Proton uptake mechanism of bacteriorhodopsin as determined by
time-resolved stroboscopic-FTIR-spectroscopy

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ABSTRACT  Bacteriorhodopsin’s proton uptake reaction mechanism in the M to BR reaction pathway was investigated by time-resolved FTIR spectroscopy under physiological conditions (293 K, pH 6.5, 1 M KCl). The time resolution of a conventional fast-scan FTIR spectrometer was improved from 10 ms to 100 μs, using the stroboscopic FTIR technique. Simultaneously, absorbance changes at 11 wavelengths in the visible between 410 and 680 nm were recorded. Global fit analysis with sums of exponentials of both the infrared and visible absorbance changes yields four apparent rate constants, $k_2 = 0.3$ ms, $k_4 = 2.3$ ms, $k_5 = 6.9$ ms, $k_6 = 30$ ms, for the M to BR reaction pathway. Although the rise of the N and O intermediates is dominated by the same apparent rate constant ($k_2$), protein reactions can be attributed to either the N or the O intermediate by comparison of data sets taken at 273 and 293 K. Conceptually, the Schiff base has to be oriented in its deprotonated state from the proton donor (asp-85) to the proton acceptor (asp-96) in the $M_1$ to $M_0$ transition. However, experimentally two different M intermediates are not resolved, and $M_2$ and N are merged. From the results the following conclusions are drawn: (a) the main structural change of the protein backbone, indicated by amide I, amide II difference bands, takes place in the M to N (conventionally $M_2$) transition. This reaction is proposed to be involved in the “reset switch” of the pump, (b) In the M to N (conventionally $M_2$) transition, most likely, asp-85’s carbonyl frequency shifts from 1,762 to 1,753 cm$^{-1}$ and persists in O. Protonation of asp-85 explains the red-shift of the absorbance maximum in O. (c) The catalytic proton uptake binding site asp-96 is deprotonated in the M to N transition and is reprotonated in O.

INTRODUCTION

The membrane protein bacteriorhodopsin of Halobacterium halobium acts as a light driven proton pump (for a recent review see reference 1). Several approaches have been made to investigate the photocycle. Most of them are based on absorbance change measurements in the UV visible spectral range between 300 and 700 nm (for recent articles see references 2, 3 and papers cited therein). Absorbance changes in this region are due to changes of the retinal and its microenvironment. Detailed information about the chromophore structure on the single bond level is yielded by resonance-Raman (RR) experiments (for review see references 4, 5). Measurements of infrared absorbance changes gave insight into not only the chromophore but also the protein backbone and side-group reactions (for review see reference 6). A number of absorbance bands in the RR and IR spectra are assigned to vibrations of specific molecular groups using isotopically labeled and site-specific mutated BR molecules (4–9). The time course of the charge displacement during the photocycle was monitored by electric charge measurements (for review see reference 10).

The originally proposed unidirectional photocycle of BR, without significant back reactions, cannot explain all the experimental results (11). The biphasic decay of the blue shifted M intermediate alone has to include back reactions, branching, or parallel cycles. As a consequence, there is always a larger number of intrinsic rate constants than there are apparent, i.e., measurable, constants. This leads to a multitude of model schemes which connect these intermediates with first order reactions. Two principal different proposals are given: parallel photocycles originating from different BR ground states (12–14) or a linear photocycle with significant back reactions particularly during the M-to-BR-reaction pathway (3, 15).

We have measured the absorbance changes during the bacteriorhodopsin photocycle between 1,800 and 1,000 cm$^{-1}$ with a spectral resolution of 4 cm$^{-1}$ using the stroboscopic FTIR-technique (16, 17). We achieved a time resolution of 100 μs compared with the 10 ms in an earlier approach using the rapid scan technique (18). Importantly, in the experiments described here, the salt concentration of the sample is drastically increased (1 M KCl), compared with the other approaches (17, 18, 24). Simultaneously, absorbance changes in the visible spectral range were monitored in order to compare the IR data with other experiments (19). The absorbance data of both spectral ranges are analyzed by a Global-Fit procedure that assumes first order reactions, i.e., the data are approximated by sums of exponentials yielding apparent rate constants (18). The implications of our results for photocycle models and the proton uptake mechanism are discussed.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Sample preparation

Purple membrane (PM) was isolated as described in reference 20. 440 μl of PM suspension with OD 0.5, 20 mM KCl and buffered to pH 6.5 with Hepes buffer were dried on two CaF2 windows under a nitrogen stream. The two films were cooled and subsequently rehydrated. They
then were pressed together separated by a 2.5 μm spacer and placed in a
domestic sample chamber. The ionic strength in this preparation was ~3 M. Photocycle kinetics of this sample were taken at seven
wavelengths in the visible spectral region at room temperature and
compared with those of a suspension. Agreement between the photocycle
kinetics of the two sample preparations indicates sufficient hydra-
tion.

**Measuring conditions**

At 293 K absorbance changes in the IR from 1,800 to 1,000 cm⁻¹ and
at 11 wavelengths between 410 and 680 nm were recorded simulta-
neously. The absorbance change at 410 nm was measured every 30 min
as a control during the 7-h measuring time.

**Stroboscopic FTIR**

The data acquisition for this time-resolved FTIR technique is done by
the fast-scan mode (18). By merely introducing software changes, the
stroboscope method allows our experimental set up to achieve a time
resolution of 110 microseconds. The idea (21) is this: if it takes a time T
for the absorbance change to be registered for a complete interferogram of
length X, it only takes T/N time to record an X’/N’ segment of the interferogram. Successive experi-
ments record all N different interferogram segments and software sorts
and combines these segments into the appropriate interferograms with
a T/N time resolution. Fig. 1 illustrates an absorbance change in the
visible (VIS) signals protein activity. We divide the interferograms of
length X into ten (N = 10) segments. The start of the nth interferogram
relative to the excitation is at a time:

\[
\frac{n \cdot X}{10}, \quad n = 1, 2, \ldots
\]

The newly rearranged interferogram (A² B³ C⁴ D⁵ E⁶ F⁷ G⁸ H⁹ I¹⁰) has 10 times
the original time resolution (see Fig. 1). Because each measured inter-
ferogram contains several useful segments (e.g., B² in interferogram 2,
C³ in interferogram 3) the multiplex advantage persists although to a
lesser degree as N increases. The loss of the multiplex advantage makes
this method more time consuming with increasing time resolution.
Importantly, the Jaquinot advantage is still present, thus requiring less
averages for each segment than with dispersive instruments. The stro-
boscopic FTIR technique requires a high degree of stability of all parts
of the apparatus. Drifts in one component, e.g., the flash intensity, the
detector response, or the BR sample, would lead to artifacts in the
rarranged interferogram. FT transforms such interferogram incon-
stances into artificial structures in the spectra which in the worst cases
render them useless or cause misinterpretations. Another precondition
is a constant mirror velocity during the data acquisition.

The interferograms contain a superimposed intensity change indi-
cated by the laser flash (Fig. 2, a and b). These changes seem to come
from photocycle reactions, because only phototoxic PM, but not dried
or bleached PM, caused this signal. Furthermore, the time course of the
intensity change qualitatively exhibits the same temperature depen-
dence as the photocycle. A linear superposition of all absorbance
changes in the IR can be excluded, because it cannot be described as a
sum of exponentials, whereas all absorbance changes in the IR can be
fitted well by such functions. This intensity change results in the super-
position of the interferograms with a periodic function, leading to
artificial bands in the difference spectra. The interferograms are
corrected such that the artifacts only cover a small region in the differ-
ence spectra with spectral width of ~10 cm⁻¹. Since this distortion in
the interferograms is periodic, the artifacts are also periodic. The fewer
the artifacts, the further apart they lie. It is easy to calculate the position
in the spectrum at which they are expected. Under our conditions, they
were separated by 658 cm⁻¹ resulting in only one artifact at 1,316 cm⁻¹
between 1,800 and 1,000 cm⁻¹. As a control FTIR measurements were
performed at 288 K on the same sample applying fast-scan and strobo-
scope FTIR. They confirmed the artifact at 1,316 cm⁻¹ as the only one
in the stroboscopic measurement. These results prove that it is possible

**FIGURE 1** Scheme stroboscope technique. The reaction is indicated by an absorbance change in the visible (VIS). In 11 succeeding experiments interferograms are measured (IR) which are shifted relative to the VIS signal. New interferograms (lower part) with increased time resolution are composed from segments of the measured interferograms.
Global-Fit-Evaluation

The time course of the absorbance changes in the visible and the infrared were analyzed by a global fitting (35) with sums of \( nr \) exponentials with the rate constants \( k_i \) to the data

\[
\Delta A(\nu) = \sum_{i=1}^{nr} a_i(\nu) e^{-k_i t} + a_0.
\]

In this analysis, the weighted sum of squared differences between the fit with \( nr \) rate constants \( k_i \) and data points at \( nw \) measured wavelengths \( \nu \), and \( nt \) time \( t_j \),

\[
f = \sum_{i=1}^{nw} \sum_{j=1}^{nt} \left[ w_j(\nu_i) \right]^2 \left[ \Delta A_{\text{measured}}(\nu_i, t_j) - \sum_{i=1}^{nr} a_i(\nu_i) e^{-k_i t_j} + a_0(\nu_i) \right]^2
\]

is minimized in one procedure assuming the rate constants are the same for all spectral elements. The weights \( w_j(\nu_i) \) are chosen with respect to the estimated noise at each wavelength (18). This is important for IR data because the amplitudes of the noise differ by more than one order of magnitude over the observed spectral range. The criteria for the significance of an additional rate constant were: (a) the sum of squared differences between fit and data of all wavenumbers is lowered significantly; (b) the sum of squared differences between fit and data of some neighboring wavenumbers is lowered significantly; (c) after addition of a new rate constant the residual plot of one or more wavenumbers is significantly moved towards a random distribution.

The last conditions are important because the improvement depends on the signal to noise ratio (SNR). Sometimes the overall sum of squares happens to improve only by a small amount. In this case an additional rate constant is required at some wavenumbers for a high SNR, while the bulk part of the spectrum can be described with fewer parameters. Therefore, not only the complete infrared difference spectra were fitted, but smaller segments were also individually fitted. By doing this we kept the kinetics of large bands with high SNR from dominating those of small bands with possibly different rate constants.

RESULTS

Not only the pH of a BR sample but also its ionic strength affects the photocycle kinetics (22). Experiments in the visible showed that the amplitudes of the exponentials are very sensitive to the salt and buffer contents while the rate constants remain rather stable between pH 5 and 7 at KCl concentrations between 0 and 4 M. In an amplitude spectrum the amplitude \( a_i(\nu) \) of a specific rate constant is plotted as a function of wavenumbers. The M decay turned out to be monophasic at low ionic strength and biphasic at high ionic strength. The ratio of the two decay rate amplitudes depends on pH and ionic strength. In a hydrated film it is more difficult to adjust these parameters to desired values with a reasonable accuracy than in a suspension. In contrast to earlier experiments (17, 18, 24), in this work we used BR samples with high salt and buffer contents, as described in Materials and Methods. The kinetics of the films are identical to those of suspensions at pH 7 in 1 M KCl solution.

Absorbance changes in the visible

In the visible spectral range, absorbance changes were measured at 410, 430, 460, 500, 530, 570, 590, 620, 640, 660, and 680 nm. The global fit analysis gives five rate constants (in agreement with references 2 and 18): \( k_3 = 70 \mu s \), \( k_2 = 300 \mu s \), \( k_1 = 2.3 \) ms, \( k_5 = 6.9 \) ms, and \( k_4 = 30 \) ms. Ordering \( i \) of the rate constants \( k_i \) is according to their significance in the fit calculation (i.e., the fit procedure provides \( k_3 \), before \( k_4 \)). Due to their faster time scale, the K-L transition \( (k_1 = 1 \mu s) \) and the biphasic M rise \( (k_2 = 30 \mu s, k_3 = 70 \mu s) \) are not resolved. The absorbance band at 410 nm, mainly describing the concentration of the M intermediate, rises with \( k_4 \) and decays with \( k_3 \), \( k_4 \), and \( k_5 \) (Fig. 3, a and c). It should be noted that in contrast to the measurement at 273 K without salt (18), \( k_4 \) now contributes significantly to the M decay at 273 and 293 K. The concentration of the O intermediate is largely represented by the absorbance change at 680 nm (Fig. 3, b and d). Comparing the absorbance changes at 273 and 293 K indicates a significant increase of the apparent O concentration (about four times) at 293 K. The rise of O is dominated by \( k_4 \), its decay by \( k_3 \). At 293 K, an additional rate, \( k_7 \), contributes significantly to O's reaction kinetics.
Amplitude spectra

The amplitude spectra of the apparent rate constants represent mixtures of difference spectra between the BR ground-state and the different intermediates. The contribution of an intermediate to an amplitude spectrum depends on the contribution of the corresponding apparent rate constant to the rise or decay of the intermediate.

Since $k_3$ describes M decay, N decay, and O decay, the $k_3$ amplitude spectrum is the sum of $\alpha_3 \cdot (\text{BR-M}) + \beta_3 \cdot (\text{BR-N}) + \gamma_3 \cdot (\text{BR-O})$ difference spectra (Fig. 4a and b). The coefficients $\alpha_i$, $\beta_i$, and $\gamma_i$ depend on pH, temperature, and ionic strength. As indicated by the small amplitude at 660 nm, the $k_3$ amplitude spectrum at 273 K represents mainly a mixture of BR-M and BR-N, and at 293 K BR-O also contributes significantly. Due to the overlap of BR and N absorbance bands around 570 nm, the contribution of N is not as clear as those of M (at 410 nm) and of O (at 660 nm). The wavelength dependence of the $k_3$ amplitude spectrum is similar to the $k_3$ amplitude spectrum (data not shown). At 293 K its amplitudes are very small but at 273 K they are about half of $k_3$.

Since $k_4$ describes M decay, N and O rise to the $k_4$ amplitude spectra, $\alpha_4 \cdot (\text{BR-M}) - \beta_4 \cdot (\text{BR-N}) - \gamma_4 \cdot (\text{BR-O})$ difference spectra contribute (Fig. 4c and d). N and O contribute to $k_4$ amplitude spectra with negative amplitudes. Again, O contributes at 293 K much more than at 273 K, as can be seen at 660 nm (Fig. 4c and d).

IR-absorbance-changes

In Fig. 5, a three-dimensional graph of the IR absorbance changes at 293 K is shown. In order to smooth the data the fitted curves are presented. In Fig. 6, the difference spectra, measured at 200 $\mu$s (a) and at 6 ms (b) after the laser flash, are shown. The first represents mainly a BR-M difference spectrum with a small L contribution, whereas the second contains N and O contributions.

The fit of the complete IR difference spectra at 293 K clearly requires three time constants: 100 $\mu$s, 2.4 ms, and 8.1 ms. The addition of a fourth constant left the two faster unchanged and splits the 8.1-ms rate into two constants of 7.4 and 28.6 ms. The 28.6-ms time constant improves the fit significantly between 1,203 and 1,199 cm$^{-1}$. Addition of a fifth constant, 300 $\mu$s, left the others unchanged and resulted in an improvement between 1,511 and 1,501 cm$^{-1}$. These five constants seem to be significant not only because of the excellent agreement with those found in the visible (Table 1) but also because of the stability of the fit results. Addition of redundant rates in most cases results in degeneration of rate constants or in a strong dependence on the starting values.

Subsequently, nine smaller segments of the IR spec-
Amplitude spectra of the rates $k_3$ at 273 K (a) and 293 K (b) and the rate $k_4$ at 273 K (c) and 293 K (d).

trum were fitted in order to separate regions dominated by the large chromophore bands from those reflecting mainly smaller protein absorbance changes. The regions selected were 1,790–1,660 cm$^{-1}$ (carbonyl stretching vibrations), 1,691–1,660 cm$^{-1}$, 1,670–1,650 cm$^{-1}$ (amide-I vibration of the protein backbone), 1,650–1,534 cm$^{-1}$ ($\text{C} = \text{NH}^+$ and ethylenic-stretching vibrations of the chromophore, amide-II vibration of the protein backbone), 1,590–1,480 cm$^{-1}$ (ethylenic-stretching vibrations of the chromophore and amide-II vibration of the protein backbone), 1,580–1,545 cm$^{-1}$ (ethylenic-stretching vibrations of the chromophore and amide-II vibration of the protein backbone), 1,500–1,320 cm$^{-1}$ (protein side groups, chromophore and backbone vibra-

Three-dimensional graph of the absorbance changes in the infrared spectral region between 1,800 and 1,000 cm$^{-1}$. Absorbance bands of the BR groundstate are negative and intermediate bands are positive. The time resolution is 100 $\mu$s. In order to smooth the data the fitted curves are shown.
were flash (ions), 1,306–1,230 cm⁻¹ (protein sidegroups, chromophore and backbone vibrations), 1,230–1,140 cm⁻¹ (C—C-stretching vibrations of the chromophore). Depending on S/N, between three and five rate constants were required to fit the data in these segments (see Table 1). The five constants were necessary only between 1,590 and 1,480 cm⁻¹ and 1,230 and 1,140 cm⁻¹. In all cases the same rate constants were found as in the visible (410–660 nm). No additional rate constant appeared that could be assigned to a protein reaction which would run asynchronously with the chromophore reactions.

At 1,505 cm⁻¹, representing the ethylenic stretching vibration of the retinal, the O concentration can be followed (Fig. 7a and b) (30). Its time dependence agrees with the absorbance change at 660 nm in the visible spectral range. The absorbance change, small at 273 K due to low O concentration, is pronounced at 293 K (Fig. 7a and b). Its rise is dominated by  k₄ and its decay by  k₃. At 293 K, as shown in the visible Fig. 3d,  k₇ contributes significantly (Fig. 7b).  k₇ indicates O's backreaction to the preceding intermediates.

The ethylenic stretching vibration of N is seen in resonance Raman experiments at 1,530 and 1,548 cm⁻¹ (14, 15). In the infrared difference spectra, in addition, absorbance changes of the amide-II vibration contribute at 1,555 cm⁻¹ (18). This may explain the presence of an absorbance band at 1,555 cm⁻¹ already in the M intermediate. The further rise of the absorbance changes at 1,555 cm⁻¹ is dominated by  k₄ decay by  k₃ (Fig. 7c and d). At 293 K,  k₇ also contributes to the rise of this band (Fig. 7d).

Additional absorbance changes representing the concentration of the N intermediate are given in Fig. 8. The absorbance change at 1,186 cm⁻¹ represents the reproto nation of the Schiff base after M formation (9, 14, 15, 17, 18, 34). Its rise is dominated by  k₄ (Fig. 8a and b). At 273 K, at least, it represents mainly the concentration of N, with a minor contribution of O. Measurements at high pH at which the N intermediate accumulates show that the absorbance change at 1,385 cm⁻¹ is indicative of N (Gerwert and Souvignier, manuscript in preparation). The rise of this absorbance change is dominated by  k₄, decay by  k₃ (Fig. 8c and d).

In summary, the measurements in the IR indicate that the rise of the N and the O intermediate is dominated by the same rate constant  k₄. It seems that  k₈ contributes to the decay to preceding intermediates of O and rise of N.

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**FIGURE 6** Difference spectra taken 200 μs (a) and 6 ms (b) after the laser flash are shown.

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**TABLE 1** Time constants  τ, yielded by global fit analysis in the visible between 410 and 680 nm, in the infrared between 1,800–1,000 cm⁻¹ and for different spectral segments;  τ₁ = 0.1 ms,  τ₂ = 0.3 ms,  τ₃ = 2.3 ms,  τ₄ = 6.9 ms,  τ₅ = 30 ms
This can be explained by a fast N ⇆ O equilibrium reaction (3, 26). Alternatively, parallel or branching reactions in M could explain these results.

Amplitude spectra in the IR

The $k_3$ amplitude spectrum at 273 K (Fig. 9 a) represents mostly a BR-M difference spectrum with contributions of BR-N. It resembles the so-called “BR-M” difference spectrum obtained under “steady-state illumination.” At 293 K (Fig. 9 b), in addition, O contributes, as already shown in the visible’s $k_3$-amplitude spectrum (compare with Fig. 4). The bands characteristic of O are at 1,508 cm⁻¹, a broad band at around 1,170 cm⁻¹ and a carbonyl band at 1,732 cm⁻¹ (Fig. 9 b).

The $k_4$ amplitude spectrum at 273 K contains almost no O contribution (Fig. 9 c), as the corresponding spectrum in the visible indicates. It represents absorbance changes in the BR- to N reaction. It is a superposition of BR-N and BR-M difference spectra $\alpha_4$ (BR-M) – $\beta_4$ (BR-N) in which $\beta \gg \alpha$, i.e., the BR-N difference spectrum dominates. Absorbance bands appearing in N are negative and M bands disappearing in N are positive (compare with Fig. 4 c). The characteristics of N are the retinal vibrations at 1,186 cm⁻¹, the band at 1,555 cm⁻¹, the carbonyl vibrations appearing at 1,755 cm⁻¹ and disappearing at 1,762 cm⁻¹ and disappearing at 1,742 cm⁻¹, the band appearing around 1,396 cm⁻¹ and the large amide-I and amide-II difference bands at 1,650 cm⁻¹/1,670 cm⁻¹ and 1,555 cm⁻¹, respectively. The $k_4$ amplitude spectrum at 293 K exhibits in addition to these N-specific bands (Fig. 9 d), O-specific bands (compare also with Fig. 4 d): retinal vibrations around 1,170 cm⁻¹ (C—C) and 1,505 cm⁻¹ (C═C) (30). The carbonyl vibration at 1,742 cm⁻¹ is no longer pronounced and therefore seems to disappear in N but reappear in O. An unidentified carbonyl vibration appears at 1,732 cm⁻¹ in O. Interestingly, the 1,755-cm⁻¹ asp-carbonyl vibration, more pronounced at 293 K compared with 273 K, indicates protonation of the corresponding asp in O.

DISCUSSION

Photocycle

The global fit analysis proves that four apparent rate constants $k_7 = 0.3$ ms, $k_4 = 2.3$ ms, $k_5 = 6.9$ ms, and $k_6 = 30$ ms are sufficient to describe the M to BR reaction pathway under physiological conditions. These results agree with earlier findings obtained on hydrated films without salt and buffer (18). The same rate constants describe absorbance changes in the visible and in the different infrared spectral regions, that are indicative of chromophore, side group, and backbone vibrations. This implies a synchronization between reactions in the different molecular groups of the protein not only in the
ms (18) but also (at least) in the 100-μs time frame under physiological conditions.

In a unidirectional photocycle the apparent rates would correspond to the natural rate constants. For bacteriorhodopsin’s photocycle, an unidirectional scheme must be excluded and the apparent rates are functions of several natural rate constants. Therefore, the problem is experimentally underdetermined, i.e., the photocycle model has more parameters than are experimentally accessible. Nevertheless, we will still give the minimal requirements of a photocycle model describing the M to BR reaction pathway. A reasonable model should be able to reproduce the apparent rate constants found in the global fit analysis. Furthermore, the time course of the M concentration should more or less coincide with the absorbance change at 410 nm, that of the O concentration with the absorbance change at 680 nm, and that of N with the absorbance change at 1,385 cm⁻¹ (Gerwert and Souvignier, manuscript in preparation). The second of the rates for biphasic M rise is too fast and cannot be experimentally resolved (2). The L to M transition will be discussed elsewhere (Souvignier and Gerwert, manuscript in preparation). The rise of the N and O intermediates should be dominated by k₄. The N and O intermediates should be connected by a fast equilibrium reaction which is reflected by the rate constant k₅. Here we discuss a model with a minimum number of free parameters. It should be noted that more complex models which contain more free parameters are also able to explain our results.

Even the simple scheme:

\[ M \rightarrow N \rightleftharpoons 0 \rightarrow BR, \]

can simulate an O concentration which resembles the absorbance change at 680 nm, an M concentration which resembles the absorbance change at 410 nm, and an N concentration which resembles the absorbance change at 1,385 cm⁻¹ at low salt concentrations. A possible set of natural time constants \( k_{op} \) which yield the experimentally observed apparent rate constants \( k_i \) are given in Table 2. The amplitudes of the apparent rates indicating their contributions to the respective intermediate are given in the table. The data set reveals an interesting point: even if M decays directly to N, its apparent decay is only described by \( k_3 \), whereas \( k_4 \), which dominates the N and O rise, does not contribute to M’s decay. It would have been very difficult to arrive at this conclusion from purely intuitive reasoning. This model scheme clarifies a long discussed ambiguity: because the rise of the 1,755-cm⁻¹ asp-carbonyl band is dominated by \( k_4 \) but the decay of the 1,762 cm⁻¹ asp-carbonyl band is described only by \( k_5 \) at low salt concentration, it was concluded that one of two possibilities had to be hold. Either they belong to two different aspartic acids in a linear photocycle (7, 25), or, if not, there must exist parallel photocy-
cles (24). The solution outlined here illustrates clearly (in contrast to references 7, 24, 25) that both the 1,762 cm\(^{-1}\) and 1,755-cm\(^{-1}\) asp-carbonyl vibrations can be assigned to the same aspartic acid in a linear photocycle even if the rate constant describing disappearance of the 1,762-cm\(^{-1}\) band, which is connected to M decay, is different from the rate constant describing appearance at 1,755 cm\(^{-1}\), which is connected to N rise.

At high salt concentration the M intermediate and the 1,762-cm\(^{-1}\) band decay biphasically with \(k_3\) and \(k_4\), i.e., having a rate constant \((k_4)\) with which the 1,755-cm\(^{-1}\) band appears. This supports the conclusion that the asp-85-carbonyl vibration shifts during the M to N transition from 1,762 to 1,755 cm\(^{-1}\). A frequency shift of asp-85 from 1,765 to 1,755 cm\(^{-1}\) indicates its environmental change in the M- to N transition.

However, the biphasic M decay cannot be described by the above model. Extending the scheme to the next simpler solution:

\[
M \rightleftharpoons N \rightleftharpoons O \rightarrow BR,
\]

can reproduce the biphasic M decay with a large \(k_3\) contribution. One possible set of intrinsic time constants that reproduces the apparent time constants is given in Table 3. The corresponding concentration dependence of M, N, and O is given in Fig. 10. Also, the simultaneous rise of N and O with \(k_4\) and the amplitudes of \(k_7\) are correctly described by this scheme.

The models discussed do not explain the slow rate constant \(k_6\). At physiological conditions its amplitude is very small, and therefore negligible, but at high pH (data not shown) or at low temperature its contribution is of the same order of magnitude as \(k_4\) and \(k_3\). To explain \(k_6\), an additional intermediate in the photocycle has to be introduced. Model simulations with this intermediate situated between O and BR failed to reproduce the experimental data. In this case, the amplitudes calculated for \(k_6\) are too large by at least one order of magnitude. Alternatively, putting the new intermediate in an additional branch, as shown in the following scheme, describes the measured data including \(k_6\) and its amplitudes

\[
M \rightleftharpoons N \rightleftharpoons O \rightarrow BR,
\]

Alternatively, the rate constant \(k_6\) can be explained by parallel cycles with spectroscopically very similar intermediates and similar intrinsic rate constants for the major part of the reaction (12–14). However, it is not clear if this branching is relevant for the proton-pump mechanism.

In summary, at 20°C, pH 7, and high salt concentration the M to BR reaction can more or less be described by an

\[
M \rightleftharpoons N \rightleftharpoons O \rightarrow BR
\]

reaction scheme which agrees with earlier conclusions (3, 15, 26). However, we cannot exclude parallel photo-
cycles of different BR groundstate molecules. Nevertheless, under physiological conditions we have presented a sequential scheme with back reactions that can satisfactorily describe the observed multiexponential kinetics. At lower temperature, lower salt concentration, or lower/higher pH, branching or parallel reactions have to be considered to explain $k_i$.

Because $k_3$ dominates the rise of N and O, and $k_5$ dominates their decay, it is reasonable to assume that $\beta_3 \approx \beta_4$ and $\gamma_4 \approx \gamma_3$. In this case the addition of the amplitude spectra $k_4 + k_5$ with $k_4 (= \alpha_4 (BR-M) - \beta_4 (BR-N) - \gamma_4 (BR-O))$ and $k_5 (= \alpha_5 (BR-M) + \beta_5 (BR-N) + \gamma_5 (BR-O))$ represents a pure BR-M-difference spectrum (Fig. 11 a, visible; Fig. 11 b, infrared). Comparison with Fig. 9 d shows that the so-called "BR-M" difference spectrum obtained under steady-state illumination represents mainly BR-M with a minor contribution of the BR-N difference spectra (9). Deviations to the low temperature BR-M difference spectrum (Fig. 11 c) are caused by N contributions, but do not verify, as recently proposed, a second M intermediate (23). Interestingly, a comparison of the low temperature BR-M with the "pure" room temperature BR-M difference spectrum shows mainly deviations in the amide-I (1,650/1,660 cm$^{-1}$) and amide-II regions (1,550 cm$^{-1}$). The conformational change of the backbone is frozen at the low temperature (compare Fig. 11, b and c). This seems to prevent the reprotonation of the Schiff base, stops the photocycle in M, and thereby shuts off proton pump activity. These conclusions agree with references 23, 31.

In order to yield vectoriality, conceptionally, two different intermediates have to exist: (a) one with access of the $C=NH^+$ to the proton release pathway; and (b) one with access of the $C=N$ to the proton uptake pathway.

In addition, the amplitudes of the apparent time constants, i.e., their contribution to the respective intermediate kinetic, are given.

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<th>$k_7$</th>
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<td>-0.01</td>
<td>-0.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>-0.17</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition, the amplitudes of the apparent time constants, i.e., their contribution to the respective intermediate kinetic, are given.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>$k_5$</th>
<th>$k_7$</th>
<th>$k_4$</th>
<th>$k_3$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$\tau_{1/2}$ d. $k_i$</td>
<td>0.07 ms</td>
<td>0.31 ms</td>
<td>2.2 ms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>-1.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>-0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>-0.20</td>
<td>0.17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FIGURE 10 Calculated concentration dependence of the M, N, and O intermediates of the model scheme using the given natural time constants.
This proton pump's reset switch was assigned either to the C$_{14}$—C$_{15}$ single bond isomerization (32) or to a pure protein conformational change (33). Mechanistically, it was signifies as an M$_1$ to M$_2$ transition (3, 7, 32) or attributed to the L to M transition (33). Our results do not indicate the existence of two different M intermediates at room temperature, and model simulation of the data also do not suggest such possibilities. The low temperature BR-M difference spectrum, which differs from the room temperature BR-M only in its protein configuration, could represent an M$_1$ but is experimentally not observed at room temperature. Nevertheless, conceptionally, there have to exist two M states, one with orientation of the Schiff base to the proton acceptor asp 85 and one with orientation of the Schiff base to the proton donor asp 96. A very fast reprotonation of the Schiff base may merge the M$_2$ and N intermediates making their experimental detection impossible.

**Proton pump model**

In the following, we attribute reactions to different intermediates to obtain a dynamic picture of the pump. Even if the N and O intermediates are connected via a fast equilibrium reaction we can still distinguish between reactions with N and as reactions from those with O, by comparing $k_4$-amplitude spectra at 273 and at 293 K (Fig. 9, c and d). The results in the visible and in the infrared indicate almost no apparent O contribution during the M to BR reaction at 273 K and a significant O contribution at 293 K.

The following conclusions can be drawn (and are illustrated in Fig. 12); (a) because the 1,742-cm$^{-1}$ band, indicative of asp-96 deprotonation (9, 18), clearly disappears in N but not in O, asp-96 deprotonates during the M to N transition and reprotonates already in the N to O transition; (b) the carbonyl vibration of asp-85 seems to shift from 1,761 cm$^{-1}$ in the M intermediate to 1,755 cm$^{-1}$ in the N and O intermediate; this indicates an environmental change of asp-85 during the M to N (conceptionally M$_2$) transition which persists in O. This conclusion is in agreement with a recent assignment of the 1,755 cm$^{-1}$ carbonyl band to asp-85 (F. Siebert, private communication). Its protonation explains the red-shift in the O intermediate, because the asp-85's counterion does not stabilize the positive chromophore charge; (c) the amide-I and II difference bands at 1,670/1,650 cm$^{-1}$ and at 1,555 cm$^{-1}$, indicative of a conformational change of the protein backbone, are the largest in N. This conformational change in the M to N transition is blocked at low temperature, at which the proton uptake is inhibited; therefore, we conclude that this conformational change is essential for the proton uptake mechanism. It takes place in the M to N (conceptionally in the M$_2$) transition, but not in the L to M as proposed by the C-T model (33). In time-resolved x-ray diffraction studies structural alterations of a few amino acid residues at both ends of the retinal helix G and between the helices E and F are observed, which might be caused by a tilt of $\alpha$-helices (27). The structural relaxation is related to the M's decay but occurs after the first phase. This result is in full agreement with the absorbance changes of the amide-I and II vibration observed here. In agreement with the diffraction studies large scale structural changes during bacteriorhodopsin's photocycle can be excluded; the IR-absorbance changes indicate involvement of only one to three residues. The time course of the structural change, clearly elucidated in the IR experiments, proves...
A further development of the stroboscopic-FTIR technique should yield a time resolution of 25 μs in the near future. This will allow us to examine the L to M reaction.

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FIGURE 12 Model of the proton-pump mechanism. After light induced C13=C14 double bond isomerization and twist around the C14=C15 single bond, the pK of the protonated Schiff base is reduced. In the L to M transition a proton is transferred from C=NH+ to asp 85. Because a proton is released in the L to M transition another proton donor group has to be involved in the proton-release mechanism (AH+). After relaxation around the light induced twist of the C14=C15 single bond and a structural change, maybe of helix G, in the M to N transition, the Schiff base can be reprotonated in the M to N transition from asp 96. Bound water molecules may be involved in the reprotonation pathway. Asp 96 is already reprotonated in the N to O transition.

that it is largest in the M to N (conventionally M2) transition and relaxes during the N to BR reaction. We conclude that the absorbance changes of the amide I and II vibrations are most likely caused by a structural backbone change close to helix G and helices F and E; (d) the broad continuum band above 1,765 cm−1 disappears in the M to N reaction. This may indicate a change in a hydrogen-bonded network, which could transport protons in an ice-like mechanism (18, 28); (e) the carbonyl vibration of an additional unidentified protonated carboxylic acid at 1,732 cm−1 appears in O.


