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A Chemical Model of Catechol-*O*-methyltransferase. Methylation of 3,4-Dihydroxybenzaldehyde in Aqueous Solution*

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Catechol-*O*-methyltransferase (COMT, EC 2.1.1.6) catalyzes the transfer of the methyl group of *S*-adenosyl-L-methionine (SAM) to the phenolic group of catechol or substituted catechols. It requires divalent metal ions such as Mg^{2+} for the catalysis. The *O*-methylation *in vivo* occurs almost exclusively on the *m*-hydroxyl group of the catechols, but *in vitro* it occurs at one of the *m*- or *p*-hydroxyl groups.

To elucidate the role of metal ions in *O*-methylation of catechols, the reaction of 3,4-dihydroxybenzaldehyde (LH_2) and dimethylsulfate (DMS) to form the *m*- and *p*-*O*-methylated products (vanillin and isovanillin, respectively) was studied. The kinetics of the reaction in aqueous 2-(*N*-morpholino)ethanesulfonate buffer in the presence and the absence of metal ions were measured. The products were determined by means of high-performance liquid chromatography. The *O*-methylation occurred principally at the *p*-hydroxyl group in the absence of divalent metal ions. In the presence of Cu(II), the *m*-methylation was promoted and became predominant. Zn(II) showed a similar but less pronounced effect. The effects were explained in terms of the complex formation of LH_2 . The second order rate constants for the *m*- and *p*-methylation of the species, LH_2 , CuL and CuL_2^{2-} by DMS were calculated. The values and their ratio for the *m*-/*p*-reactions increased in the order of $LH_2 < CuL < CuL_2^{2-}$. The reaction may serve as a chemical model for COMT.

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