

proteins (Escalante et al., [2006\)](#page-33-0)), and their pro- or anticoagulant activities will not be considered further here. However, it is likely that functionally important interactions occur among these venom components, and hypofibrinogenemia (TLE-catalyzed) accompanied by structural degradation catalyzed by metalloproteinases may produced uncontrollable hemorrhage. For the snake, these actions are important for prey incapacitation and facilitation of digestion; in human envenomations by vipers, these proteinases produce some of the more debilitating and difficult to manage effects (Gutiérrez et al., [2009\)](#page-33-1).

Defining which of the myriad serine proteases often found in a single venom is a TLE-SVSP can be challenging, as many have similar activities toward model substrates such as paranitroaniline-derived peptides as well as toward native protein substrates such as fibrinogen. Further, the term "thrombin-like" is also problematic, because unlike most TLEs, thrombin is a multifunctional enzyme with rather different roles depending on physiological environment (Kini, [2005;](#page-34-4) Phillips et al., [2009\)](#page-36-2). Additionally, most TLEs have not been assayed with a wide series of substrates (some are defined by sequence homology only), so the true specificity of activity, or lack thereof, is not well defined. Some of the SVSPs labeled as thrombin-like enzymes in the databases are incorrectly assigned to this activity, and some (particularly sequences derived from cDNA libraries) are labeled as TLEs because of sequence homologies but without any activity data. A more limiting definition of venom TLEs is needed, but for the present review, SVSPs which have specific catalytic activity toward fibrinogen $A\alpha$ or/and $B\beta$ chains will be considered as TLEs. A

.73333 .2902 .68235 scn

functional trade-off between optimal enzyme activity and in vivo stability, suggesting that the protective effect of glycosylation is not without some cost to enzyme efficacy.

Two SVSPs with apparent thrombin-like activity were isolated from *Deinagkistrodon acutus* venom and shown to be *N*-glycosylated at Asn35, as observed from electron density maps of this region of the crystal structures (Zhu et al., [2005\)](#page-38-0). Because this glycosylation site occurs close to the active site, it was interpreted to restrict access of larger molecules like STI and BPTI. Structural analyses using superimposition of the venom SVSPs and trypsin-STI complex demonstrated collision between side-chain residues of STI and the carbohydrate moieties of the SVSPs. Again, it appears that glycosylation of these serine proteases creates steric hindrance of inhibitor binding, thereby protecting the enzyme. Most TLEs also are glycosylated, and it is likely that glycosylation has been selected for as a protective mechanism against endogenous serine protease inhibitors of snake prey species. The effect of glycosylation may therefore be to increase effective half-life in prey tissues and to increase probability of fibrinogen depletion. In human envenomations by rattlesnakes (*Crotalus*), recurrent coagulopathies are commonly encountered following antivenom treatment (Boyer et al., [1999\)](#page-32-3), and it would be of interest to determine if glycosylated TLEs are involved in these persistent and recurrent cases of hypofibrinogenemia and thrombocytopenia.

Crystal Structures and Structural Predictions

At present, no crystal structures of snake venom TLEs have been solved. The structure of a plasminogen activator from *Trimeresurus stejnegeri* venom was resolved at 2.5 Å (Parry et al., [1998\)](#page-36-3), and this protein has a high degree of sequence identity with snake venom TLEs. Several glycosylated serine proteases from *Deinagkistrodon acutus*

Fig. 30.2 Space-filling models of serine proteases. (**a**) Bovine trypsin (PDB ID: 1AQ7); (**b**) Bovine chymotrypsin B (PDB ID: 1DLK); (**c**) Venom serine proteinase Dav-PA (*Deinagkistrodon*

Mechanisms of Evolution of SV-TLEs

Gene Duplication

A common means by which diversity is generated in a specific protein family is via gene duplication. In a critically important component of a complex system, such as thrombin in the blood clot cascade, mutation of specific residues which change activity levels or specificity of substrate recognition could be lethal mutations. However, when the gene is duplicated and one member remains static, the functional product of the original gene remains intact. The other gene copy is freed from selective constraints favoring conservation of original structure/function, and mutations can then lead to production of a novel activity. Repeated gene duplication can result in multiple copies of closely related genes being present, and over evolutionary time, a diverse set of pharmacologies within a structurally conserved protein family may result (Ogawa et al., [1996;](#page-36-4) Nobuhisa et al., [1996;](#page-36-5) Kini and Chan, [1999\)](#page-34-5). This appears to be of common occurrence among snake venoms, and venom gene duplication has resulted in a multigene family of SVSPs (Deshimaru et al., [1996\)](#page-33-2), giving rise to venoms with numerous serine proteinases. For example, in the venom of the Desert Massasauga (*Sistrurus catenatus edwardsii*), 24% of the proteome (Sanz et al., 2006) and >37% of the transcriptome consists of serine proteinases (Pahari et al., [2007\)](#page-36-6). The transcriptome analysis showed 12 distinct isoforms of SVSPs, and fractionation of the venom has revealed at least 8 high rate of substitution has contributed in part to the diversification of functionality. The ratios of non-synonymous to synonymous substitutions within coding regions were generally greater than 1 (0.67–1.64), whereas these ratios in typical isozyme genes were typically less than 0.2 (Deshimaru et al., [1996\)](#page-33-2), again highlighting the point mutations occur in the rest of the molecule; among SVSPs, this includes those regions associated with substrate binding. ASSET therefore could produce rapid functional differentiation of gene products which share a highly conserved molecular fold and apparent surface topology (see Fig. [30.2\)](#page-15-0). In viperid venoms in particular, numerous SVSP cDNAs have been sequenced, including many from *Viridovipera stejnegeri* (Tsai and Wang, [2001\)](#page-38-2), *Deinagkistrodon acutus* (Zhang et al., [2006\)](#page-38-3) and *Sistrurus catenatus edwardsii* (Pahari et al., [2007\)](#page-36-6), demonstrating the high level of multiplicity of SVSPs in the venom and gland transcriptome of even a single individual. At least part of this diversification has occurred via ASSET.

ASSET has been hypothesized to be a mechanism of accelerated evolution of venom toxins which can confer new pharmacological functionalities on a conserved molecular fold, as is common among venom proteins. By switching functionally important segments of gene (protein) sequence, such as that important to substrate binding, rapid large scale changes in substrate specificity can occur. Such a mechanism appears to be important in the evolution of SVSPs (Doley et al., [2009\)](#page-33-3), as the regions of exchange include those known to involve substrate binding (Fig. [30.3\)](#page-18-0). ASSET can result in large-scale functional changes, with accelerated point mutations "fine-tuning" substrate fit. This hypothetical scenario may explain the variety of substrate specificities (thrombin-like, kallikrein-like, plasmin-like, arginine esterase, etc) seen among the SVSPs.

Structural and Phylogenetic Relationships

As mentioned above, SVSPs including TLEs show a high level of sequence identity, and the genes are obviously closely related. One might predict that functional classes of the SVSPs (thrombin-like, kallikrein-like, plasmin-like, etc) should cluster following structural cladistic analyses, and this prediction has been borne out by some studies (i.e., Wang et al., [2001\)](#page-38-1). In this study, three functional subtypes clustered into discrete groups (thrombin-like {coagulating}, kallikrein-like {kininogenase} and plasminogen activators). However, a different analysis (Lee and Park, [2000\)](#page-34-6) resulted in the clustering of functionally different SVSPs. A more recent analysis of sequence relationships among TLEs indicated a common ancestry among the SVSPs analyzed but did not demonstrate unequivocal clustering of functional subtypes (Castro et al., [2004\)](#page-32-1). Because of these discrepancies, a phylogenetic analysis of TLEs and other SVSPs was undertaken using ClustalX and bootstrapped neighbor-joining method. One hundred and fifty-one snake venom serine protease sequences were retrieved from the UniProtKB database (http://www.uniprot.org/; January 2010) using the primary sequence of batroxobin in a BLAST search and the criterion of having >50% sequence identity with this target. Five SP sequences from lizards (sequence identity ∼40%) were also included. Bovine and human trypsin sequences were used as outgroups, and bovine chymotrypsinogen and human thrombin were included in alignments and subsequent analyses (160 sequences

functionality based on database-reported activity. The majority of sequences were identified as thrombin-like enzymes in the UniProt database, with a smaller number of kallikrein-like (14) and plasminogen activator (5) sequences identified; 28 were of unknown/undefined activity. Although there is a tendency for similar function sequences to cluster (Fig. [30.4\)](#page-20-0), there are instances of all three activities occurring within many clades, suggesting that functionality is not dependent on sequence features alone. Effects of phylogenetic constraint (closer evolutionary relatedness of species) were not specifically analyzed but seem unlikely to play a major role. A more likely limitation of this analysis is that the absolute function of many SVSPs is equivocal or unknown. As others have noted, the relationship between sequence homology and biological activity remains paradoxical (Serrano and Maroun, [2005\)](#page-37-3).

Biomedical Applications of SV-TLEs

Therapeutic Use and Drug Discovery

Snake venoms consist of a myriad of potent biological activities which have been recruited from various tissues and which mimic many natural regulatory components (Fry, [2005;](#page-33-4) Stocker and Meier, [1989\)](#page-37-5). Because venom protein components profoundly affect homeostasis at numerous levels, there is a long-standing interest in venoms as a source of drug discovery and development (for a review, see Fox and Serrano, [2007\)](#page-33-5). One of the earliest drugs related to hemostasis developed from a venom and approved for human use is Captopril, an inhibitor of angiotensinconverting enzyme which was based on bradykinin-potentiating peptides isolated from *Bothrops jararaca* venom (Ferreira, [1965;](#page-33-6) Smith and Vane, [2003\)](#page-37-6). Several SVSPs have also been developed as actual or potential drugs for human use, and these have been discussed in several more recent reviews (Fox and Serrano, [2007;](#page-33-5) Marsh and Williams, [2005;](#page-35-3) Phillips et al., [2009;](#page-36-2) Serrano and Maroun, [2005;](#page-37-3) Swenson and Markland, [2005\)](#page-37-7); only those with defined thrombin-like properties will be included here.

One of the most promising SV-TLEs for clinical use was Ancrod (Viprinex), a serine proteinase originally isolated from the venom of *Calloselasma* (formerly *Agkistrodon*) *rhodostoma* (Au et al., [1993\)](#page-32-4). Its utility in treating stroke victims was evaluated some years ago (Sherman, [2002\)](#page-37-8), and initial indications for acute ischemic stroke were very promising. However, in late 2008, Ancrod failed phase 3 clinical trials for acute ischemic stroke, and it is no longer being developed as a drug for human use in strokes (Neurobiological Technologies, http://www.ntii.com). In a recently published study involving 500 patients at several different facilities who received Ancrod within 6 h of symptom onset, Ancrod treatment of acute patients or in ninety day mortality levels, and the incidence of symptomatic intracra-

batroxobin may have efficacy for controlling some specific types of coagulopathies, it is not generally indicated for all such conditions.

Several additional TLEs are undergoing evaluation in animal models for antithrombotic use. Acutobin, a TLE derived from *Deinagkistrodon acutus* venom, was reported to be effective in reducing mortality and brain damage following ischemia and reperfusion of the cerebral artery in hyperglycemic rats (Wei et al., [2004\)](#page-38-4). This model mimics a condition particularly at risk of brain tissue injury following ischemia, and acutobin treatment resulted in increased brain tissue perfusion and a reduction in the size of infarct. In a very different application of a snake venom TLE, a dental fibrin adhesive was produced from fibrinogen hydrolyzed by TLE from *Crotalus durissus terrificus* venom (Barbosa et al., [2008\)](#page-32-5). Free gingival grafts were immobilized using either TLE or sutures, and at 7 days post-treatment, inflammatory cell density was lower in the TLE treatment group. By 14 and 45 days,

of the creative ways in which venom TLEs are being utilized in both applied clinical and basic research.

Future Potential for SV-TLEs

There is a continuing need for safe and effective drugs to treat coagulation disorders such as venous thromboembolic disease and stroke (Spyropoulos, [2008\)](#page-37-9), and research into thrombin-like enzymes from snake venoms could provide novel lead compounds or enzymes which could be directly useful. There is an obvious diversity of SVSPs from front-fanged snakes which could provide a source of novel compounds. However, though variation in component number can exceed 100 protein/peptide compounds in a single venom, there is a relatively small diversity of protein families so far described from venoms (Juárez et al., [2004\)](#page-34-7), and TLEs described thus far appear to possess conserved functional variation along a common theme. This scenario may change as newer methods allow a deeper probe of the venom proteome and reveal diversity of structure (and likely function) among the much less abundant minor venom components (Bandow, [2010;](#page-32-6) Calvete et al., [2009;](#page-32-7) Polaskova et al., [2010\)](#page-36-7), but other sources, such as among venoms from rear-fanged snakes, may prove to contain novel TLEs.

Snake venom serine proteases have proven to be useful in various applications in biotechnology and basic research (Wisner et al., [2001\)](#page-38-5), and their specificities could perhaps be exploited for use in mass spectrometry applications currently dominated by trypsin use, such as peptide fingerprinting, MS/MS sequencing, etc. It may be that the most useful applications of SVSPs like the TLEs may lie in research purposes rather than drug development.

Summary and Conclusion

Snake venom thrombin-like enzymes are important components of most viperid snake venoms and are less broadly occurring among other squamate reptile venoms. As part of the biological weaponry of venomous species, their actions in vivo can cause cataclysmic coagulopathies which may become life-threatening. Purified and characterized, TLEs have many applications in biomedicine as well as basic and applied research. Rapid advances in genomics and proteomics have provided sequences for many venom serine proteinases, including TLEs, and detailed structure/activity data is available for a smaller subset of these. There is a need for rigorous substrate specificity studies to be conducted with the naturally expressed venom serine proteinases, particularly for those species with extensive transcriptome and proteome datasets. Such functional data will help to answer the remaining questions related to the observed diversity of actions of these structurally conservative venom components. Further, there are many species of front-fanged and rear-fanged snakes whose venoms are poorly known, and it is likely that additional interesting variants of this family of proteinases remain to be described.

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