

Epimerization of an Ascaroside-Type Glycolipid Downstream of the Canonical β -Oxidation Cycle in the Nematode *Caenorhabditis nigoni*

Célia P. Bergame,[†] Chuanfu Dong,^{‡,||} Sylvain Sutour,[§] and Stephan H. von Reuß^{*,†,‡,§}

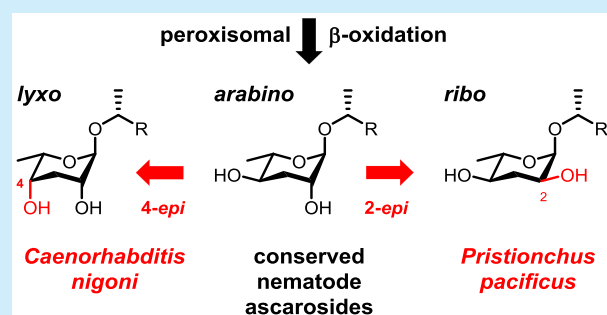
[†]Laboratory for Bioanalytical Chemistry, Institute of Chemistry, University of Neuchâtel, Avenue de Bellevaux 51, CH-2000 Neuchâtel, Switzerland

[‡]Department of Bioorganic Chemistry, Max Planck Institute for Chemical Ecology, Hans-Knöll Straße 8, D-07745 Jena, Germany

[§]Neuchâtel Platform for Analytical Chemistry (NPAC), University of Neuchâtel, Avenue de Bellevaux 51, CH-2000 Neuchâtel, Switzerland

Supporting Information

ABSTRACT: A species-specific ascaroside-type glycolipid was identified in the nematode *Caenorhabditis nigoni* using HPLC-ESI(-)-MS/MS precursor ion scanning, HR-MS/MS, and NMR techniques. Its structure containing an L-3,6-dideoxy-lyxo-hexose unit was established by total synthesis. The identification of this novel 4-*epi*-ascaroside (caenorhabdoside) in *C. nigoni* along with the previous identification of 2-*epi*-ascarosides (paratosides) in *Pristionchus pacificus* indicate that nematodes can generate highly specific signaling molecules by epimerization of the ascarose building block downstream of the canonical β -oxidation cycle.



3,6-Dideoxyaldohexoses constitute essential building blocks of bacterial lipopolysaccharides¹ and nematode glycolipids.² Of the eight theoretically possible isomers (Figure 1), six have

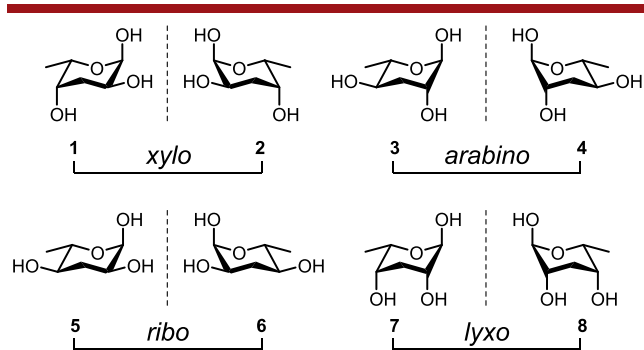


Figure 1. Eight possible stereoisomers of 3,6-dideoxyaldohexose, of which five were identified from microorganisms (1–4, 6) and four from nematodes (3–5, and 7, this work).

previously been described, which represent three pairs of enantiomers (1–6). In many Gram-negative bacteria, 3,6-dideoxyhexoses located at the terminal ends of lipopolysaccharide chains constitute major epitopes that determinate antigen activity³ such as L-colitose (1, 3,6-dideoxy-L-xylo-hexose) from *E. coli* O111,⁴ D-abequose (2, 3,6-dideoxy-D-xylo-hexose) from *Salmonella abortus equi*,⁵ L-ascarylose (3, 3,6-dideoxy-L-arabino-hexose) from *Yersinia pseudotuberculosis*,⁶ D-tyvelose (4, 3,6-dideoxy-D-arabino-hexose) from *Salmonella typhi*,^{5,7} and D-paratose (6, 3,6-dideoxy-D-ribo-hexose) from *Salmonella paratyphi*.⁸ Within the animal kingdom, D-tyvelose

(4) is known as a terminal glycan unit of glycoproteins of the parasitic nematode *Trichinella spiralis*.⁹ The enantiomeric L-ascarylose (3) was first described from lipophilic glycolipids located in the eggs of parasitic nematodes of the *Ascaris* genus.¹⁰ Over the past decade, L-ascarylose (3) has been recognized as the core building block of a large diversity of nematode-derived glycolipids, commonly known as ascarosides, which represent key signaling molecules in nematode chemical ecology.² Nematode ascarosides include a large diversity of homologous fatty acid like aglycones derived from the peroxisomal β -oxidation cycle and, in addition, incorporate a variety of building blocks from primary metabolic pathways to form a modular library of signaling molecules.¹¹ Recently, a sixth 3,6-dideoxysugar, the enantiomeric L-paratose (5, 3,6-dideoxy-L-ribo-hexose), was identified as a rare building block of 2-*epi*-ascaroside-type glycolipids such as 12 from the nematode *Pristionchus pacificus*.¹² Here we describe the identification of a novel 4-*epi*-ascaroside-type glycolipid 11 from the nematode *Caenorhabditis nigoni* that represents the first natural product carrying the L-3,6-dideoxy-lyxo-hexose unit (7) that we like to call L-caenorhabdoside. The exclusive specificity of these rare glycolipids for certain aglycones suggests that nematodes can generate species-specific 3,6-dideoxyaldohexoses via 2- and 4-epimerization of the L-ascarylose building block (3) downstream of the highly conserved peroxisomal β -oxidation cycle.

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Comprehensive ascaroside profiling of the *Caenorhabditis nigoni* exometabolome extract using two complementary techniques, a HPLC-ESI(-)-MS/MS precursor ion scan¹³ for the ascaroside specific fragment ion at m/z 73.0 [$C_3H_5O_2$]⁻ (Figure S1) and GC-EIMS analysis of TMS-derivatized crude metabolome extracts¹⁴ using extracted ion chromatograms for the K1 fragment ion at m/z 130.1 [$C_6H_{14}OSi$]^{•+}, resulted in the identification of several common simple ascarosides (**9**, $n = 0-7$), along with some species-specific derivatives such as the hydroxyacyl ascaroside asc-7OH- Δ C9 (**10**) (Figure 2).¹⁵

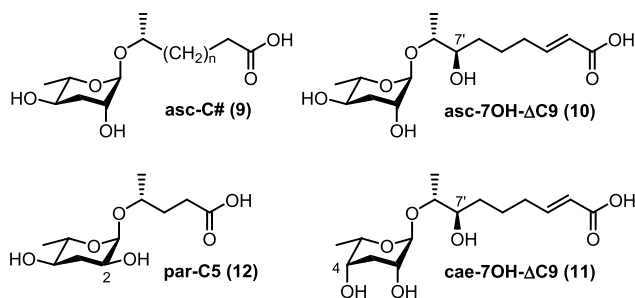


Figure 2. Core structure of nematode ascarosides (**9**) along with the species-specific hydroxyacyl ascaroside asc-7OH- Δ C9 (**10**) and 4-epimeric hydroxyacyl caenorhabdoside cae-7OH- Δ C9 (**11**) from *Caenorhabditis nigoni*, as well as the 2-epimeric L-paratoside par-C5 (**12**) from *Pristionchus pacificus*.

One additional putative ascaroside-type component (**11**) was enriched from the *C. nigoni* exometabolome extract by reverse-phase C18 solid-phase extraction (SPE) and finally isolated as a 1:1 mixture along with coeluting asc-C7 (SMID:¹⁶ asc#1, **9**, $n = 3$) using semipreparative RP-C18-HPLC (Figure S2). The molecular formula of $C_{15}H_{26}O_7$ was established by HRMS (found m/z 317.1603 [$M - H$]⁻, Δ 0.9 ppm), whereas HR-MS/MS analysis suggested a hydroxynonenoic acid aglycone (Figure S3). Differential analysis of the ¹H NMR spectrum with those of a preceding fraction rich in asc-C7 (**9**, $n = 3$) highlighted signals corresponding to the target compound **11** (Figure S4). Comparative analysis of the high-resolution *dq*-COSY spectrum of **11** with those of asc-7OH- Δ C9 (**10**), previously identified from *C. nigoni*,¹⁵ suggested the presence of a similar ($\omega - 1$)-linked 7OH- Δ C9 aglycone, whereas the 7,8-*threo*-configuration was derived from the vicinal coupling constant of $^3J = 3.9$ Hz by comparison with the *threo*- and *erythro*-configured synthetic standards prepared as previously described (Figure S5).¹⁵ Because the target compound **11** was different from *threo*-asc-7OH- Δ C9 (**10**), the stereochemistry of its 3,6-dideoxyhexose moiety was reevaluated based on the chemical shifts and ¹H,¹H-coupling constants (Table 1, Figure S6). Structure assignment was complicated by the fact that the chemical shifts for H-2 and H-4 were almost indistinguishable, but both methines were found to exhibit small coupling constants with both anisochoric H-3 methylene protons at δ_H 1.93 ppm (*dt*, $^2J = 14.2$ Hz, $^3J = 3.5$ Hz) and 2.06 ppm (*dt*, $^2J = 14.2$ Hz, $^3J = 3.1$ Hz). Furthermore, the methine proton H-5 at δ_H 3.99 ppm appeared as a broad quartet with $^3J_{5,6} = 6.6$ Hz, instead of the *dq*-signal with $^3J_{5,4} = 9.3$ Hz and $^3J_{5,6} = 6.2$ Hz commonly observed in ascarosides, indicating that the vicinal coupling constant $^3J_{5,4}$ is small. Along with the very small (unresolved) coupling constant for the anomeric proton H-1, these results indicated the α -configured 4-epimer of ascaroside for the sugar moiety that we like to call caenorhabdose (**7**)

Table 1. 400 MHz NMR Data of the Hydroxyacyl Ascaroside-Type Glycolipids asc-7OH- Δ C9 (**10**)¹⁵ and cae-7OH- Δ C9 (**11**) from *C. nigoni* (in CD₃OD)

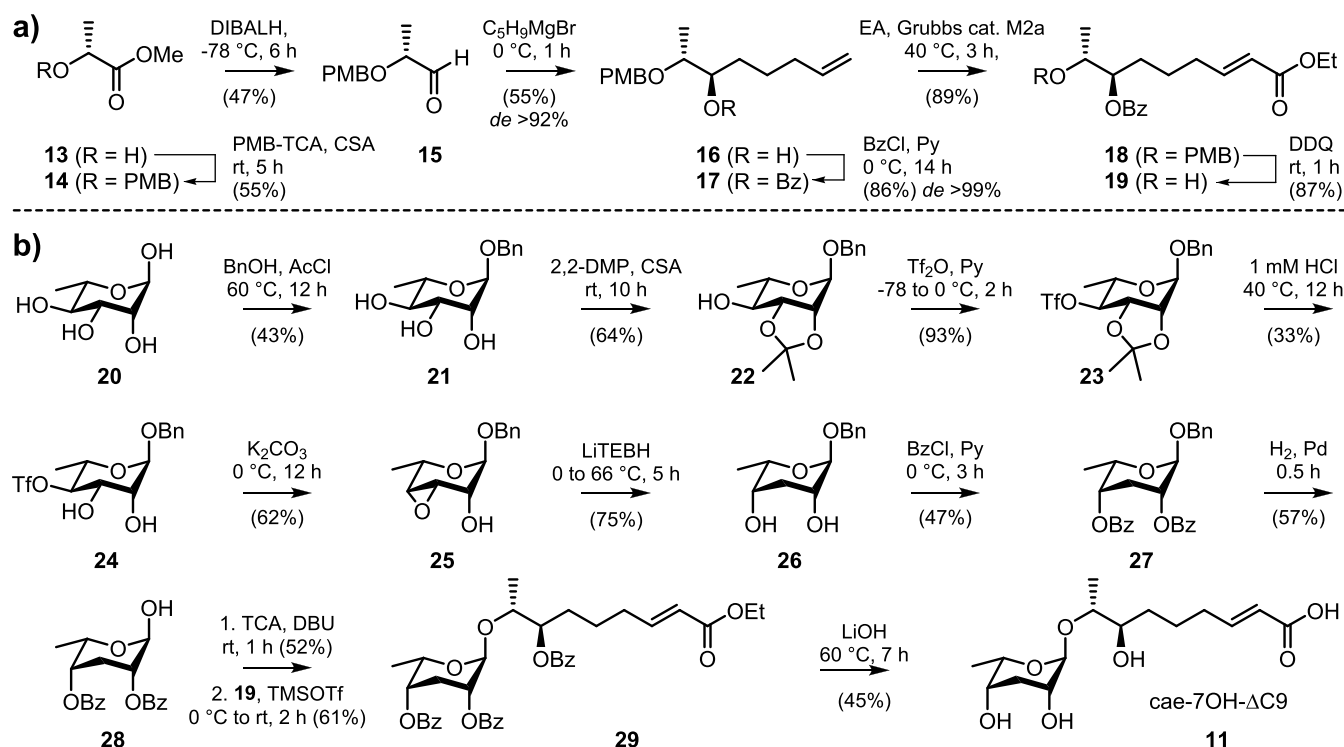
	asc-7OH- Δ C9 (10)		cae-7OH- Δ C9 (11)	
	¹ H	¹³ C	¹ H	¹³ C
1	4.65 s	97.8	4.78 s	98.8
2	3.75 s.br	69.9	3.57 s.br	68.2
3ax	1.80 ddd, 13.1, 11.0, 3.0	35.9	2.06 dt, 14.3, 3.1	32.3
3eq	1.95 dt, 13.1, 3.8		1.93 ddt, 14.3, 1.0, 3.4	
4	3.52 ddd, 11.3, 9.3, 4.3	68.3	3.57 s.br	69.1
5	3.64 dq, 9.3, 6.2	71.4	3.99 dq, 1.0, 6.6	68.5
6	1.22 d, 6.2	18.1	1.18 d, 6.6	17.2
1'	-	170.6	-	170.8
2'	5.82 d, 15.6	123.2	5.82 d, 15.6	123.7
3'	6.95 dt, 15.6, 7.0	150.5	6.91 dt, 15.6, 7.0	150.0
4'	2.27 m	33.1	2.26 m	33.0
5'	1.54–1.68 m	25.9	1.53–1.70 m	25.8
6'	1.48–1.62 m	33.0	1.52–1.59 m	33.0
7'	3.53 m	74.9	3.52 m	75.0
8'	3.74 dq, 3.9, 6.2	75.3	3.75 dq, 3.9, 6.3	75.7
9'	1.14 d, 6.2	14.7	1.15 d, 6.3	14.8

and, thus, suggested the cae-7OH- Δ C9 structure for caenorhabdoside **11** (SMID:¹⁶ caen#1).

The structure assignment of cae-7OH- Δ C9 (**11**) was unambiguously established by total synthesis as shown in Scheme 1. The *threo*-configured aglycone (**19**) was prepared in 9.5% yield over six steps as previously described (Scheme 1a).¹⁵ (+)-Methyl D-lactate (**13**) was converted to the *para*-methoxybenzyl (PMB) ether (**14**), reduced to the aldehyde **15**, and reacted with 4-pentenyl magnesium bromide to furnish the *threo*-configured 2-O-PMB-3-hydroxy-oct-7-ene (**16**) with a diastereoisomeric excess of $de > 92\%$ as determined by ¹H NMR. Benzoylation of **16** gave **17** with $de > 99\%$ after column chromatography. Cross metathesis of **17** with ethyl acrylate using Grubbs second-generation catalyst furnished the nonenoate ester **18**, which was converted to the aglycone unit **19** upon selective cleavage of the PMB group. The 2,4-di-O-benzoyl protected L-caenorhabdose building block (**28**) was prepared in 1% yield over eight steps as shown in Scheme 1b. Commercially available L-rhamnose (**20**) was converted to the 1-O-benzyl rhamnoside (**21**) and the 2,3-positions protected as isopropylidene ketal (**22**). After formation of the 4-trifluoromethylsulfonate (triflate) ester (**23**) and hydrolysis of the ketal, the resulting **24** was cyclized to the oxirane (**25**) under slightly alkaline conditions.¹⁷ Regioselective oxirane ring opening using lithium triethylborohydride furnished the L-1-O-benzyl caenorhabdoside (**26**).¹⁸

After benzoylation to the ester **27**, palladium-catalyzed hydrogenation furnished the 2,4-di-O-benzoyl-caenorhabdose building block (**28**) as a 7:3 mixture of the α - and β -anomers. Glycoside formation between the aglycone (**19**) and the caenorhabdose (**28**) unit was accomplished using the trichloroacetimidate route¹⁹ to furnish **29** as a 3.4:1 mixture of the α - and β -isomers. Subsequent deprotection of isolated **29** under alkaline conditions afforded cae-7OH- Δ C9 (**11**), which displayed identical NMR (Figure S7) and LC-MS (Figure S8) data as the natural product isolated from *C. nigoni*.

Potential behavioral activity was evaluated using a holding assay that quantifies nematode retention in cae-7OH- Δ C9 (**11**) conditioned scoring regions as well as a two-spot chemotaxis assay that quantifies nematode preference for

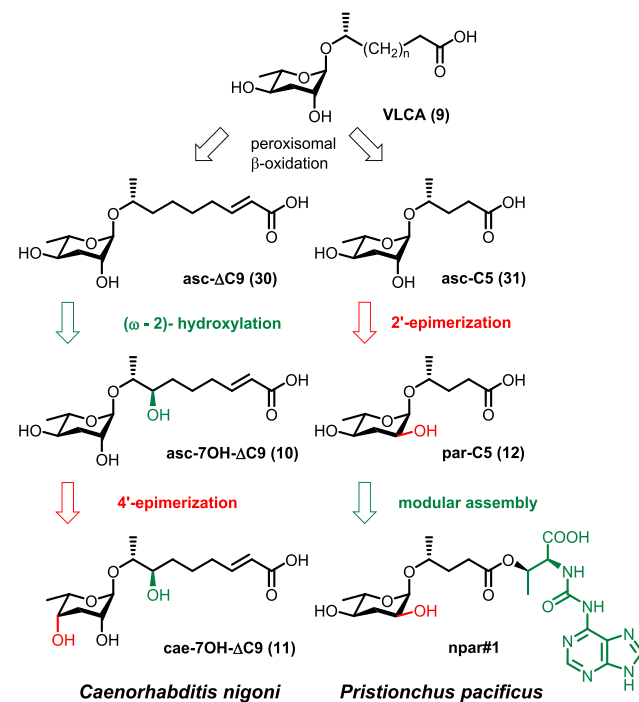
Scheme 1. Total Synthesis of Caenorhabdoside cae-7OH- Δ C9 (11) from *C. nigoni*^a

^aPMB-TCA: *para*-methoxybenzyl trichloroacetimidate, CSA: camphor-10-sulfonic acid, EA: ethyl acrylate. Grubbs cat. M2a: Grubbs second-generation catalyst, 2,2-DMP: 2,2-dimethoxypropane, LiTEBH: lithium triethylborohydride, TCA: trichloroacetonitrile, DBU: 1,8-diazabicyclo-undec-7-ene.

feeding in cae-7OH- Δ C9 (11) conditioned *E. coli* spots in comparison with solvent-treated control. We found that cae-7OH- Δ C9 (11), individually as well as in combination with asc-7OH- Δ C9 (10), does not elicit any significant response in adult *C. nigoni* males or females. Additional experiments will be required to unravel the biological activity and ecological function of these highly species-specific potential signaling compounds.

In conclusion, chemical analysis of the *C. nigoni* metabolome resulted in the identification of a novel 4-*epi*-ascaroside-type glycolipid (11), the first natural product carrying the 3,6-dideoxy-*lyxo*-hexose unit (7). While the biogenesis of various 3,6-dideoxyhexoses in bacteria (1–4, 6) is well understood,²⁰ the *de novo* pathway to *L*-ascarylose (3) as the core building block of nematode ascarosides remains enigmatic. Functional characterization of *C. elegans* genes with homology to those implicated in the biogenesis of bacterial 3,6-dideoxyhexoses demonstrated that they are involved in *L*-rhamnose (6-deoxymannose) biosynthesis.²¹

Comprehensive ascaroside profiling of the *C. nigoni* metabolome demonstrated that formation of the 4-epimeric caenorhabdoside 11 is highly specific for the 7-OH- Δ C9 aglycone (Scheme 2). While its biosynthetic precursor asc- Δ C9 (SMID: ascr#3, 30) is highly abundant, the corresponding 4-epimeric caenorhabdoside with a Δ C9 aglycone could not be detected (Figure S9), indicating that 4-epimerization occurs downstream from the β -oxidation cycle and side-chain hydroxylation. Similarly, analysis of *P. pacificus* *daf-22*, a mutant defective in peroxisomal β -oxidation, did not reveal any long-chain paratoside precursors,²² which suggests that par-C5 (SMID: part#9, 12) is derived from the corresponding asc-C5 (SMID: ascr#9, 31) via 2-epimerization downstream of the β -

Scheme 2. Postulated Biosynthesis of Highly Species-Specific Signaling Molecules in the Nematodes *C. nigoni* and *P. pacificus* Based on Epimerization of the *L*-Ascaroside Building Block Downstream of the β -Oxidation Cycle

oxidation cycle. Enzymes capable of catalyzing epimerization of nonactivated hydroxymethine groups are well-known from

carbohydrate metabolism.²³ Taken together, these results demonstrate how epimerization of the L-ascarylose building block acts along with peroxisomal β -oxidation, side chain hydroxylation, and modular assembly to generate highly species-specific glycolipids that form the chemical language of nematodes.

■ ASSOCIATED CONTENT

Supporting Information

The Supporting Information is available free of charge at <https://pubs.acs.org/doi/10.1021/acs.orglett.9b03808>.

Detailed experimental procedures, supporting tables and figures as described in the mail text, and NMR spectra of isolated and synthetic compounds (PDF)

■ AUTHOR INFORMATION

Corresponding Author

*E-mail: stephan.vonreuss@unine.ch.

ORCID

Célia P. Bergame: 0000-0001-9075-505X

Chuanfu Dong: 0000-0003-3043-7257

Sylvain Sutour: 0000-0001-9676-7123

Stephan H. von Reuß: 0000-0003-4325-5495

Present Address

^{||}Department of Integrative Evolutionary Biology, Max Planck Institute for Developmental Biology, Max-Planck-Ring 9, D-72076 Tübingen, Germany.

Notes

The authors declare no competing financial interest.

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