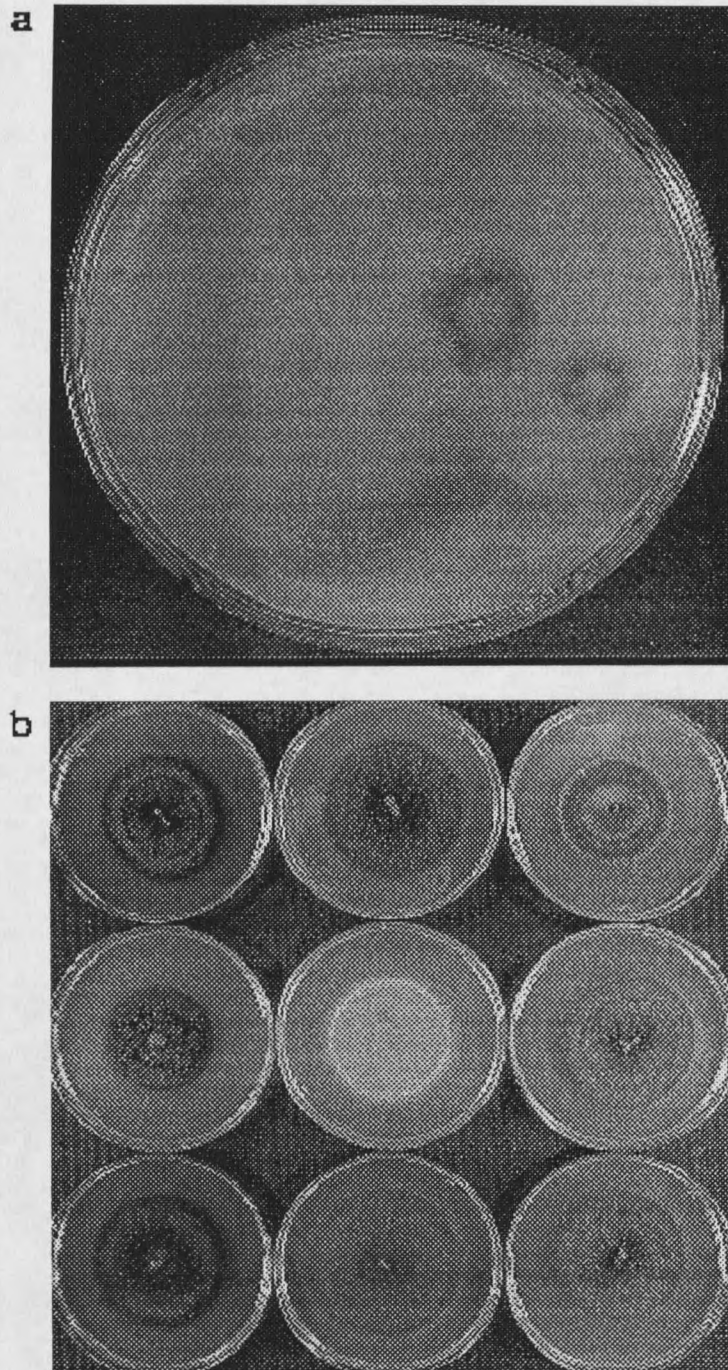


Figure 1. Isolation of Spontaneous Melanin Variants. Protoplasts of *Ggt* recovered on regeneration media. Enhanced pigmentation presented as the melanin variant phenotype with abundant aerial hyphae evident on an ecru background lacking aerial hyphae (a). Typical melanin variant strains and wild-type *Ggt* (central colony) on PDA. (b).

The melanin variants designated MV01 and MV02, two stable white-derivatives, MV01-W and MV02-W (derived from MV01 and MV02 respectively), and the wild-type, *Ggt*, were selected for further study. Identical banding patterns observed in RFLP analysis indicated that the variants selected were derived from *Ggt* (Fig. 2).

The linear growth rates of the melanin variants was the same as that observed in the wild-type. The white-derivatives demonstrate a slower initial growth rate that appeared to lag behind that of the melanin variants and wild-type by approximately 24 hours over the six day testing period (Fig. 3).

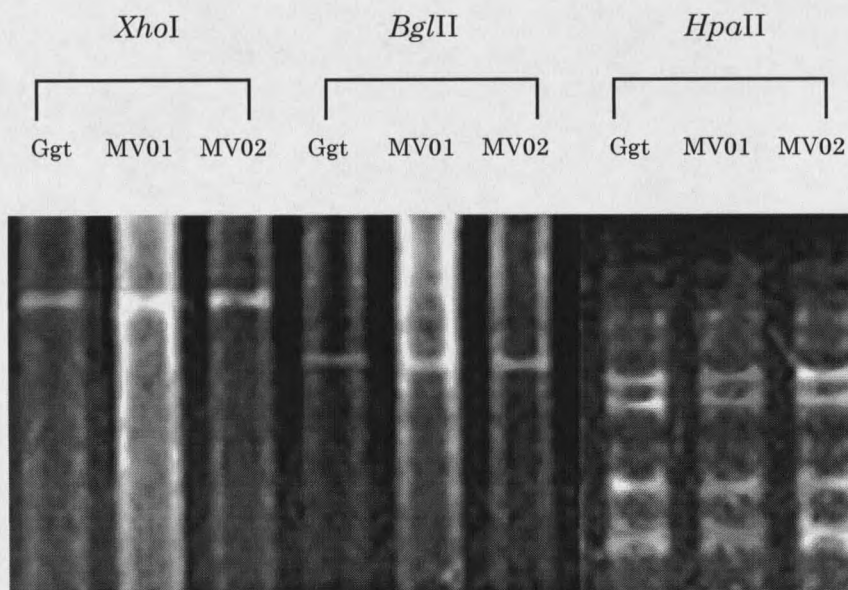


Figure 2. RFLP Analysis to Verify Parental *Ggt* as Source of Melanin Variant Strains. Identical banding patterns were observed after restriction endonuclease treatment of *Ggt*, MV01 and MV02 DNA preparations. *Xho*I, *Bgl*II and *Hpa*II yielded representative results from all digests.

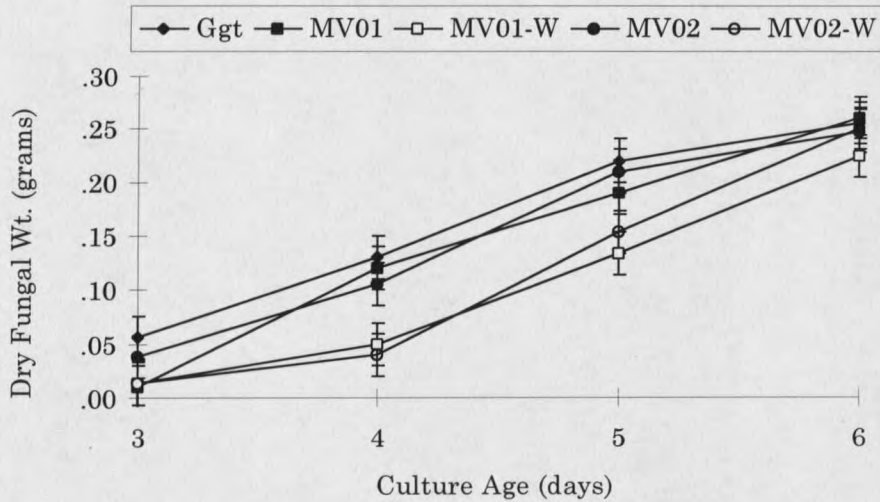


Figure 3. Fungal Linear Growth Rates. Fungal dry weight is expressed as the mean of three replicate LB cultures grown and harvested as described.

Under the conditions described, lunate to clavate phialospores are produced only by the melanin variants and were produced by all twenty-two melanin variants tested (Fig. 4a, 4b). Phialospore germination (Fig. 4c), assessed for six melanin variants, occurred regardless if spore production took place in the presence or absence of wheat seedlings. The germinated phialospores matured to form colonies with the enhanced pigment phenotype.

Pretreatment of protoplasts with 150 μ M to 800 μ M 5-azacytidine or protoplast recovery in the presence of 500 μ M 5-azacytidine did not significantly alter the rate of occurrence of the melanin variant phenotype. However, non-inhibition of protoplast recovery rates at all concentrations of 5-azacytidine may indicate that DNA methylation inhibitor did not penetrate the fungal cell membrane with high efficiency.

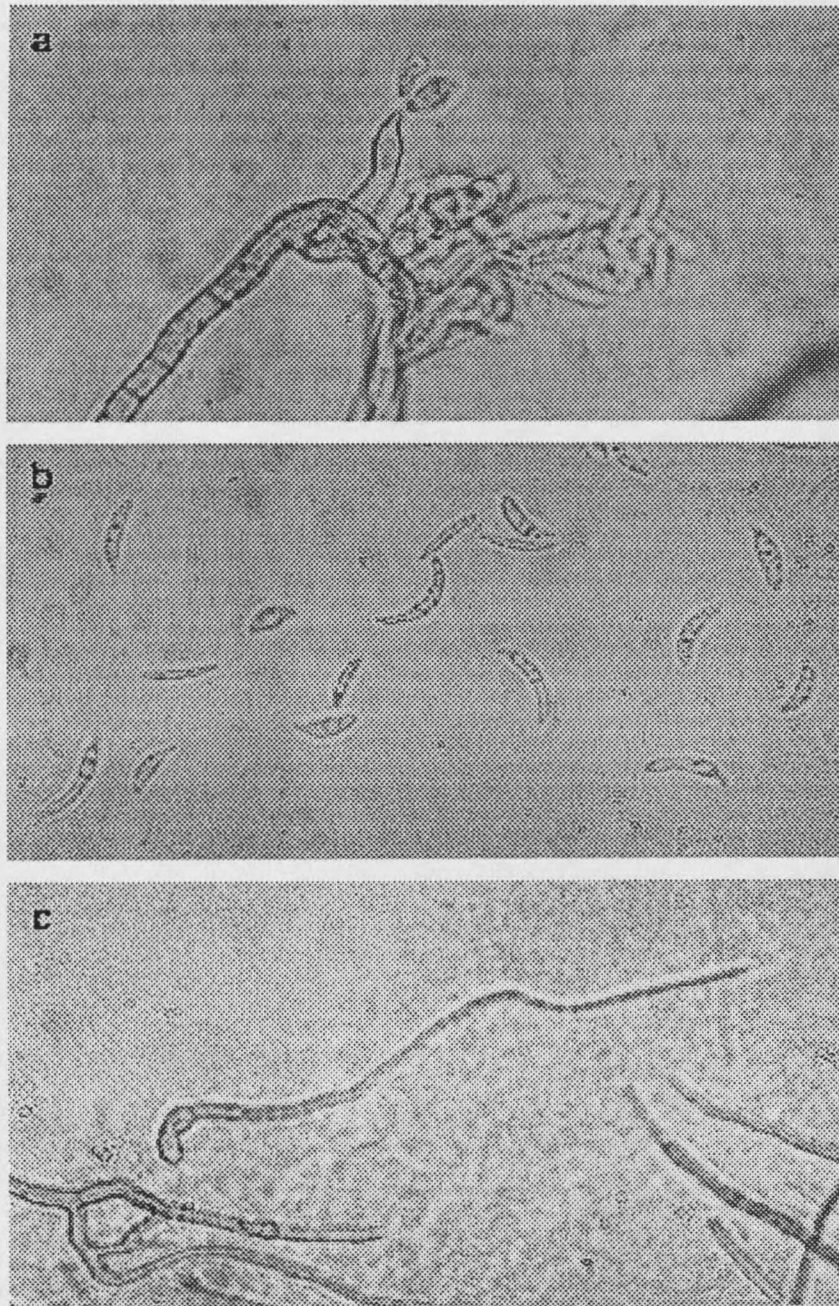


Figure 4. Phialospore Formation in the Melanin Variant Strains. Phialophore (a), phialospore morphology, some with a central septa (b), and a germinating phialospore (c).

Protein Secretion and Enhanced Pigmentation

Relative Total Protein Secretion

Intensity of silver staining of culture filtrates harvested on days 4 and 6 clearly indicates the higher capacity for protein secretion by the non-melanized *Ggt* (Fig. 5). Enhanced pigmentation of MV01 and MV02 became visually evident on day 3 and day 5, respectively. The earlier visual appearance of enhanced pigmentation in MV01 is reflected in the lesser relative total proteins secreted by MV01 on day 6 (Fig. 5, lane 6) compared to MV02 on day 6 (Fig. 5, lane 4). The comparable fungal dry weights, determined on day 6, suggest that differences in hyphal mass were not the source of differences in relative total proteins levels detected.

The addition of tricyclazole to the growth medium to inhibit DHN-melanin biosynthesis by the melanin variants increased relative total protein secretion (Fig. 6, lanes 3 and 5). The treated *Ggt* demonstrated a decrease in relative total protein secretion (Fig. 6, lanes 1 and 2) indicating treatment with tricyclazole does not induce secretory activity. This suggested that the increase in relative total protein secretion in the tricyclazole treated melanin variants results from the inhibition of fungal cell wall melanization.

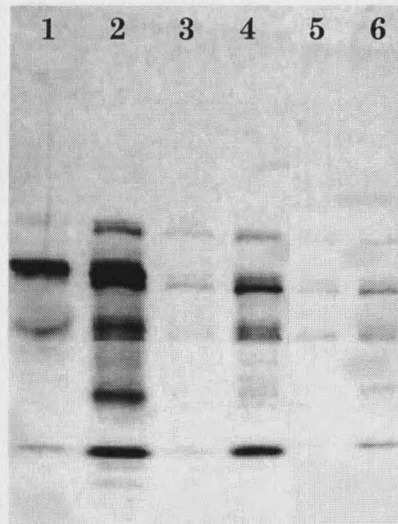


Figure 5. Effect of Enhanced Pigmentation on Relative Total Protein Secretion. The SDS-PAGE (3-10% gradient gel) was silver stained to quantitate total proteins secreted into the LB culture filtrate harvested on day 4 (lanes 1,3,5) and day 6 (lanes 2,4,6). The fungal culture dry weights determined for *Ggt* (lanes 1,2) MV01 (lanes 5,6) and MV02 (lanes 3,4) at day 6 are 0.17, 0.16 and 0.16 grams, respectively.

Plant-Cell-Wall Degrading Enzyme Secretion

The pigment phenotype and hyphal morphology of the selected strains remained consistent on the enzyme assay plates and LB maintenance plates; enhanced pigmentation and the production of aerial hyphae was observed only in the melanin variants. The secretion of plant-cell-wall degrading enzymes by the melanin variant strains was uniformly lower than that of the wild-type and the white derivative strains (Table 1). The increased protein secretion levels observed with tricyclazole treatment may be attributed to blocked DHN-melanin biosynthesis

as treatment of the wild-type and the white derivatives with tricyclazole resulted in no change in protein secretion levels and the treated melanin variant strains produced 2-hydroxyjugalone and flaviolin (Wheeler, pers. comm.), diffusible orange shunt products of the blocked DHN-melanin biosynthesis pathway.

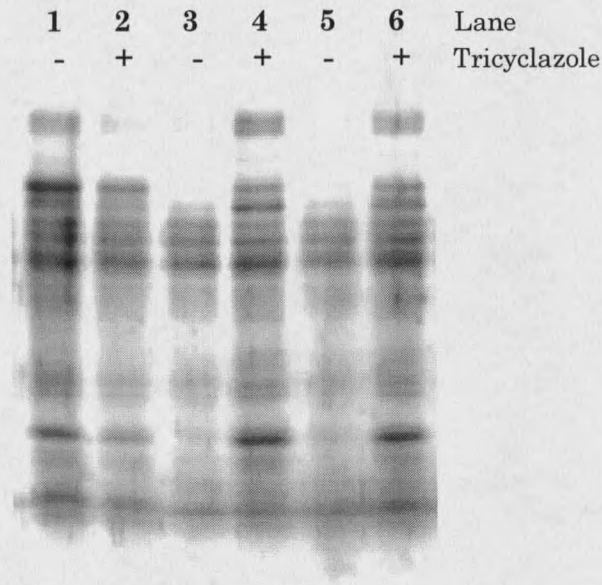


Figure 6. Effect of Tricyclazole on Relative Total Protein Secretion. The SDS-PAGE (3-10% gradient gel) was silver stained to detect the relative total proteins secreted into the LB culture filtrates by *Ggt* (lanes 1,2), MV01 (lanes 3,4), and MV02 (lanes 5,6).

Table 1. Effect of Tricyclazole on Plant-Cell-Wall Degrading Enzyme Secretion. Positive enzyme secretion results are indicated by the diameter of a clear halo in the agar that is smaller than (+) or the same size as (++) the fungal colony diameter. A negative result (-) was indicated by the absence of an area of hydrolysis.

	<i>Ggt</i>		MV01		MV01 - W		MV02		MV02 - W	
	0	16	0	16	0	16	0	16	0	16
Tricyclazole ($\mu\text{g/ml}$)	0	16	0	16	0	16	0	16	0	16
Cellobiohydrolase	+	+	-	+	+	+	-	+	+	+
Endo- β -Glucanase	++	++	-	+	++	++	-	+	+	+
Milk Protease	++	++	+	+	++	++	+	++	++	++
Gelatin Protease	++	++	-	+	++	++	-	+	++	++
Pectin Lyase (pH 5)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Pectin Lyase (pH 9)	++	++	-	+	++	++	-	+	+	+
Polygalacturonase	++	++	-	++	++	++	-	++	+	++

Phenolic Detoxifying Enzymes

The non-melanized *Ggt* and MV01-W grew equally well on PDA (+/-) phenolic compounds (Table 2). The melanin variant strains grew better than either *Ggt* or MV01-W on PDA alone but growth was significantly inhibited in the presence of the

phenolic acids. The growth rates of MV02-W on the various media is maximum on PDA alone (like the non-pigmented strains) but inhibited by added phenolic acids (like the pigmented strains). Growth of all strains was inhibited by the presence of the two phenolic acids added together.

Table 2. Effect of Fungitoxic Phenolic Compounds on Fungal Growth Rates. Fungal dry weight was determined for 8-day old triplicate cultures; standard deviation in parentheses.

	PDA	Caffeic Acid	<i>p</i> -Coumaric Acid	<i>p</i> -Coumaric Acid plus Caffeic Acid
<i>Ggt</i>	.030 (.0006)	.035 (.0026)	.038 (.0012)	.021 (.0021)
MV01	.058 (.0087)	.037 (.0076)	.029 (.0053)	.017 (.0012)
MV01-W	.027 (.0050)	.030 (.0040)	.032 (.0010)	.023 (.0036)
MV02	.080 (.0032)	.066 (.0049)	.046 (.0045)	.037 (.0036)
MV02-W	.049 (.0052)	.045 (.0015)	.044 (.0051)	.037 (.0046)

Graphic comparison of the fungal growth rates shown in Figure 7 illustrates the phenolic stimulus of growth in the non-pigmented *Ggt* and MV01-W, the phenolic inhibition of growth in the melanin variants, MV01 and MV02, and the unique response of MV02-W.

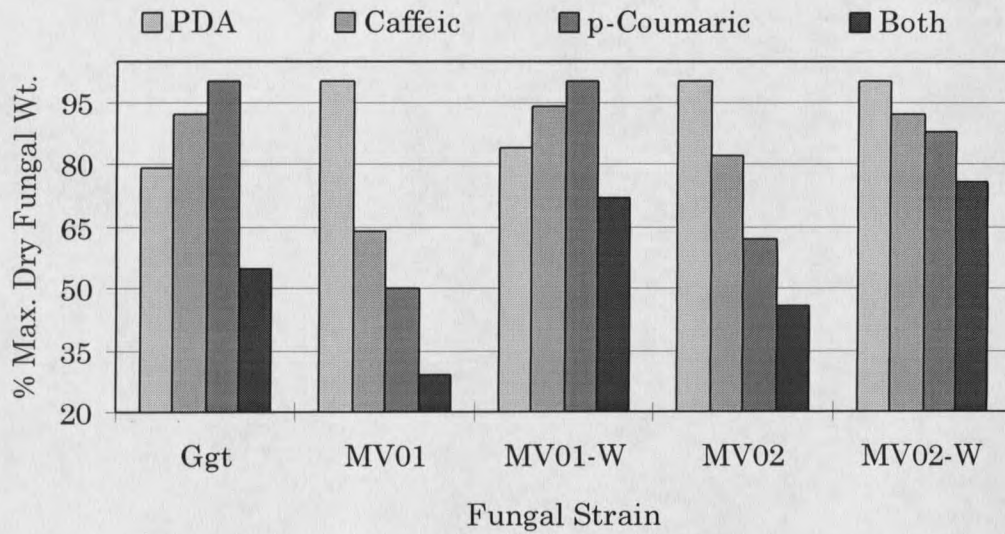


Figure 7. Relative Fungal Growth Rates in the Presence of Fungitoxic Phenolic Compounds. Data points are the mean of triplicate weight determinations on each media type ($P \leq .05$).

The pattern of relative fungal growth rates is consistent with the displayed phenotype in the presence of the phenolic compounds. Wild-type *Ggt* and MV01-W were phenotypically identical and produced ecru colonies with no aerial growth (Table 3). The melanin variants MV01 and MV02 were also phenotypically identical and produced pigmented aerial hyphae. However, MV02-W displayed both colony morphologies; sectors of ecru hyphae lacking aerial growth and pigmented aerial hyphae.

Table 3. Effect of Fungitoxic Phenolic Compounds on Fungal Morphology. Pigmentation is ecru (-), light green (+), medium green (++) , dark green (+++), or present in sectors of ecru and green (- / ++). Aerial growth is lacking (-), present (++) , or is present only in pigmented sectors in a colony of mixed pigment type (Sectors).

	PDA		Caffeic Acid		<i>p</i> -Coumaric Acid		Caffeic Acid plus <i>p</i> -coumaric Acid	
	Green Pigment	Aerial Growth	Green Pigment	Aerial Growth	Green Pigment	Aerial Growth	Green Pigment	Aerial Growth
<i>Ggt</i>	-	-	+	-	+	-	-	-
MV01	+++	++	+++	++	++	++	++	++
MV01-W	-	-	+	-	+	-	-	-
MV02	+++	++	+++	++	++	++	+++	++
MV02-W	+++	Sectors	+++	-	++	Sectors	++	Sectors

Polyphenol Oxidase Secretion

Identification of the Polyphenol Oxidase. The spot test reagents indicated the presence of a fungal laccase or peroxidase, yielding positive oxidation reactions with the specific agent in the time periods indicated: syringaldazine (bright pink, 10 to 60 seconds), α -naphthol (deep blue-violet, 60 minutes in the dark), and DMOP (orange,

1 to 10 minutes). Results with the reagents specific for tyrosinase, L-tyrosine and *p*-cresol, were both negative.

Fungal PPO and peroxidase have many substrates in common but may be differentiated via susceptibility to inactivation by specific redox agents. The effect of redox agents on PPO activity was determined using DMOP as substrate. The effect of various oxidation inhibitors indicated that oxidation of the DMOP results solely from polyphenol oxidase activity (Fig. 10). Oxidation was partially inhibited by pretreatment of the culture filtrate with cetyltrimethylammonium bromide and totally inhibited by NaN_3 . Pretreatment with catalase to remove endogenous H_2O_2 had no effect on oxidation and the addition of exogenous H_2O_2 actually decreased oxidation, a result consistent with the action of copper containing enzymes but not of peroxidase (6).

The DMOP colorimetric reaction is readily applicable to quantitative assay due to a linear rate of change in absorbance at 468 nm during a three minute interval for a wide range of PPO concentrations (.05 - 2.0 units per assay volume) (Fig. 8a and Fig. 9a). At PPO concentrations greater than .50 units, the linear rate of change slows and the concentration (units) of PPO present is increasingly underestimated (Fig. 8b and Fig. 9b). Actual units present at concentrations greater than .50 was determined by calculating $\{\text{units} + 2.5 (\text{units} - .50)\}$.

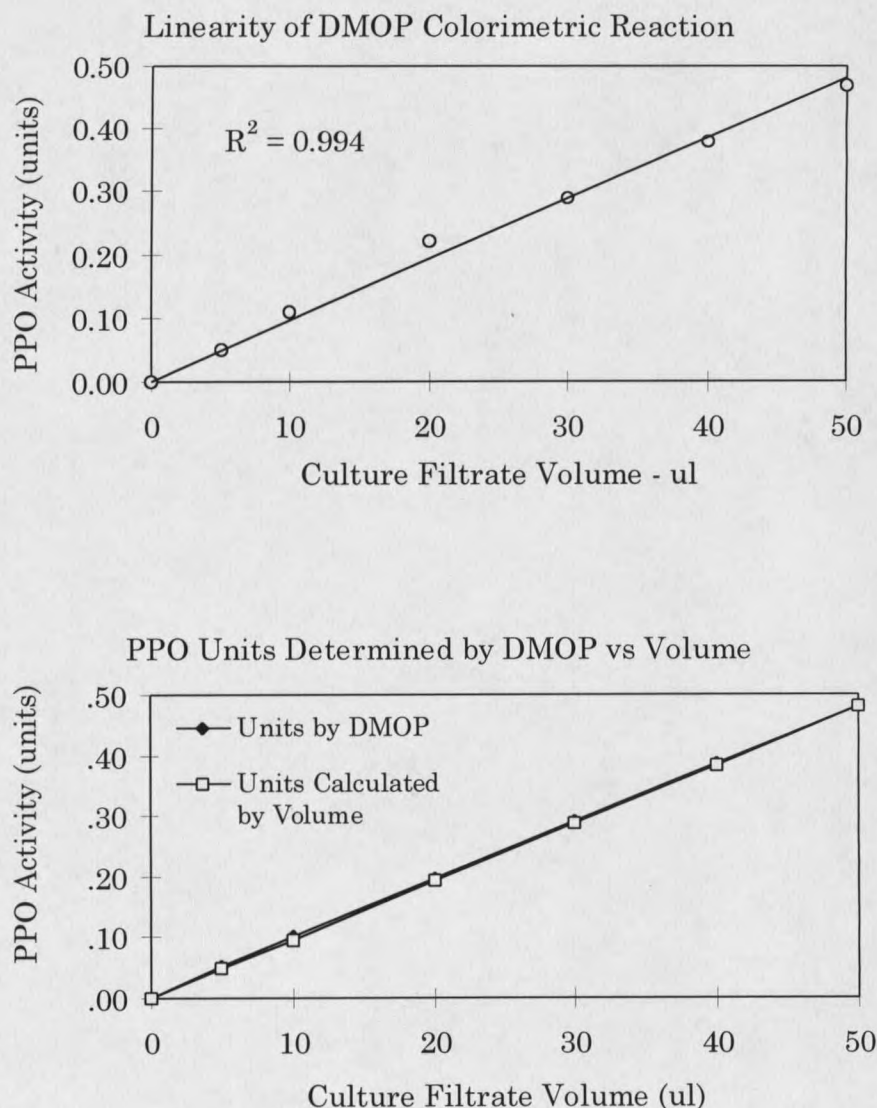


Figure 8. Calibration of the DMOP Colorimetric Assay for Determination of PPO Concentration (0 to .50 units). The volume (μl) added to substrate consisted of culture filtrate plus LB to a total volume of 500 μl . One unit of enzyme activity is defined as that amount catalyzing a change in absorbance of 1.0 at 468 nm over a one minute interval. Units calculated by volume is based on the volume of culture filtrate yielding .50 units PPO by the DMOP reaction. A direct relationship between amount of PPO present and change in absorbance is indicated at PPO concentrations \leq .50 units.

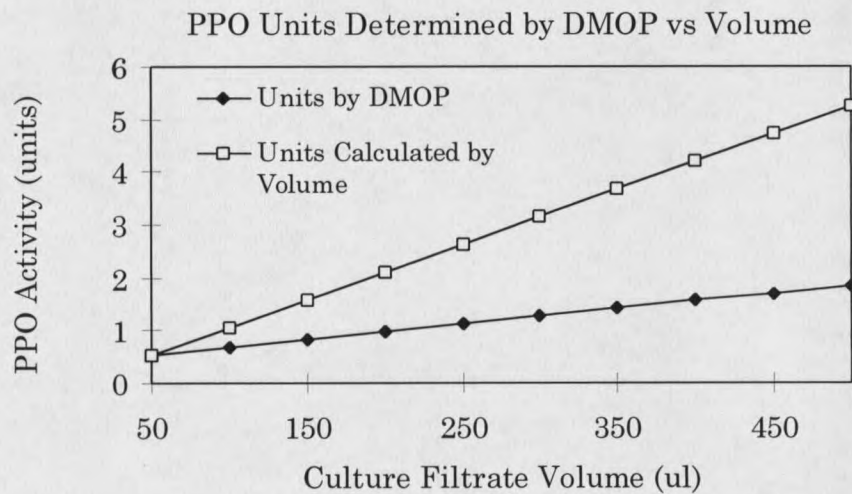
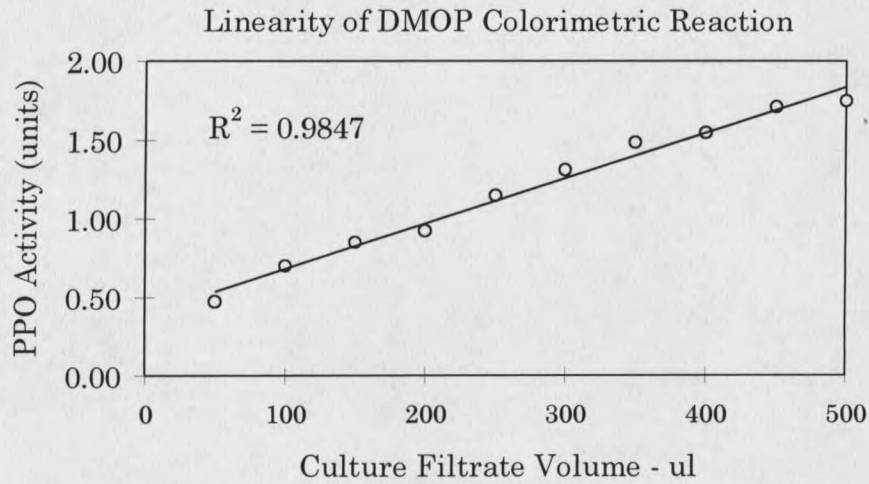


Figure 9. Calibration of the DMOP Colorimetric Assay for Determination of PPO Concentration (.50 to 2.0 units). The volume (μl) added to substrate consisted of culture filtrate and LB to a total volume of 500 μl . One unit of enzyme activity is defined as that amount that catalyzed a change in absorbance of 1.0 at 468 nm over a one minute interval. Units calculated by volume is based on the volume of culture filtrate yielding .50 units by the DMOP reaction. At PPO concentrations > .50 units, the change in absorbance does not increase in direct relationship to PPO present and PPO concentration is increasingly underestimated.

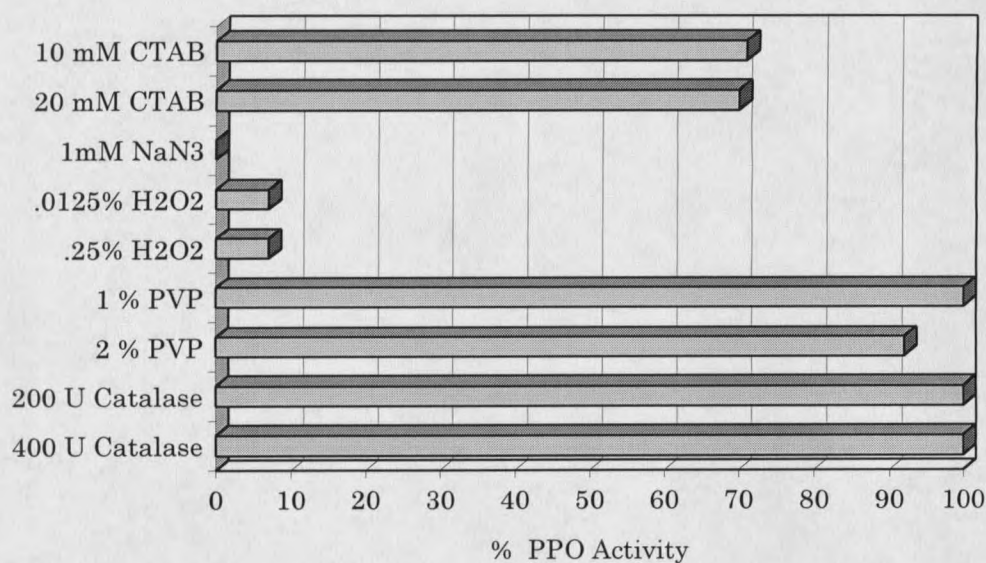


Figure 10. Effect of Potential Inhibitors and a Peroxidase Cofactor on the Oxidation of DMOP by the Enzyme(s) Secreted by *Ggt*. PPO activity in culture filtrates was determined following pretreatment with the agent indicated. Abscissa values indicate the percent mean of triplicate trials compared to an untreated control (0.6 units).

Dependence of Polyphenol Oxidase Secretion on Culture Age. The temporal secretion of PPO into culture filtrate by the selected strains was determined over a period of six days (Fig. 11). The wild-type strain consistently demonstrated peak PPO activity on day four when grown in LB medium in which PPO secretion was constitutive. The delayed peak PPO activity by the white derivatives may simply reflect a difference in fungal mass; this apparent 24-hour lag period mimicked the fungal growth curve. In contrast, the melanin variant strains secrete significantly less PPO in a pattern consistent with the visible detection of hyphal pigmentation.

Enhanced pigmentation became evident in MV01 and MV02 on day 3 and day 5, respectively (Fig. 11).

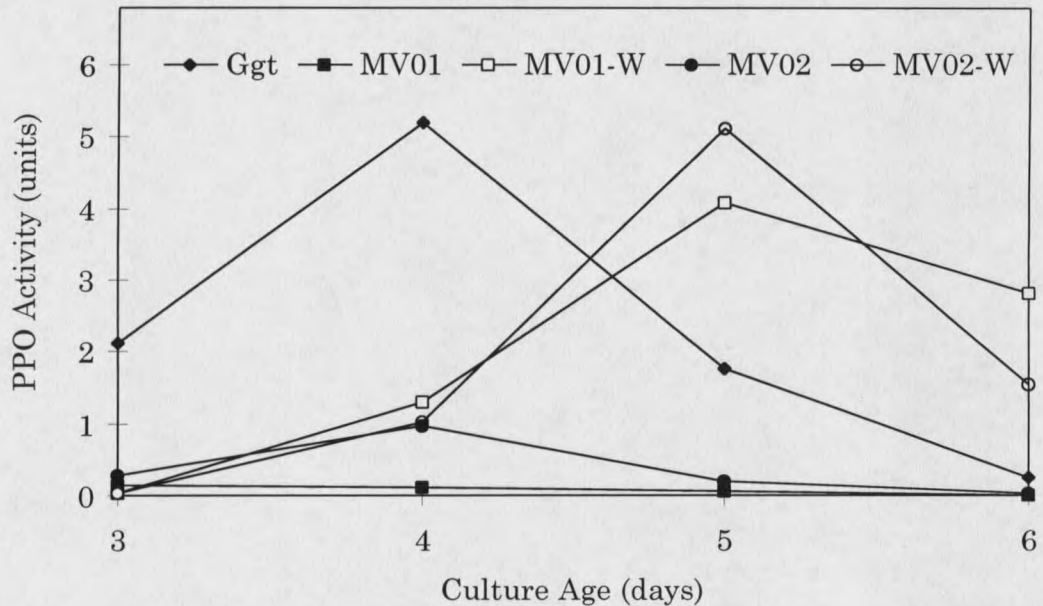


Figure 11. Dependence of Polyphenol Oxidase Secretion on Culture Age and Visual Detection of the Enhanced Pigment Phenotype. Secreted PPO activity was determined using DMOP as substrate. Values indicate the mean of triplicate filtrate samples assayed at the time points indicated.

Effect of Tricyclazole on Polyphenol Oxidase Secretion. Efficiency of PPO secretion in *Ggt* and MV01 treated with the DHN-melanin biosynthesis inhibitor tricyclazole suggested that pigmentation inhibited PPO secretion. Treatment of MV01 resulted in a five-fold increase in PPO activity in the culture filtrate over the untreated MV01 control (Fig. 12). Again, this increase was not due to a stimulatory increase in secretory activity; the treated *Ggt* secreted less PPO than the untreated *Ggt* (Fig. 12). The variable secreted enzyme levels were not due to differences in

fungal mass as the treated and untreated cultures of *Ggt* and MV01 demonstrated the same fungal mass at 0.06 g and 0.08 g, respectively (Fig. 12). Finally, the pigment phenotype of the treated MV01 was orange-brown rather than green, indicative of blocked DHN-melanin biosynthesis and the accumulation of DHN-melanin shunt products (255).

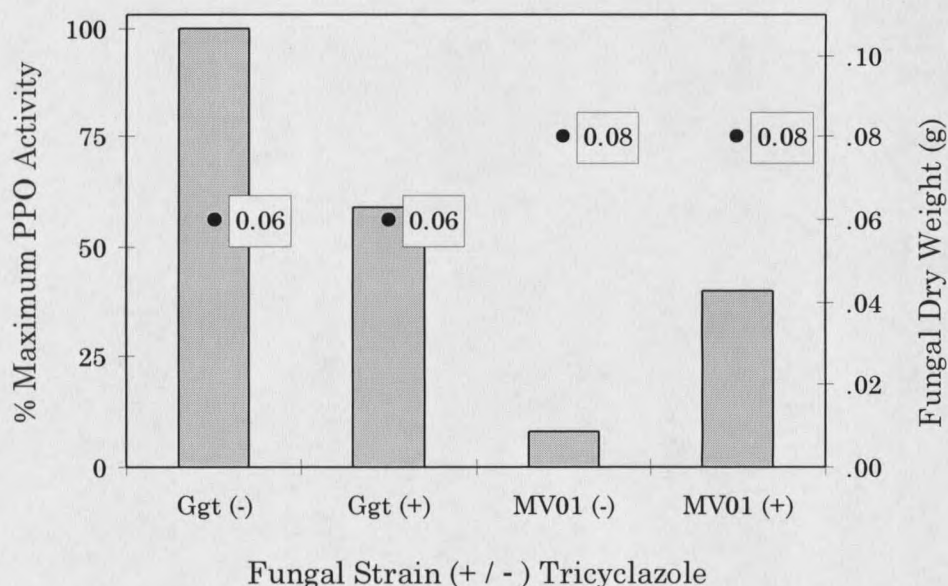


Figure 12. The Effect of Tricyclazole on Polyphenol Oxidase Secretion *Ggt* and the melanin variant MV01. PPO activity was determined using DMOP as substrate and was confined to a range between 0.13 and 1.2 units. The fungal weights are the means of duplicate cultures of *Ggt* and quadruplicate cultures of MV01.

Characterization of the Polyphenol Oxidase

Additional characterization of the *Ggt* PPO was carried out with culture filtrates harvested from *Ggt* grown in the defined medium without yeast extract (yeast extract can complicate protein purification procedures by stimulating the secretion of many proteins) (81). The temporal secretion pattern of the PPO was

determined in shaken and static cultures (27). No PPO activity was detected in the culture filtrates harvested from the static cultures (Fig. 13) and PPO activity in the shaken cultures was not evident until day 6 and peaked at day 8 (Fig. 13). Laccase secretion in the ascomycete *Neurospora crassa* is inducible with cycloheximide and actinomycin D (88, 151), but these protein synthesis inhibitors failed to elicit PPO secretion in *Ggt* (data not shown). PPO secretion by *Ggt* grown in defined medium required induction with 2,5-xylidine (2,5-dimethylaniline) (Fig. 14), a phenolic compound previously believed to induce laccase secretion only in basidiomycetes (27).

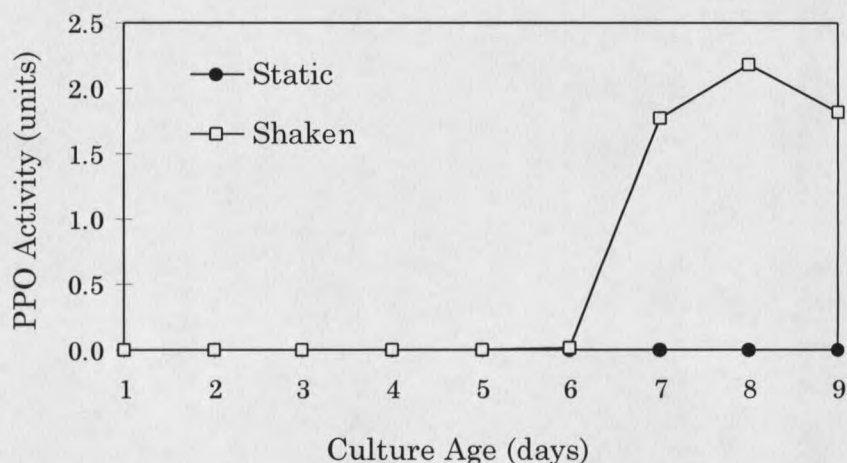


Figure 13. Dependence of Polyphenol Oxidase Secretion on Culture Age in Static and Shaken Defined Induction Medium. Values indicate the mean of triplicate filtrate samples assayed at the time points indicated. The cultures were induced with 2,5-xylidine on day 4 and day 6 as described in the text. Cultures were supplemented with 400 μM CuSO_4 on day 2.

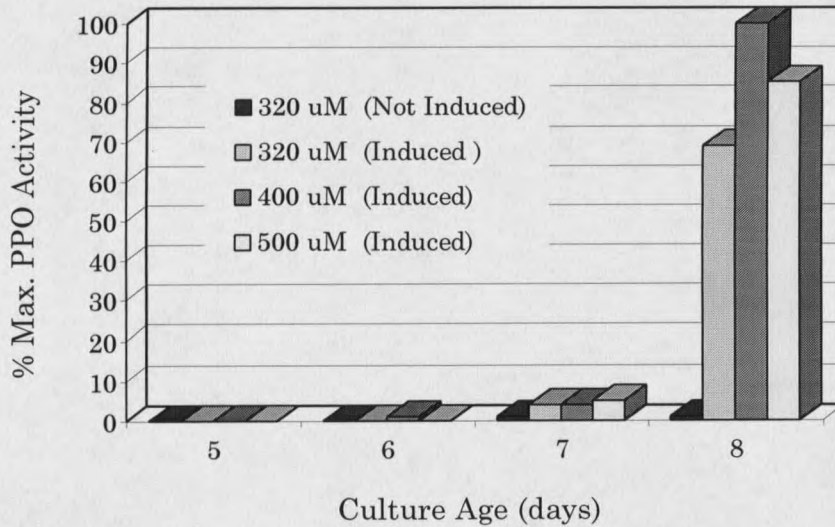


Figure 14. Effect of Copper Sulfate Concentration on the Secretion of Polyphenol Oxidase by *Ggt* in Defined Induction Medium. All cultures were inoculated into defined media containing trace copper ($8 \mu\text{M}$). Supplemental copper was added on day 2 at the concentrations indicated. 2,5-xylidine was added to all induced cultures on days 4 and 6. Values are the mean of triplicate assays and are presented as the percentage of maximum PPO activity as determined using DMOP as substrate.

Maximum PPO secretion was attained by day-8 in defined media supplemented with $400 \mu\text{M}$ CuSO_4 and induced with 2,5-xylidine on day 4 and day 6 (Fig. 14). CuSO_4 at concentrations greater than $400 \mu\text{M}$ were inhibitory to fungal growth. The supplemental copper does not itself act as an inducer of PPO secretion; the uninduced culture at $320 \mu\text{M}$ CuSO_4 failed to secrete significantly higher, or “induced”, levels of the enzyme.

The molecular weight of the native PPO was 190,000 (Fig. 15). The PPO retained activity in the SDS-PAGE gel (Fig. 15, lane 3) and exhibits a single band of activity corresponding to the protein band localized at 190,000 by silver staining (Fig. 15, lane 2).

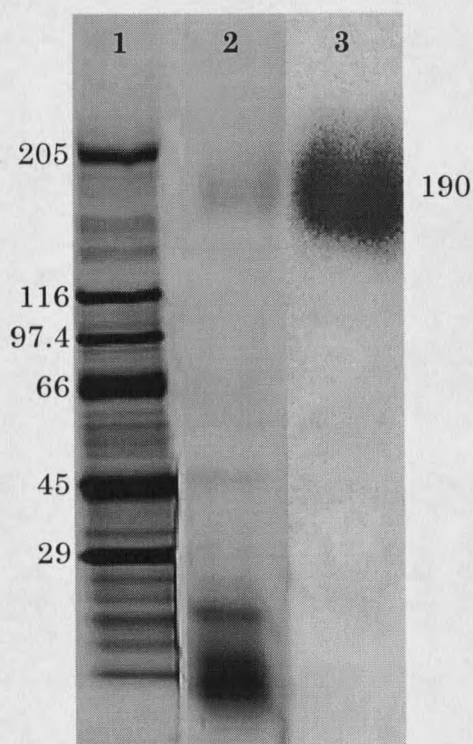


Figure 15. Determination of Molecular Weight of the Native Polyphenol Oxidase. Sample source is the 100% fraction recovered from the crude enzyme preparation. Equal volumes of the preparation were silver stained (lane 2) or activity stained (lane 3) using DMOP as substrate. The molecular weights ($\times 10^{-3}$) are indicated for the standard (lane 1) and the samples.

The 60% fraction did not contain PPO activity (DMOP as substrate) and the SDS-PAGE of the native preparation (Fig. 16, lane 2) lacks the PPO band at

190,000. The PPO band at 190,000 is present in the native preparation of the 100% fraction (Fig. 16, lane 3). Heat denaturation (100 °C for 90 seconds) resulted in significant modification of protein band migration (Fig. 16, lanes 4 and 5) with a shift of the 190,000 PPO band to 66,000. Deglycosylation resulted in a mobility shift of the 66,000 PPO band in the 100% fraction (Fig. 16, lane 5) to 60,000 (Fig. 16, lane 7).

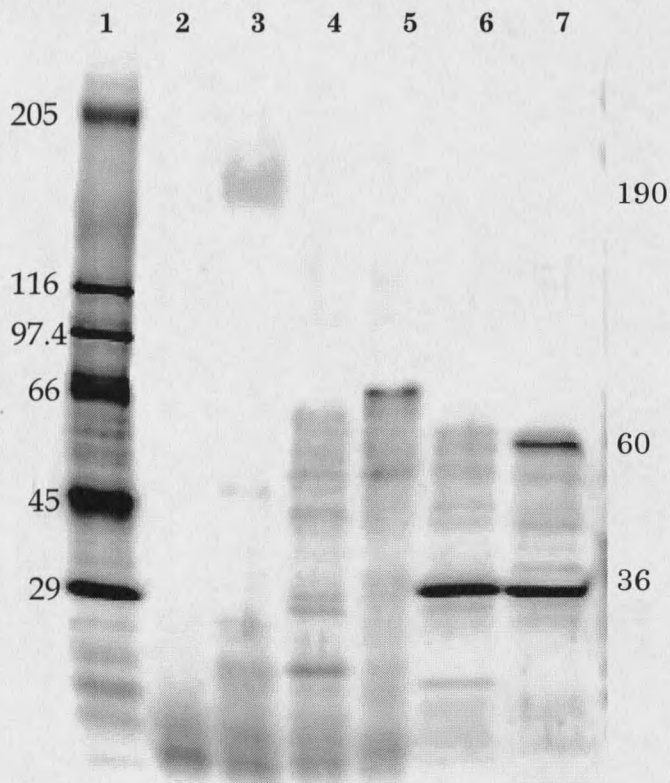


Figure 16. Determination of Proteins Present in the 60% and 100% Fractions by SDS-PAGE and Silver Staining. The samples are the native (lane 2), denatured (lane 4), and deglycosylated (lane 6) 60% fraction; the native (lane 3), denatured (lane 5), and deglycosylated (lane 7) 100% fraction. The molecular weights ($\times 10^{-3}$) are indicated for the standard (lane 1) and the samples. The 36,000 band is PNGase F.

Preparative SDS-PAGE eliminated the major contaminating protein present in the 100% fraction (Fig. 17). The PAGE-eluent yielded a single band at 66,000 (Fig. 17, lane 3) whereas the major protein in the 100% fraction migrated at 78,000 (Fig. 17, lane 2). Deglycosylation of the PAGE-eluent resulted in a mobility shift of the PPO band to 60,000 (Fig. 17, lane 4).

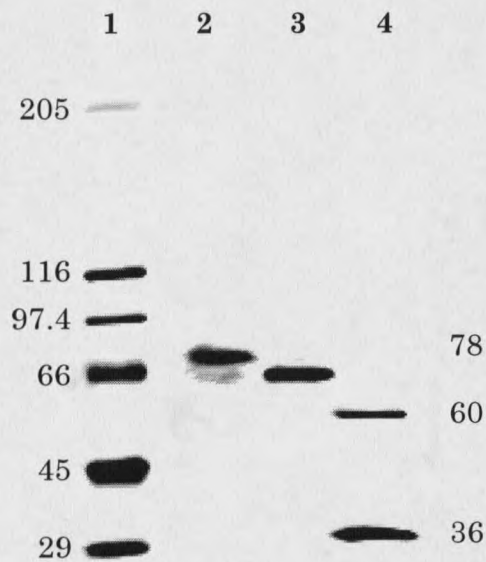


Figure 17. Molecular Weight Determination and Deglycosylation of the PPO Recovered from Preparative SDS-PAGE. The 3-10% gradient gel was silver stained and the molecular weights ($\times 10^{-3}$) of the standard (lane 1) and samples are indicated. The 36,000 band (lane 4) is PNGase F.

The pH activity range of *Ggt* PPO was broad with a minimum of 30% of activity observed at pH 2.5 and pH 8.0. Maximum PPO activity was observed at pH 4.2 (Fig. 18). Laccase of the deuteromycete *Botrytis cinerea* and the basidiomycetes *Fomes annosus* and *Pleurotus ostreatus* (27) also demonstrate similar maxima.

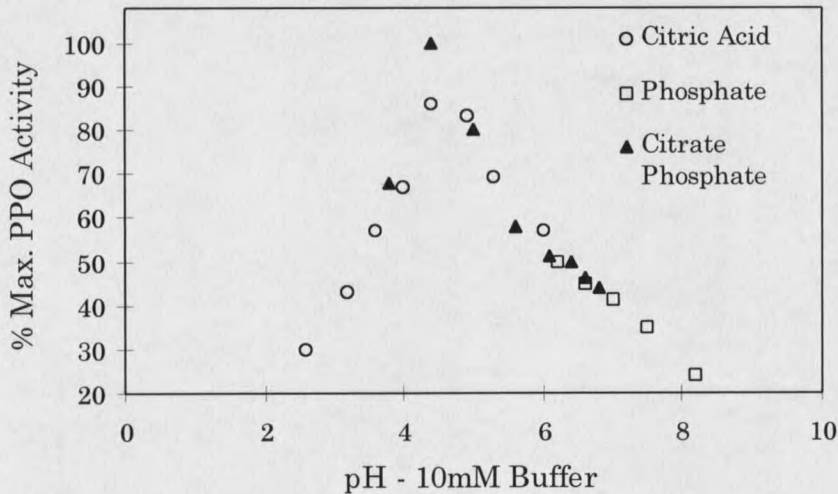


Figure 18. pH Range of Polyphenol Oxidase Activity. Data expressed as a percentage of maximum PPO activity determined using DMOP as substrate. PPO activity range in the various buffers was 0.17 to 0.56 units.

Following isoelectric focusing, PPO activity was concentrated in a single collected fraction with pH 5.5. All other fractions were negative for PPO activity indicating the presence of a single fungal polyphenol oxidase in the culture filtrate.

The Lineweaver-Burke plot indicated a PPO K_m of 1.00 mM using DMOP as substrate (Fig. 19). Characteristics of the *Ggt* polyphenol oxidase are summarized in Table 4.

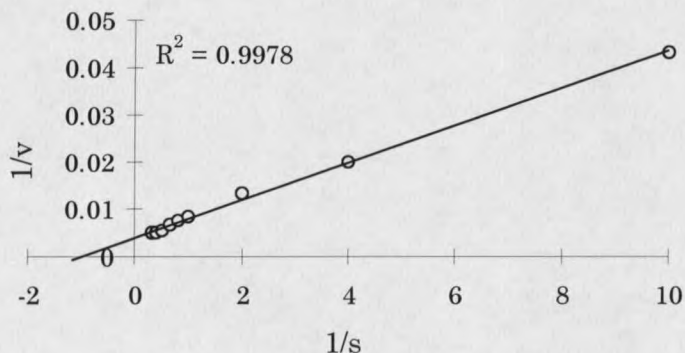


Figure 19. Determination of Polyphenol Oxidase K_m . The K_m of the PPO was determined by Lineweaver-Burke plot using 0.1 - 3.0 mM DMOP as substrate. Assays were done in duplicate at each substrate concentration and remained within the range .02 - .20 units of PPO activity per reaction.

The enzyme preparations were sometimes stored at $-20\text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ prior to assay. The PPO was stable after freezing, retaining 80% activity after 48 days at $-20\text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ (Fig. 20). Enzyme preparations were stored for a maximum period of 30 days prior to assay and cold inactivation was not a source of experimental variability.

Ggt PPO was labile above $60\text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ losing 50, 90, and 93% activity after 20, 40 and 60 minutes, respectively (Fig. 21). At $40\text{ }^\circ\text{C}$, PPO activity was elevated and demonstrated no loss of activity during the 60 minute testing period (Fig. 20). All PPO quantitative determinations were completed within one hour after bringing the sample up to room temperature ($26\text{ }^\circ\text{C}$).

Table 4. Characteristics of the *Ggt* Polyphenol Oxidase.

Molecular Weight ^a	
Native ^b	190,000
Denatured ^c	66,000
Deglycosylated ^d	60,000
Isoelectric Point	pH 5.5
pH Optimum	pH 4.2
Km ^e	1.00 mM

^a Apparent molecular weights determined by SDS-PAGE

^b Untreated 100% fraction

^c 100% fraction treated for 90 seconds at 100°C

^d Preparative SDS-PAGE eluent treated with PNGase F

^e DMOP as substrate

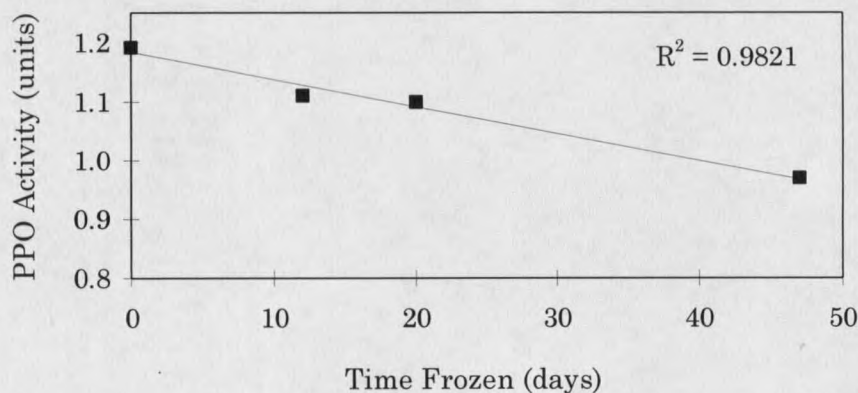


Figure 20. Effect of Freezing on Polyphenol Oxidase Activity. Culture filtrate harvested from a 4-day old *Ggt* LB culture was immediately assayed for PPO activity or frozen at -20 °C to be assayed when indicated using DMOP as substrate. All samples were at room temperature prior to assay. Data points represent the mean value of quadruplicate trials at each time point indicated.

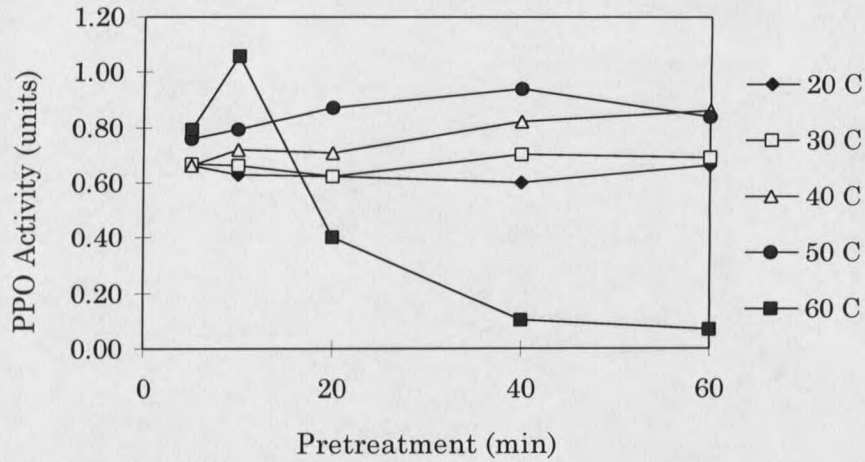


Figure 21. Effect of Elevated Temperature on Polyphenol Oxidase Activity. Identical culture filtrate aliquots from a 4-day old *Ggt* LB culture were exposed to various temperatures for the indicated time periods. PPO activity was determined using DMOP as substrate.

Lignin Degradation

Positive decolorization of Poly B-411 indicated that *Ggt* PPO is capable of lignin degradation. *Ggt* culture filtrate containing .54 units PPO activity decreased the A_{593}/A_{483} absorbance ratio from 3.85 to 2.37 within two hours (Fig. 22). No further decrease in absorbance ratio was observed after this time.

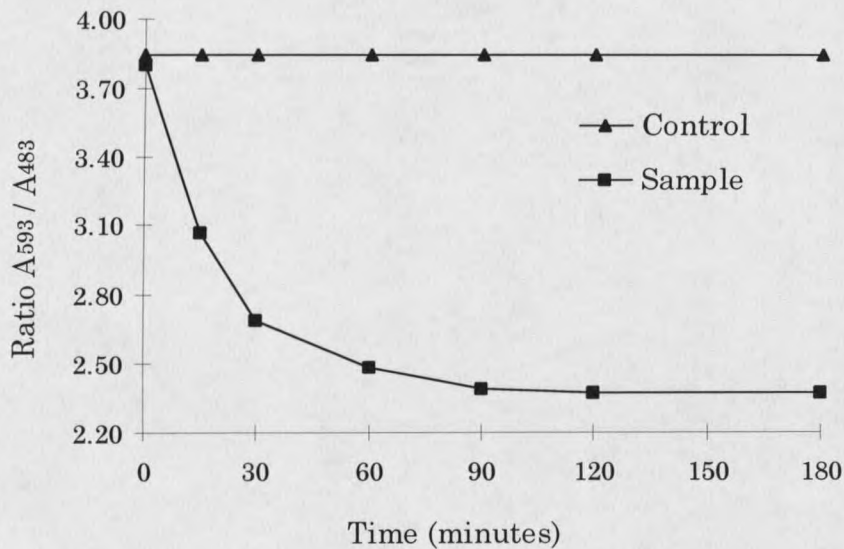


Figure 22. Assessment of Lignin Degradative Capability by Poly B-411 Decolorization. Poly B-411 was added to *Ggt* culture filtrate and samples were removed at the times indicated and the absorbance ratio was measured as described in the text.

Pathogenicity and Enhanced Pigmentation

A reduction in shoot weight is an excellent index of plant health and is a direct result of infection (10, 84, 213). The mean shoot weight of *Ggt* infected plants was 36% less than that of uninfected control plants. Shoot weight loss resulting from infection with the white-derivatives was not significantly different from losses due to *Ggt* at 36% and 33%; however, the melanin variants, MV01 and MV02, were significantly less pathogenic ($P \leq .05$) causing shoot weight losses of 2% and 9%, respectively (Fig. 23).

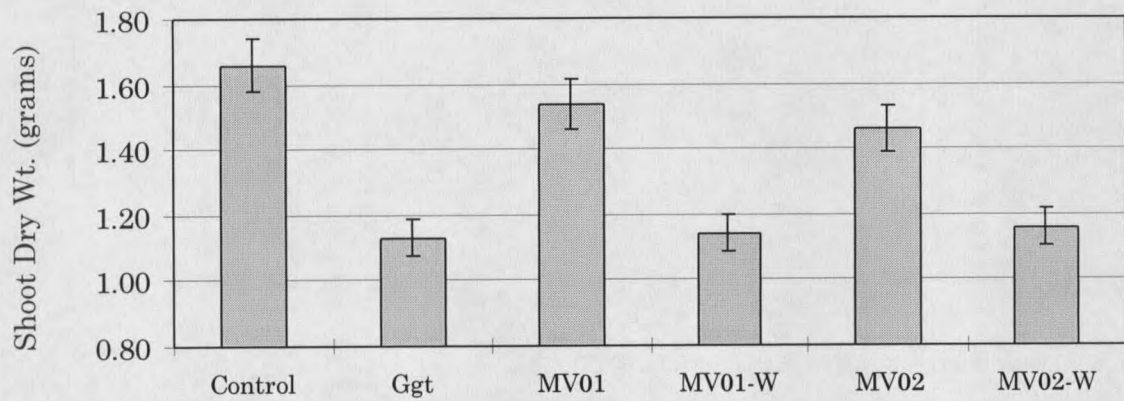


Figure 23. Pathogenicity Assay - Shoot Mass. Dry shoot weight is expressed as the mean of five replicates of twenty plants each replicate ($P \leq .05$) (a). The plant shoots are (positioned left to right) from uninfected control shoots to shoots harvested from plants infected with *Ggt*, MV01, MV01-W, MV02 and MV02-W (b).

The general health of the plant indicated by shoot weights is also reflected in root weights. Using the control root weights as the reference, the non-pigmented strains *Ggt*, MV01-W and MV02-W caused respective root weight losses of 47%, 49% and 40% (Fig. 24). Roots infected with MV02 demonstrated a root weight loss of 3% while roots infected with MV01 actually had 11% more mass than the uninfected control (Fig. 24). An additional sensitive measure of infection is the determination of total root stelar lesion lengths (198). Total lesion lengths produced by *Ggt* and the two white-derivatives, MV01-W and MV02-W, represent 25%, 33% and 18% of the recovered root systems, respectively. The melanin variant strains, MV01 and MV02, were less invasive with 5% and 4% of the recovered root system demonstrating stelar lesions (Fig. 25). Visual inspection of the root surfaces ascertained that the variant strains demonstrated the same ectotrophic growth habit as the wild-type and differences in this growth habit could not account for differences in lesion production.

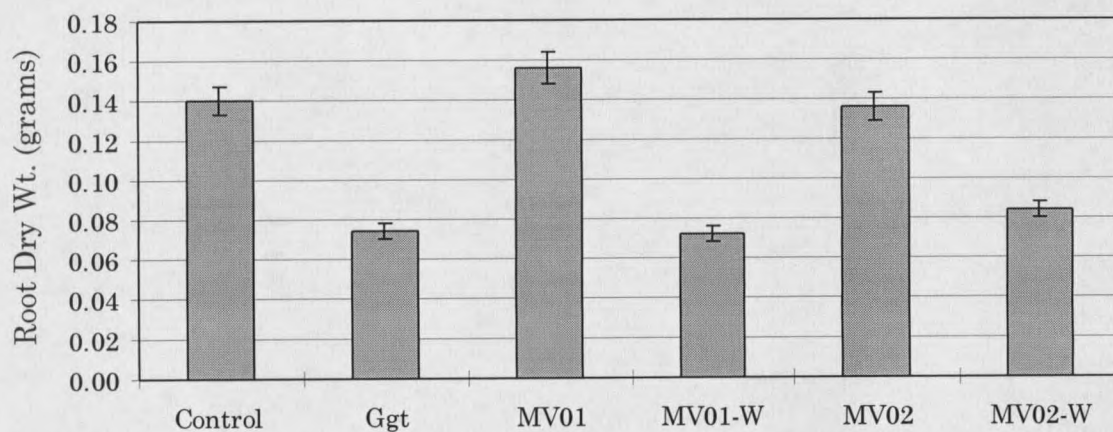
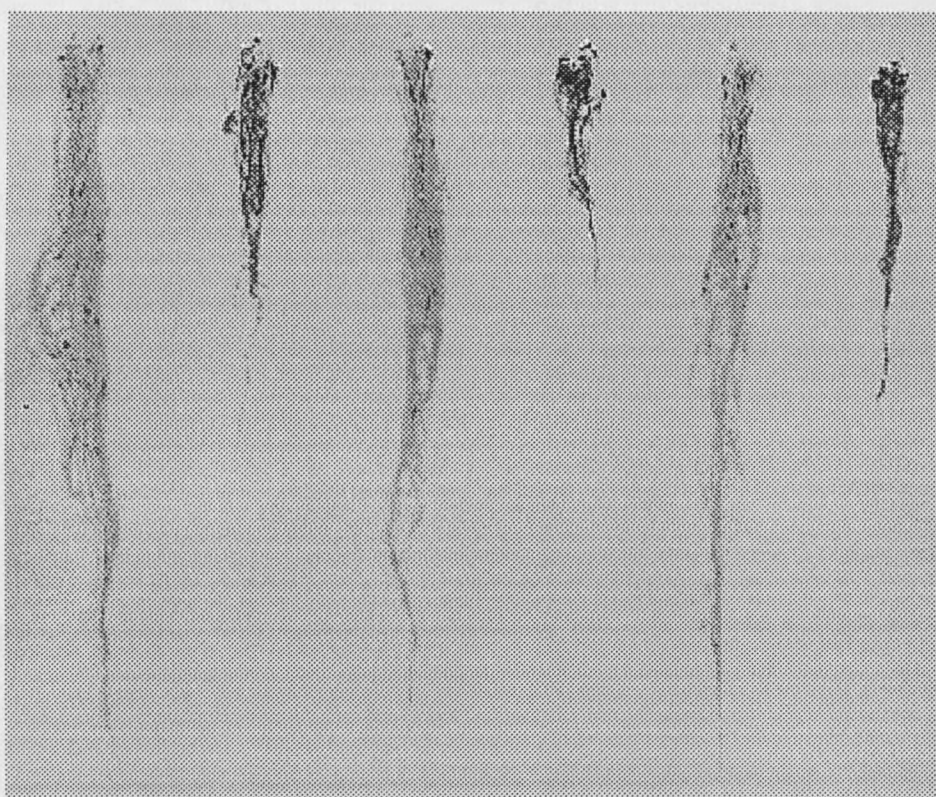


Figure 24. Pathogenicity Assay - Root Mass. Dry root weight is expressed as the mean of five replicates of twenty plants each replicate ($P \leq .05$) (a). The plant roots are (positioned left to right) from uninfected control roots, to roots harvested from plants infected with *Ggt*, MV01, MV01-W, MV02 and MV02-W (b).

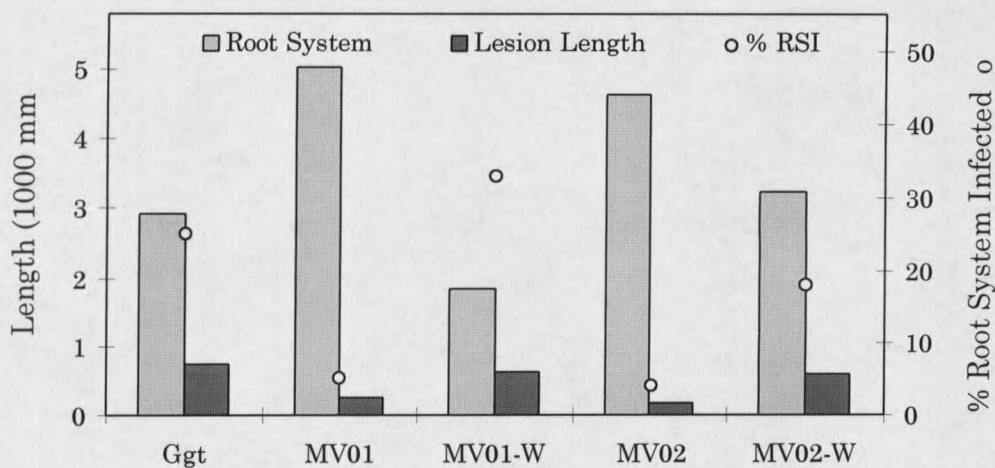


Figure 25. Pathogenicity Assay - Root Steelar Lesions. The percent wheat root system infected is expressed as $[(\text{lesion length} / \text{root system length recovered}) \times 100]$.

To detect histological changes in the root tissue, cryostat sections were stained with toluidine blue-O, a polychromatic dye that stains lignin green or blue-green (175). The degree of lignification in the healthy uninfected control is demonstrated by the markedly thickened endodermis (Fig. 26a). Sections of roots infected with the melanin variants, MV01 and MV02, demonstrate root and endodermis morphology comparable to that of the control (Fig. 26c and 26e). The endodermis in wheat root sections from plants infected with *Ggt* and either white derivative, MV01-W or MV02-W, lack the thickened, lignified endodermis. The presence of hyphal elements is evident in the vascular tissues of roots infected with the non-pigmented strains (Fig. 26b, 26d and 26f).

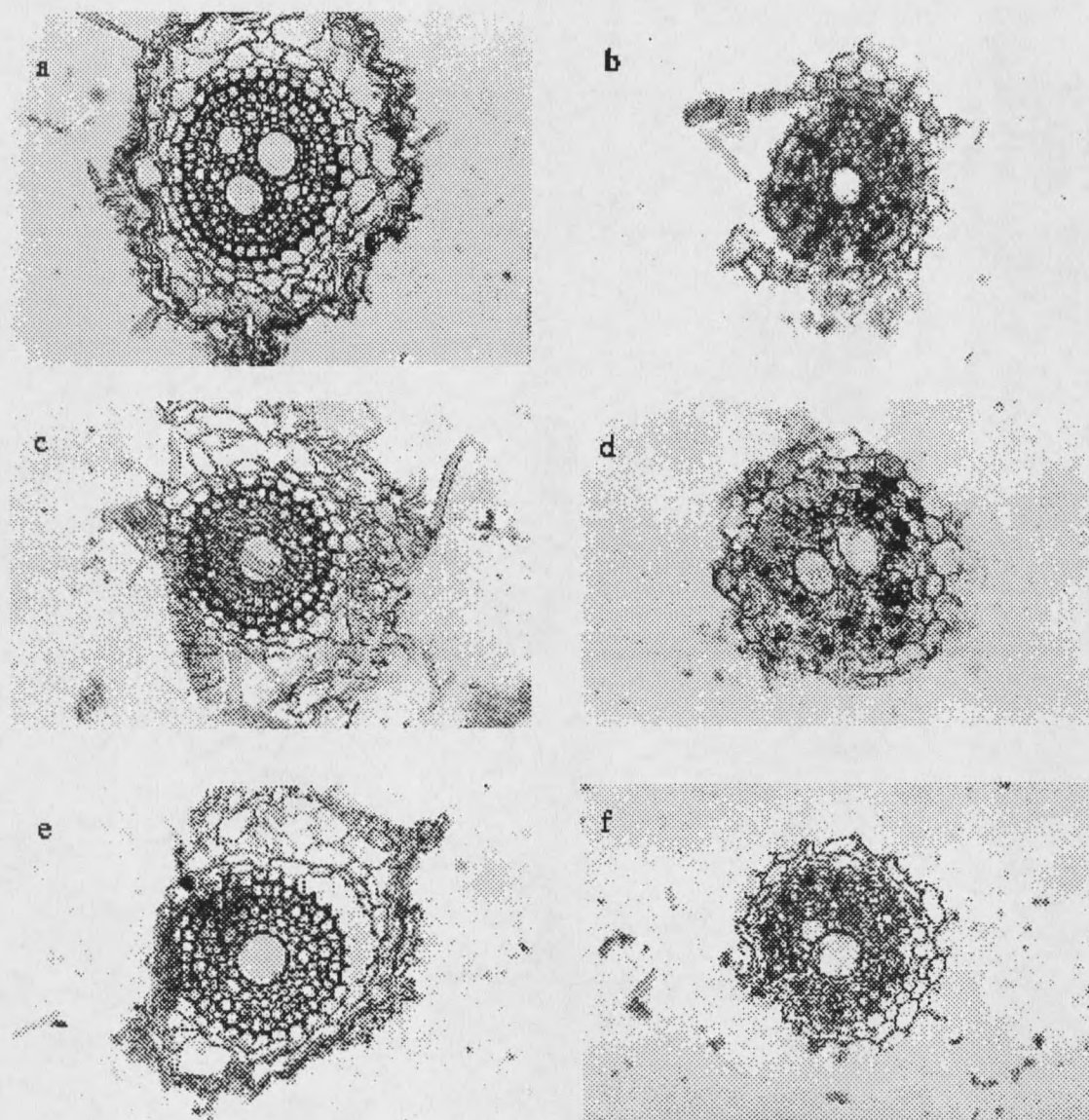


Figure 26. Cryostat Sections of Wheat Root Tissue. The 12- μ m root sections were stained with Toluidine Blue-O as described and examined microscopically with visible light. Panels are uninfected root control (a), and roots infected with *Ggt* (b), MV01 (c), MV01-W (d), MV02 (e) and MV02-W (f).

Protein Secretion and Pathogenicity

The relationships between enhanced pigmentation and protein secretion / pathogenicity were determined empirically. The relationship between protein secretion and pathogenicity must be inferred. Efficiency of PPO secretion was directly related to the production of root stelar lesions (Fig. 27) and a decrease in root and shoot dry weights (Fig. 28). These direct relationships suggested that melanization resulting in the enhanced pigment phenotype of MV01 and MV02 was responsible for decreased pathogenicity due to decreased efficiency of fungal protein secretion.

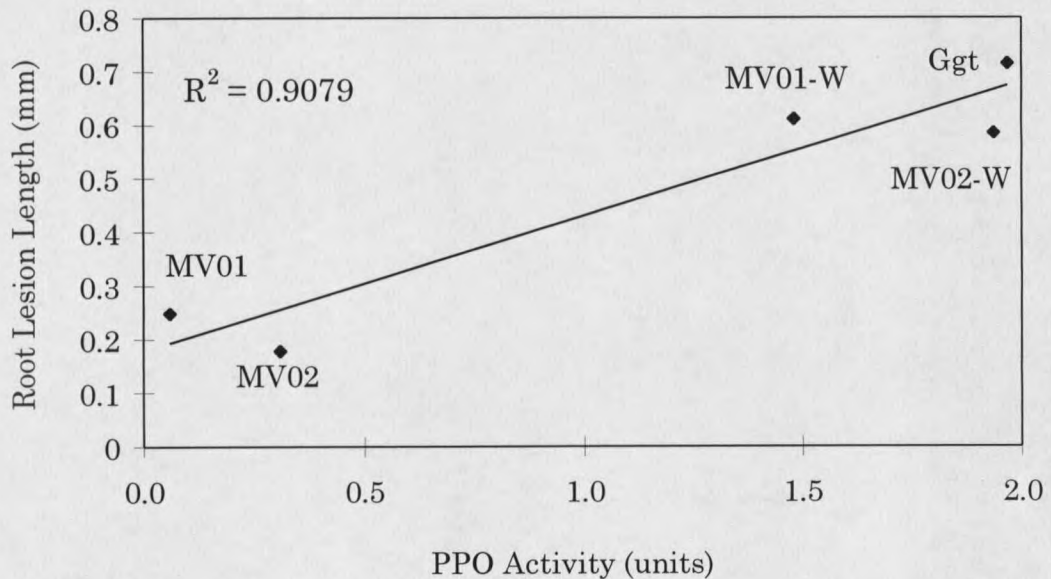


Figure 27. Direct Correlation Between Polyphenol Oxidase Activity and Pathogenicity (Root Stellar Lesion Assay). The root stelar lesion lengths were determined in the pathogenicity assay (Fig. 25). PPO activity was determined in LB where PPO secretion is constitutive.

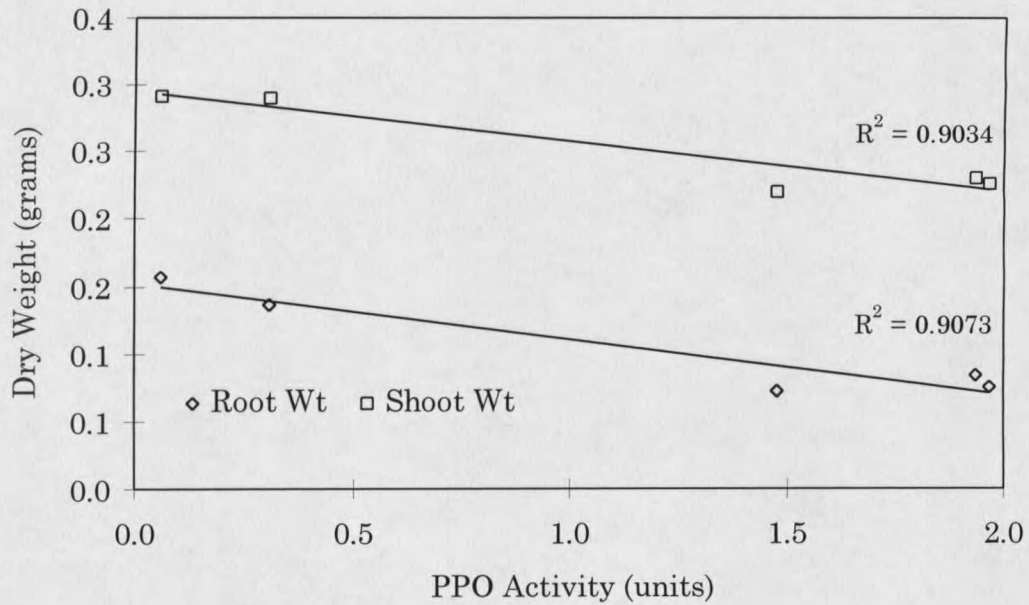


Figure 28. Direct Correlation Between Polyphenol Oxidase Activity and Pathogenicity (Plant Mass Assay). The fungal dry weights were determined in the pathogenicity assays (Fig. 23 and Fig. 24). PPO activity was determined in LB where PPO secretion is constitutive

DISCUSSION

The Fungal Strains

The spontaneous occurrence of the enhanced pigment phenotype was not unique to the *G. graminis* var. *tritici* isolate (D. Mathre, DM526) selected for this study. The spontaneous rate of occurrence in the parental *G. graminis* var. *tritici* strain selected was comparable to the mean positive rate of occurrence in the four *G. graminis* var. *tritici* strains screened. It is therefore probable that characterization results would be applicable to other *G. graminis* var. *tritici* isolates displaying the spontaneous enhanced pigment phenotype.

The selected *Ggt* isolate has maintained pathogenicity in culture for more than eight years without passage through the host indicating its stable virulence genotype. Changes in virulence phenotype demonstrated in its derivatives, was therefore not synonymous with loss of virulence due to subculture (46). The presence of mycovirus (86,146,195) and the production of Q factor (163) have been implicated in expression of the virulence phenotype. However, these factors were not a source of virulence variability among the strains selected for study. No viral RNA was detected in the parental *Ggt* strain (Henson, pers. comm.) purification by ascosporeogenesis generally eliminates mycovirus particles (162, 195). The production of Q factor is dependent on growth medium (163) and no Q factor was detected on the media used in this study.

The enhanced pigment phenotype was not stable through meiosis; 50% of the colonies derived from germinated ascospores no longer expressed the enhanced pigment phenotype. Meiotic segregation of a heterokaryon could result in a 1:1 ratio of progeny types, but this was not likely the case demonstrated here. The possibility of heterokaryosis was reduced via hyphal tipping (162). Also, the mitotic instability of the white derivatives suggested that they were not wild-type "revertants" recovered from a heterokaryon following meiotic segregation of dominant (pigmented) and recessive (non-pigmented) alleles.

Phenotypic characteristics expressed exclusively by the melanin variants were the production of phialospores and abundant aerial hyphae. The parental *Ggt* strain consistently produced perithecia in culture but the production of phialospores has never been observed. Contrary to the observation of Brown and Hornby (1971) that phialospores are produced only in the absence of living root tissue, phialospores were produced by all melanin variants tested regardless of the presence of root tissue. All colonies derived from germinated phialospores demonstrated the enhanced pigment phenotype indicating that the melanin variant strains were not homokaryotic. Phialosporogenesis of heterokaryons would yield progeny with melanin variant and wild-type pigment phenotypes.

A family of fungal surface proteins associated with the development of fungal aerial structures are hydrophobins, small (about 100 aa) cysteine-rich proteins present in ascomycetes, basidiomycetes and zygomycetes (15, 69, 71, 248, 249). In the ascomycete *Magnaporthe grisea* (15), the expression of a single hydrophobin gene effects the development of aerial hyphae, conidia and appressoria. In the

basidiomycete *Ustilago maydis* (266), a single amphipathic peptide (a proposed hydrophobin) has been associated with aerial hyphal growth and surface hydrophobicity. Using a simple water-drop test, placing a drop of water onto the surface of a fungal colony, differences in hydrophobicity between wild-type *Ggt* and the melanin variants is easily demonstrated. A drop of water placed onto *Ggt* dissipates immediately, whereas the drop on the surface of a melanin variant colony will remain intact for days. It is therefore possible that a change in expression of a single genetic element, e.g. a structural hydrophobin gene, could result in phenotypic pleomorphism including the development of aerial hyphae and phialospores and the presentation of surface hydrophobicity. The retention of hydrophobins in the fungal cell wall is required for the production of aerial fungal elements. Assimilative hyphal elements secrete the hydrophobins into the surrounding milieu (71, 248, 249). If hydrophobins are not retained, the fungal cell wall may lose the structural capacity to retain melanin or enzymatic proteins required for the synthesis of melanin.

The spontaneous nature of the melanin variant phenotype suggested it resulted from a single genetic change but the mechanism is unknown. Digestion of the fungal cell wall and the formation of protoplasts permits protoplast fusion and consequently the possible fusion of nuclear cell fractions permitting DNA/DNA interactions (18, 99). This same interaction could occur naturally via the parasexual phenomenon (181) that involves anastomosis, formation of diploid nuclei, and possible undefined DNA/DNA interactions prior to haploidization which may result in DNA demethylation. If the wild-type *Ggt* gene(s) that determine

melanin phenotype were silenced through DNA methylation, then treatment with 5-azacytidine should theoretically increase the incidence of the enhanced pigment phenotype. A significant increase in occurrence rate of the enhanced pigment phenotype was not observed and results were inconclusive. However, the lack of toxicity of 5-azacytidine at 800 μ M may be indicative of non-penetration of the fungal cell membrane and the possibility of gene regulation through methylation cannot be eliminated. The phenotypic variability among the melanized isolated could arise through variable degrees of DNA methylation. Regardless of whether the event is determined epigenetically or by a genetic alteration, either can be inherited with high fidelity (200).

The presentation of *Phialophora*-like characteristics by the *Ggt* melanin variants is significant. With the exception of *G. cylindrosporus*, the conversion between teleomorph and anamorph has not been observed in culture or the field. The melanin variants produced abundant fertile phialospores and after several months in culture, lost the ability to undergo meiosis. Conversion from a non-melanized, virulent *G. graminis*. var. *tritici* to a more darkly pigmented avirulent phenotype in the field could be responsible for the observed predominance of darkly pigmented fungal isolates from sources displaying little (TAD soils) or no (native grasslands) disease symptoms (51, 210, 238). Phenotypic switching from a virulent to an avirulent phenotype would be advantageous to a pathogen in establishing a long term ecological balance between host and pathogen. Phenotypic switching is supported by the observation that little gene flow occurs between fungal isolates even though they occupy the same field (176, 223).

Protein Secretion and Enhanced Pigmentation

An inverse correlation between pigmentation and protein secretion was established by determining the secretion of relative total proteins, plant-cell-wall degrading enzymes and polyphenol oxidase. The inhibition of DHN-melanin biosynthesis restored plant cell-wall- degrading enzyme secretion levels of the tricyclazole treated melanin variants to those levels seen in the wild type (Tab. 1) and significantly increased total relative total protein secretion (Fig. 6) and polyphenol oxidase secretion (Figure 12) in tricyclazole treated melanin variants. The absence of a generalized increase in secretory activity stimulated by tricyclazole treatment supports the conclusion that increased secretion is a direct result of decreased melanin deposition into the maturing fungal cell wall. These results are consistent with the assertion that filamentous fungal protein secretion is limited to non-melanized hyphal elements (184, 212, 247).

The variant secretory patterns presented by the plant-cell-wall degrading enzymes and polyphenol oxidase on solid plating media may reflect enzyme function during the infection process of a phytopathogen that relies on the secretion of enzymes to effect penetration of intact host tissue. The secretory patterns of the proteolytic enzymes are characterized by areas of positive lytic activity the same size as or smaller than the fungal colony itself. A positive reaction area the same size as the fungal colony indicates secretion occurs at the colony margin containing the non-melanized nascent hyphal tips which may be presented as an ecru colony margin on a pigmented colony. The phenotypic variability displayed by the

spontaneous melanin variants included differences in degree and rate of colony margin pigmentation that may reflect differences in the rates of onset of secondary metabolism and the deposition of DHN-melanin. Hyphae in the ecru margin may be analogous to the hyaline infection hyphae whose non-pigmented phenotype would facilitate the secretion of plant-cell-wall degrading enzymes immediately proximal to the hyphal element. A positive reaction area smaller in size than the fungal colony may result from idiophasic growth associated with the generation of new hyphal branches (167, 247) and non-pigmented hyphal apices. Idiophasic lytic enzyme secretion is required for the extracellular degradation of organic macromolecules for the nutrition and growth of all filamentous fungi.

In contrast to the secretory pattern of the lytic enzymes, the secretion of polyphenol oxidase by *Ggt* on LB agar is characterized by diffusion of the enzyme into the agar producing a wide band of activity (DMOP as substrate) extending 10-15 mm beyond the margin of the colony. Positive PPO patterns of the melanin variant strains are narrow rings of activity associated only with the colony margin. No PPO activity is associated with idiophasic growth regardless of pigment phenotype. This profuse secretion of PPO from nascent hyphal tips, ergo infection hyphae, would facilitate infection if *Ggt* PPO acted as a fungal virulence factor involved in countering the host plant defense response. Secreted fungal components can effect enlargement of the plant-cell-wall pore size to allow passage of high molecular weight enzymes permitting a single hypha to affect an entire group of adjacent intact cells (20). This phenomenon may permit the diffusion of PPO into the host tissue to effect detoxification of plant phenolic compounds prior to physical

contact with the hyphae. Results from *in vitro* assays indicate *Ggt* PPO is capable of counteracting two host plant defense responses via phenolic detoxification (Fig. 7) and lignin degradation (Fig. 21).

The addition of caffeic and *p*-coumaric acids to PDA was not inhibitory to the growth of either *Ggt* or MV01-W, and the growth rates of these non-pigmented strains were actually greater in the presence of these phenolic compounds. Maximum growth by *Ggt* and MV01-W in PDA supplemented with *p*-coumaric acid may be significant in the context of wheat lignin composition and biosynthesis. Grass lignin contains a comparatively high concentration of *p*-coumaric acid, the product of tyrosine ammonia lyase (TAL). TAL deamination of tyrosine to form *p*-coumaric acid is unique to grass lignin. The secretion of phenolic (*p*-coumaric acid) detoxifying enzymes (PPO) may be required for fungal virulence. The growth of the melanized variants, MV01 and MV02, was significantly inhibited by the added phenolics and may be correlated to a decrease in PPO secretion due to increased pigmentation (Fig. 11).

The enzymatic oxidation of fungitoxic plant phenolic compounds by fungal PPOs yields quinones which in turn are inhibitory to many enzymes. However, copper-proteins are more resistant to inactivation than are iron-proteins (204). Plant peroxidase, the enzyme that catalyzes the polymerization of the monolignol precursors into lignin, is an iron protein and is susceptible to inactivation by quinones. The production of quinones by *Ggt* PPO may effectively remove the toxic phenolic compounds via oxidation and inhibit lignin biosynthesis via peroxidase inactivation and depletion of precursors.

The mechanism by which *Ggt* effects penetration of the wheat cortical lignitubers has not been elucidated, however, positive decolorization of Poly B-411 suggests *Ggt* PPO is capable of lignin depolymerization. Attempts to induce PPO secretion in *Ggt* with protein synthesis inhibitors were unsuccessful, even though it is possible with another ascomycete, *Neurospora crassa*. *Ggt* is the first ascomycete induced to secrete PPO with 2,5-xylydine (27). The induction of PPO (laccase) secretion with 2,5-xylydine was previously associated only with the white-rot basidiomycetes capable of lignin mineralization. Similarity in induction response to 2,5-xylydine suggests function similarity for *Ggt* PPO and laccase of the white-rot Basidiomycetes.

Polyphenol Oxidase Characterization

The *Ggt* polyphenol oxidase characterized in this study is very much like a fungal laccase in substrate specificity, sensitivity to oxidation inhibitors, requirement for copper and induction of secretion with 2,5-xylydine. The laccase characteristic that could not be demonstrated was absorption at 600 nm due to the presence of a Type 1 Cu^{2+} giving the enzymes their blue color. The laccases of Ascomycetes and Basidiomycetes share many physical characteristics and the molecular weight, degree of glycosylation, and pH optimum of *Ggt* PPO is not more like one group than the other. Laccase preparations from various fungal sources indicate molecular weights range from 64,000 to 140,000. An exception is the laccase from the ascomycete *Podospira anserina* which is a 390-kDa oligomer (Laccase I) consisting of two 80-kDa subunits (Laccases III and IV) (77). The

peptide composition for most laccases consist of a single polypeptide of about 540-570 amino acids (50, 55, 92, 93, 127, 134, 187, 206, 235) and is consistent with the molecular weight of the deglycosylated *Ggt* PPO at 60,000. The major reason for the observed molecular weight differences between fungal laccases is the carbohydrate that ranges from 7% to 80% (197). This carbohydrate moiety of the glycoprotein renders the enzyme resistant to proteolytic attack (270) and may enable fungal polyphenol oxidases to function in the hostile environment of the host.

Pathogenicity and Enhanced Pigmentation

The *in vivo* pathogenicity assays clearly demonstrate a significant inverse correlation between pigmentation and pathogenicity. The shoot mass of plants infected with MV01 or MV02 was not significantly different from that of the uninfected control, whereas the white derivatives regained the virulent phenotype concomitant with the loss of enhanced pigmentation (Fig 22). The lengths of root stelar lesions in plants infected with *Ggt*, MV01-W and MV02-W are underestimated (Fig. 24) due to difficulty in recovery of the severely damaged root systems, but lesion lengths are significantly greater in the non-melanized strains.

The ectotrophic growth habits of the five strains appeared identical, with equal capacity to produce pigmented runner hyphae on the rhizoplane within the same time frame. Differences in strain virulence become evident only during the tissue invasive phase of infection that requires the secretion of lytic enzymes for the extracellular degradation of plant cell wall components and the secretion of PPO for the detoxification of plant phenolic compounds. The cryostat sections clearly

illustrate the lack of stelar lignification and colonization of the stele in roots displaying disease symptoms (Fig. 25). The root cortex senesces in wheat seedlings in the absence of disease (105, 109) and the presence of hyphal elements in the cortex will not elicit take-all symptoms. Normal lignification of the wheat root occurs between 4 and 9 days after germination, no lignin is detected prior to day 4 (144). This lignin deposition time-course and the histopathology displayed in the root cryosections may indicate virulent *Gaeumannomyces* can effect colonization of the root stele by preventing lignin maturation.

Protein Secretion and Pathogenicity

The effects of melanization on protein secretion efficiency of plant-cell-wall degrading enzymes (Tab. 1) and polyphenol oxidase (Fig. 11 and Fig. 12) indicate that a decrease in pathogenicity was directly related to expression of the enhanced pigment phenotype. These results were used to infer a direct relationship between protein secretion (PPO activity) and pathogenicity (root stelar lesion length, root and shoot mass). This direct relationship suggests that melanization resulting in the enhanced pigment phenotype of MV01 and MV02 is responsible for decreased pathogenicity resulting from decreased fungal protein secretion efficiency.

CONCLUSIONS

The enhanced pigment phenotype occurs as a spontaneous event and the melanin variant is characterized by the production of melanized hyphae, the ability to produce phialospores and abundant aerial hyphal elements, and the progressive loss of the ability to undergo meiosis. The pleiomorphic phenotype may result from a single genetic alteration.

The dependence of protein secretion on culture age, the visual appearance of enhanced pigmentation and the inhibition of DHN-melanin biosynthesis indicated that melanization resulting in the enhanced pigment phenotype was responsible for decreased efficiency of protein secretion. The enhanced pigment phenotype was also directly correlated to decreased pathogenicity. These direct relationships suggested that the enhanced pigment phenotype was responsible for decreased pathogenicity due to decreased efficiency of fungal protein secretion.

The laccase-like polyphenol oxidase secreted by *G. graminis* var. *tritici* may function as a virulence factor via plant phenolic detoxification and lignin degradation.

The ability of a virulent *Gaeumannomyces graminis* var. *tritici* strain to reversibly express *Phialophora*-like characteristics illustrates the difficulty in resolving classification questions among members of the *Gaeumannomyces-Phialophora* complex. Switching between virulent/avirulent phenotypes may play a

role in establishing an ecological balance between host and parasite. This balance, exemplified in native grasslands, may be perturbed in monoculture.

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