

Polymerization of methionine: Ignition of sulfur metabolism?

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Methionine, sulfur-bearing amino acid, is one of protein-forming 20 amino acids. On the other hand, peptide formation using methionine is known to be difficult, because of large thermal stability of methionine. Incorporation of methionine into peptide has importance to form metal-sulfur-cluster in protein or other biologically important molecules, such as taurine. In order to overcome difficulties to make methionine-bearing peptide, new series of experiments were performed in the present study. Experiments were performed at 175 C and 150 MPa, using various mixtures. Methionine-trimers, which were not formed by previous investigators, were produced in the present study. Surprisingly a part of methionine was converted into glycine and then glycine-methionine peptide was newly formed. Those results demonstrated that high T and P conditions were suitable for not only methionine-peptide formation but also making multi-component peptide. Sulfur isotope compositions were determined on run products of the present study. Run products were enriched or depleted in ³²S compared to starting materials. Hydrogen sulfides were preferentially released from methionine for the ³²S-depleted samples. The ³²S-enriched samples are explained by loss of sulfate from methionine, although oxidants of methionine-sulfur are still unclear. Modern living organisms metabolically produce sulfide and sulfate from methionine and cysteine. Such metabolic path is similar to the abiological production of sulfide and sulfate in the present study. This may imply that course of sulfur metabolism was most likely established early in the prebiotic age when methionine was incorporated in prebiotic protein.

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