

Evolution of the First Nervous Systems

Edited by

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Contents

I. INTERCELLULAR COMMUNICATION

Chapter 1

Cnidarian Gap Junctions: Structure, Function and Evolution

• C. R. Green

1. Introduction	3
2. Gap Junction Structure	4
3. The Biochemistry of Gap Junctions	6
4. Regulation of Gap Junction Communication	8
5. The Roles of Gap Junctions	9
5.1. Metabolic Cooperation	9
5.2. Ionic Coupling	10
5.3. Transfer of Regulatory Molecules and Growth Control	10
5.4. Development and Patterning.	10
6. Gap Junctions in the Nervous System	11
7. Gap Junctions in the Cnidaria	13
8. Gap Junctions and the Evolution of the First Nervous Systems	15
References	17

Chapter 2

Intercellular Junctions in Ctenophore Integument

• Mari-Luz Hernandez-Nicaise, Ghislain Nicaise
and Thomas S. Reese

1. Introduction	21
2. Materials and Methods	23
3. Results	23
3.1. Macular Gap-like Junctions	23
3.2. Apical Belt Junctions	25
3.3. Annular Junctions.	27
4. Discussion	27
4.1. Gap Junctions	27
4.2. Apical Belt Junctions	28
References	30

Chapter 3**Chemical and Electrical Synaptic Transmission in the Cnidaria**

• Andrew N. Spencer

1. Introduction	33
2. Chemical Synaptic Transmission	34
2.1. Ultrastructure of Chemical Synapses	34
2.2. Physiology of Scyphozoan Synapses	35
2.3. Physiology of Hydrozoan Chemical Synapses	39
3. Electrical Synaptic Transmission	47
4. Is Electrical or Chemical Transmission more Primitive?	49
5. Conclusions	50
References	50

Chapter 4**Control of Morphogenesis by Nervous System-derived Factors**

• S. A. H. Hoffmeister and S. Dübel

1. Introduction	55
2. Assay Systems for Head and Foot Factors	59
3. Biochemical Characteristics of the Factors	59
4. Action of Activators and Inhibitors in <i>Hydra</i>	61
5. Activators are Co-released with Carrier Molecules	63
6. Action at the Cellular Level	65
References	67

Chapter 5**Differentiation of a Nerve Cell-Battery Cell Complex in *Hydra***

• Engelbert Hobmayer and Charles N. David

1. Introduction	71
2. Morphology of Battery Cells.	72
3. Development of NV1+ Nerve Cells During Head Formation	72
4. Requirements for Formation of NV1-Battery Cell Complex	76
4.1. Formation of NV1+ Nerve Cells Requires Interstitial Cell Differentiation	76
4.2. Formation of NV1+ Nerve Cells Requires Differentiation of New Battery Cells	76
5. Stimulation of NV1+ and Battery Cell Differentiation in Head Activator-treated Polyps	78
References	79

Chapter 6**Chemical Signaling Systems in Lower Organisms: A Prelude to the Evolution of Chemical Communication in the Nervous System**

• William E. S. Carr

1. Introduction	81
2. Slime Molds and Yeast: Signal Molecules and their Synthesis	82
3. Transmembrane Signaling Systems.	84
3.1. Structure of Receptors Coupled to G-proteins	86
3.2. Structure and Role of G-protein in Signal Transduction	87
4. Inactivation of Signal Molecules	88
5. Internalization of Chemical Sensing Machinery	89
6. Conclusions	89
References	92

Chapter 7**Neurons and their Peptide Transmitters in Coelenterates**

• C. J. P. Grimmelikhuijzen, D. Graff, O. Koizumi,
J. A. Westfall and I. D. McFarlane

1. Introduction.	95
2. Immunocytochemical Staining of Neurons in Coelenterates	99
3. Ultrastructural Localization of RFamide-like Peptides	101
4. Isolation of Neuropeptides from Coelenterates	101
5. Discussion	106
References	107

Chapter 8**Peptidergic Neurotransmitters in the Anthozoa**

• I. D. McFarlane, D. Graff and C. J. P. Grimmelikhuijzen

1. Introduction.	111
2. Organization of the Sea Anemone Nervous System	112
3. Comparison with Other Cnidaria	114
4. Comparison with Higher Invertebrates.	115
5. Functions of Anthozoan Neuropeptides	116
6. Physiology of Other Putative Transmitters	121
7. Conclusions	123
References	125

Chapter 9**Catecholamines, Related Compounds and the Nervous System in the Tentacles of some Anthozoans**

• J. Van Marle

1. Introduction	129
2. The Endodermal Plexus	129
3. The Ectodermal Plexus	130
4. Evidence for Cholinergic Mechanisms	132
5. Evidence for GABA-ergic and Glutaminergic Mechanisms	132
6. Evidence for Catecholamines	133
7. Evidence for 5-hydroxytryptamine	134
8. Cellular Localization of Transmitters.	134
9. Pharmacology	136
10. Conclusions	138
References	139

Chapter 10**The Antiquity of Monaminergic Neurotransmitters: Evidence from Cnidaria**

• Michel Anctil

1. Introduction.	141
2. The Investigated Species: <i>Renilla köllikeri</i>	142
3. Evidence for Catecholamines	144
4. Evidence for Serotonin	147
5. Functional Implications	150
6. Evolutionary Implications	152
References	153

Chapter 11**Rethinking the Role of Cholinergic Neurotransmitters in the Cnidaria**

• Eliana Scemes

1. Introduction.	157
2. Scyphozoa	159
3. Anthozoa	159
4. Hydrozoa	160
5. Discussion	163
References	164

Chapter 12**Wide Range Transmitter Sensitivities of a Crustacean Chloride Channel**

• Hanns Hatt and Ch. Franke

1. Introduction	167
2. Methods	168
3. Results and Discussion	168
References	175

Chapter 13**Two Pathways of Evolution of Neurotransmitters-Modulators**

• C. Ladd Prosser

1. Introduction	177
2. Amino Acids and Biogenic Amines; Purines	177
3. Neuropeptides	181
4. Conclusions	190
References	191

Chapter 14**Summary of Session and Discussion on Intercellular Communication**

• Michael J. Greenberg	195
References	199

II. ELECTRICAL EXCITABILITY**Chapter 15****Ion Channels of Unicellular Microbes**

• Ching Kung

1. Introduction	203
2. Ion Channels of <i>Paramecium</i>	204
3. Ion Channels of Yeast	206
4. Ion Channels of Bacteria	208
5. Solute Senses vs. Solvent Senses	209
References	212

Chapter 16**Ion Currents of *Paramecium*: Effects of Mutations and Drugs**

• Todd M. Hennessey

1. Introduction	215
2. Membrane Ion Currents	216
2.1. Resting Currents	216
2.2. Mechanosensory Currents	216
2.3. Hyperpolarization-induced Currents	217
2.4. Depolarization-induced Currents	217
3. Contributions of Ion Currents of Swimming Behavior.	220
3.1. Changes in Swim Speed	220
3.2. Avoiding Reactions (A.R.).	220
3.3. Continuous Ciliary Reversal (CCR)	221
3.4. Cellular Adaptation	222
4. Effects of Mutations on Membrane Ion currents	224
4.1. Decreased I_{Ca}	224
4.2. Increased I_{Ca}	225
4.3. Decreased I_{KCa}	225
4.4. Increased I_{KCa}	227
4.5. Decreased I_{NaCa}	228
4.6. Increased I_{NaCa}	229
4.7. Resting Current.	229
4.8. Other Behavioral Mutants	230
5. Effects of Drugs on Membrane Ion Currents	230
References	233

Chapter 17**Membrane Excitability and Motile Responses in the Protozoa, with Particular Attention to the Heliozoan *Actinocoryne contractilis***• Colette Febvre-Chevalier, André Bilbaut, Jean Febvre
and Quentin Bone

1. Introduction	237
2. Cytology of <i>Actinocoryne contractilis</i> and the Kinetics of Contraction-Relaxation.	238
3. Control of Contraction and Stabilization Assays in <i>Actinocoryne</i>	239
4. Membrane Excitability in Relation to Contractile Activity in <i>Actinocoryne</i>	240
4.1. Receptor Potential, Action Potential, Contractile Activity	240

4.2. Ionic Basis of the Action Potential 241

5. Correlation between Membrane Excitability
and Contraction in Other Protists 242

5.1. Dinoflagellates 242

5.2. Acantharians 243

5.3. Contractile Ciliates 243

5.4. Free-living Helizoans 244

6. Correlation Between Membrane Excitability
and Locomotion in Protists 246

6.1. Flagallates 246

6.2. Amoebae and Slime Molds 246

6.3. Free-living Ciliates 247

7. Conclusions 248

References 249

Chapter 18

Ion Channels and the Cellular Behavior of *Stylonychia*

• Joachim Dietmer

1. Introduction 255

2. Stimulus Reception 256

3. Voltage-dependent Excitability. 259

4. The Ca⁺⁺-Channels. 259

5. The K⁺-channels 261

6. Why Such a Diversity of Ion Channels 262

7. Concluding Remarks 263

References 264

Chapter 19

Ionic Currents of the Scyphozoa

• Peter A. V. Anderson

1. Introduction. 267

2. Voltage-Activated Currents 269

2.1. Total Membrane Currents in *Cyanea* Neurons 269

2.2. Inward Currents in *Cyanea* Neurons 269

2.3. Outward Currents in *Cyanea* Neurons 275

2.4. Total Membrane Currents in
Chrysaora Cnidocytes 276

3. Ligand-activated Currents 276

4. Conclusions 278

References 279

Chapter 20

The Electrophysiology of Swimming in the Jellyfish *Aglantha digitale*

• Robert. W. Meech

- 1. Introduction 281
- 2. Anatomy 283
- 3. Behavior and Physiology 284
 - 3.1. Swimming 284
 - 3.2. Axon Impulses 285
 - 3.3. Chemical Synapses 287
 - 3.4. Lateral Neurons 288
 - 3.5. Current Spread in the Myoepithelium 289
 - 3.6. Muscle Contraction 289
- 4. Ion Channels 291
 - 4.1. Sodium and Calcium Currents 291
 - 4.2. Potassium Currents 292
- 5. Discussion 293
 - 5.1. Constraints at a Molecular Level. 293
- 6. Conclusions 296
- References 296

Chapter 21

Ionic Currents in Ctenophore Muscle Cells

• André Bilbaut, Marie-Lux Hernandez Nicaise
and Robert W. Meech

- 1. Introduction 299
- 2. Morphology of Muscle Cells. 300
- 3. Isolated Muscle Cells 301
- 4. Electrophysiology of Muscle Cells 302
 - 4.1. Resting Potential 302
 - 4.2. Action Potentials 302
 - 4.3. Ionic Dependence of Action Potentials 303
 - 4.4. Ionic Membrane Currents in Muscle Cells 305
- 5. Discussion 310
 - 5.1. Cell Membrane Excitability 310
 - 5.2. Ionic Currents in Ctenophore
Muscle Cell Membrane 310
 - 5.3. Diversity of Ionic Currents 312
- References 313

Chapter 22

Polyclad Neurobiology and the Evolution of Central Nervous Systems

• **Harold Koopowitz**

1. Introduction	315
2. Neuroanatomy	316
2.1. The Nature of the Plexus	316
2.2. Cell Anatomy.	317
2.3. Glia	318
2.4. Neuromuscular Junctions	318
3. Neurophysiology	318
3.1. Ion Channels	319
3.2. Graded Potentials.	320
3.3. Silent Cells	320
3.4. Electrotonic Coupling	321
4. Neurochemistry.	321
5. Behavior	322
5.1. Natural Behavior	322
5.2. Learning	323
5.3. Electrophysiology of Response Decrement	323
6. Redundancy and the Brain	324
7. Evolution and Perspectives	326
References	326

Chapter 23

Enigmas of Echinoderm Nervous Systems

• **James L. S. Cobb**

1. Introduction.	329
2. Separate Nervous Systems.	330
3. Ultrastructure	330
4. Lack of Glial Cells	331
5. Mutability of Connective Tissue	331
6. Ionic Basis of Action Potentials	332
7. Centralization, Receptors and Giant Fibers.	333
8. Speculation	334
References	336

Chapter 24

Summary of Session and Discussion of Electrical Excitability

• **Bertil Hille** 339

III. SENSORY MECHANISMS

Chapter 25

Chemoreception in Unicellular Eukaryotes

• Judith Van Houten

1. Introduction	343
2. Olfaction	345
3. Gustation	347
4. Unicellular Eukaryotes	348
4.1. <i>Dictyostelium</i>	348
4.2. <i>Chlamydomonas</i> Gametes	350
4.3. <i>Sacchromyces</i>	350
4.4. Sea Urchin Spermatozoa	351
4.5. <i>Paramecium</i>	351
5. Summary	353
References	353

Chapter 26

The Functional Significance of Evolutionary Modifications found in the Ciliate, *Stentor*

• David C. Wood

1. Introduction	357
2. A Voltage-dependent Mechanoreceptor Channel	358
3. The Function of Action Potentials in <i>Stentor</i>	361
References	369

Chapter 27

Hydromedusan Photophysiology: An Evolutionary Perspective

• Stuart A. Arkett

1. Introduction	373
2. Trends in Table	375
3. Hydromedusan Photophysiology Versus Other Metazoan Photophysiology	378
3.1. Morphology	379
3.2. Extraocular Photosensitivity	379
3.3. Photopigment	380
3.4. Receptor Potential	380
3.5. Electrical Coupling	381
3.6. Transmitters	382
4. Conclusions	382
References	385

Chapter 28

Summary of Session and Discussion on Sensory Mechanisms

- M. S. Laverack 389

IV. PLENARY LECTURE

Chapter 29

Evolution of Cnidarian Giant Axons

- G. O. Mackie
- 1. Introduction. 395
- 2. Scyphomedusan Giant
Fiber Nerve Net (GFNN). 396
- 3. *Velella* Closed System. 397
- 4. *Polyorchis* Swimming
Motor Neuron Network (SMN) 398
- 5. Siphonophore Stem "Giant Syncytium" 398
- 6. *Aglantha* Motor Giant Axon (MOG). 400
- 7. *Aglantha* Ring Giant Axon (RG) 401
- 8. Other Giant Axons in *Aglantha* 404
- 9. Discussion and Conclusions 405
- References 406

Chapter 30

Concluding Remarks

- Peter A. V. Anderson 409

- Index 415**

Chapter 5

Differentiation of a Nerve Cell-Battery Cell Complex in *Hydra*

ENGELBERT HOBMAYER and CHARLES N. DAVID

1. Introduction

Complex cell-cell interactions appeared early in the evolution of metazoans. One of the most interesting examples of such complexity is the battery cell in tentacles of cnidarians. This cell consists of a modified ectodermal epithelial cell which has nematocytes and sensory nerve cells embedded in it. To investigate the formation of this complex, we use the simple fresh water cnidarian *Hydra*. In this organism, epithelial cells of the gastric region are continuously displaced into tentacles (Campbell, 1967; Dübel et al., 1987), where they interact with sensory nerve cells and nematocytes to form battery cells.

Using the monoclonal antibody NV1 as a marker for tentacle-specific nerve cells (Hobmayer et al., in preparation) we have investigated formation of tentacle tissue on a cellular level. Formation of a NV1-battery cell complex occurs during head formation and is stimulated by treatment with the neuropeptide head activator (HA) (Schaller and Bodenmüller, 1981), which has been shown to stimulate tentacle (Schaller, 1973) and nerve cell formation (Holstein et al., 1986) in *Hydra*. Differentiation of NV1 immunoreactive (NV1+) nerve cells, however, does not appear to be stimulated directly by HA, but rather by cell-cell interactions with battery cell precursors during tentacle formation.

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2. Morphology of Battery Cells

Battery cells in the tentacles of *Hydra* constitute an association of different cell types (Hufnagel et al., 1985). As shown schematically in figure 1E, 15-20 nematocytes and one epidermal sensory nerve cell are embedded in an ectodermal epitheliomuscular cell, in a typical arrangement: one stenotele or one or two isorhizas lie in the center of a ring of desmonemes. The body of the sensory nerve cell is located to the side of the central nematocyte.

Using a monoclonal antibody, NV1, we were able to identify these tentacle-specific nerve cells in *H. magnipapillata* (Hobmayer et al., in preparation). With the exception of a few ganglion cells in the lower peduncle, no NV1+ cells occur in the rest of the body column. In *H. oligactis*, the same type of nerve cell is recognized by the monoclonal antibody JD1 (Dunne et al., 1985).

Based on *in situ* observations, using indirect immunofluorescence, on either NV1-stained whole mounts or maceration preparations NV1+ cells can be classified as bipolar and multipolar epidermal sensory nerve cells (Fig. 1A; Yu et al., 1986). They have an apical cilium which extends to the surface of the surrounding epithelial cell. Two or more processes extend laterally from the basal part of the cell body (Fig. 1C). They run along the base of the battery cell adjacent to the mesoglea and innervate several neighboring battery cells; short sidebranches make contact with the battery cell's nematocytes (Fig. 1A,B).

3. Development of NV1+ Nerve Cells During Head Formation

In both budding and head regeneration, the first NV1+ cells appear at the time of evagination of short tentacle tips (Fig. 2). Earlier stages of head formation, when the prospective head is only discernible as a rounded protrusion, contain no NV1+ cells and no battery cells. During outgrowth of tentacles, the density of newly formed NV1+ cells remains constant along the entire length of the tentacles. Thus, in general, differentiation of NV1+ cells shows a strong correlation with the formation of battery cells.

This dependence of NV1+ differentiation on battery cell formation is also clearly demonstrated in a regeneration deficient mutant, *reg-16* (Sugiyama and Fujisawa, 1977). Animals of strain *reg-16* are blocked at an early stage of head regeneration, and do not form tentacles. To investigate whether such animals form NV1+ cells during head regeneration, it was necessary to introduce interstitial cells of *H. magnipapillata* wild-type strain into *reg-16*, because *reg-16* nerve cells do not express the NV1 antigen. Such *reg-16/105* chimeras are defective in head regeneration, like the *reg-16* parent (Wanek et al., 1986), but can differentiate NV1+ nerve cells from wild-type strain 105

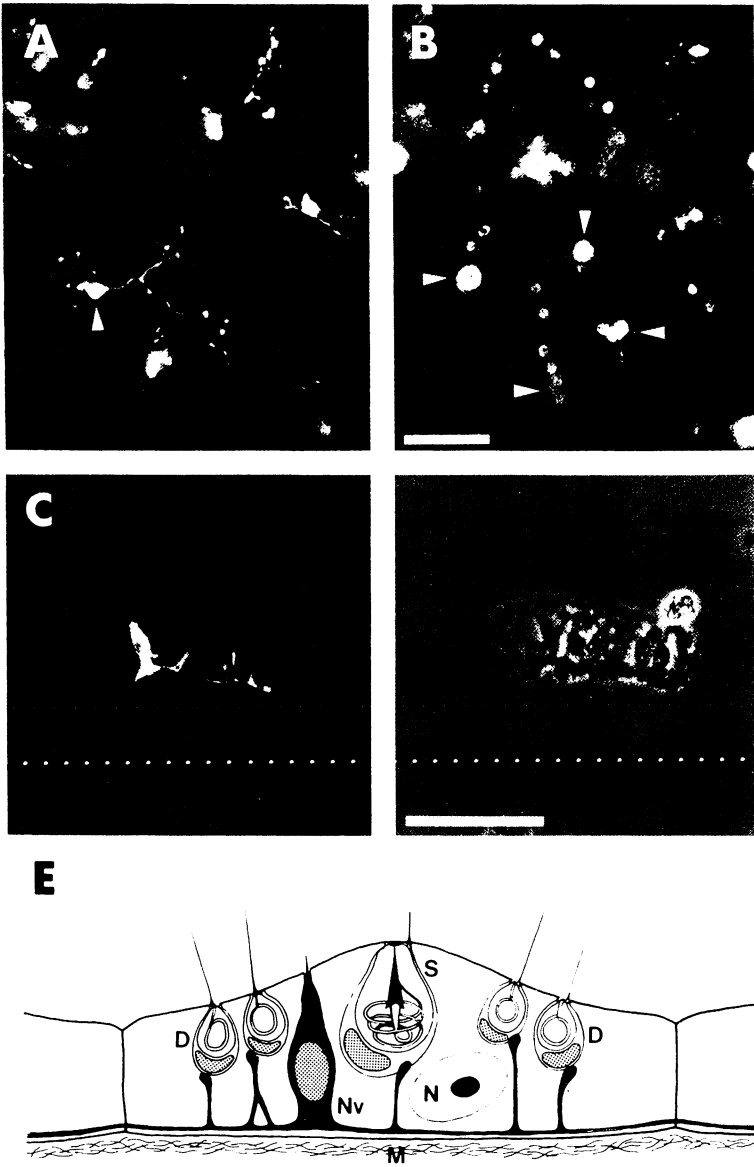


Figure 1. Tentacle-specific NV1+ nerve cells in *Hydra magnipapillata* visualized by indirect immunofluorescence. (A). NV1+ nerve cells in tentacles *in situ*. (B). Double staining with the nematocyte-specific monoclonal antibody H22 shows innervation of nematocytes of several battery cells by one NV1+ sensory cell (arrows indicate NV1+ cell body (A) and battery cell's stenoteles (B)). (C). Single NV1+ nerve cell in maceration preparation. (D). Surrounding battery cell in phase-contrast. (E). Schematic representation showing the location of a NV1+ nerve cell within the battery cell. Nv, NV1+ nerve cell; N, battery cell nucleus; S, stenotele; D, desmonemes; M, mesoglea. Bars: 25 μ m.

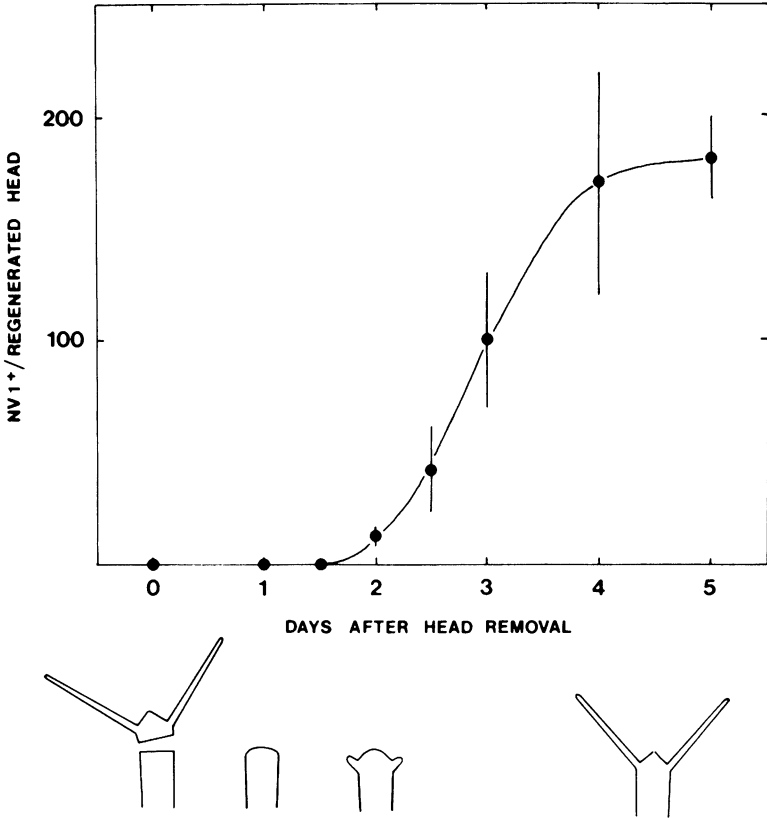


Figure 2. Reappearance of NV1+ nerve cells during head regeneration. Typical stages of head formation at the times indicated are given as schematic drawings.

interstitial cells. When chimeric animals were decapitated below the tentacle ring and allowed to regenerate, three types of regenerates were observed (Table 1): regenerates with completely normal heads (about 50%), incomplete regenerates having less than four tentacles per head (about 5%), and regenerates showing no regeneration of tentacle structures (about 45%). In the latter case, head formation was terminated by a rounded cap at the site of head removal.

In regenerates with normal heads, formation of NV1+ nerve cells was comparable to regeneration of the wild-type strain (Table 1). Tentacles contained normal numbers of NV1+ cells and the kinetics of appearance of these NV1+ cells was comparable to wild-type 105 (see Fig. 2). No NV1+ cells appeared in the regenerating tips of animals in which tentacle formation was inhibited (Table 1). NV1+ nerve cells formed, however, in partially inhibited animals with reduced numbers of tentacles (Fig. 3). There, NV1+ cells appeared only in tentacle tissue. Thus, formation of NV1+ nerve cells is tightly coupled with formation of tentacle morphology.

Table 1. Head Regeneration in Regeneration Deficient reg-16/105 Chimeras

regeneration of head structures	number of head regenerates	development of NV1+ nerve cells
complete	86	wild-type like reformation of NV1+ nerve cell pattern
incomplete	7	appearance of NV1+ nerve cells in tentacle structures
inhibited	66	no appearance of NV1+ nerve cells

Chimeras were decapitated below the tentacles, allowed to regenerate, and analyzed 7 days after head removal. Sample size: 159 head regenerates.

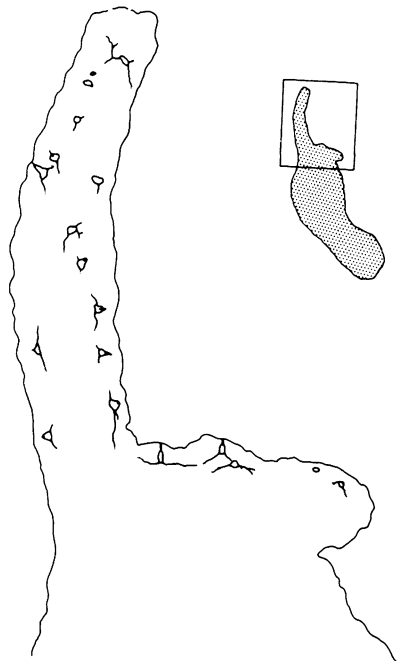


Figure 3. Camera lucida drawing showing NV1+ nerve cells in a partially inhibited reg-16/105 chimera 7 days after head removal. Inset indicates orientation of drawing.

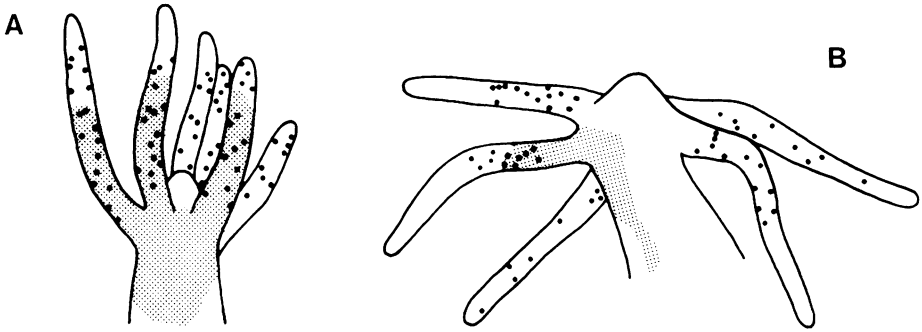


Figure 4. Camera lucida drawings showing a tentacle regenerating head (A) and an intact (B) NV1-free head, 4 days after transplantation. Black spots represent NV1+ cell bodies; stippled areas indicate the position of ink marked cells.

4. Requirements for Formation of a NV1-Battery Cell Complex

4.1. Formation of NV1+ Nerve Cells Requires Interstitial Cell Differentiation

Cell proliferation occurs continuously in the body column of *Hydra*. The new tissue is displaced into buds and into the head (tentacles) and foot, at either end of the body column (Campbell, 1967). During this displacement process, nerve cells from the body column become part of the head. Additional head-specific nerve cells also differentiate from interstitial cells at this time (Yaross et al., 1986). Thus, nerve cells in the head and tentacles are derived from two sources. These two sources can be distinguished by analyzing nerve cell formation in interstitial cell-free animals. Nerve cells, which appear in newly formed heads of such animals arise from nerve cells pre-existing in the body column; nerve cells which fail to form under these conditions must arise in normal animals by differentiation from interstitial cells.

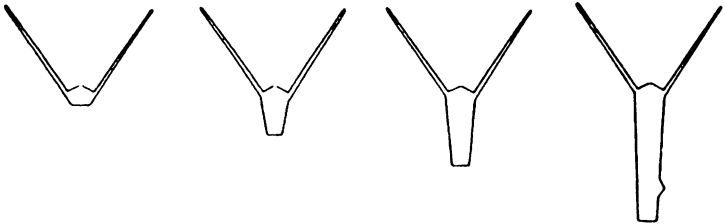
To differentiate the source of NV1+ cells in head tissue interstitial cell-free polyps (Diehl and Burnett, 1964) were allowed to regenerate heads. After six days of regeneration no NV1+ cells appeared in the regenerated tentacles; other types of nerve cells could be recognized in these tentacles using a different monoclonal antibody (NV4; Hobmayer et al., in preparation). Thus, tentacle-specific NV1+ nerve cells arise only by differentiation from interstitial precursor cells.

4.2. Formation of NV1+ Nerve Cells Requires Differentiation of New Battery Cells

Since differentiation of NV1+ nerve cells is closely correlated to differentiation of tentacle structures, it appeared possible that NV1 formation only occurs during differentiation of new battery cells. To investigate this, we grafted NV1-free heads onto the body columns of normal animals and followed the appearance of newly differentiated NV1+ nerve cells in the NV1-free tentacles. To permit tracking of epithelial cell movement from the body column into tentacles, ectodermal epithelial cells in the body column were labelled with India Ink at the site of transplantation (Campbell, 1973). Some experimental animals were left intact; in others, the tentacles were excised to follow formation of new tentacle cells.

The appearance of newly differentiated NV1+ cells was the same in both intact and tentacle regenerating transplants, and the amount of tentacle tissue containing

Table 2. Stimulation of NV1+ and Tentacle Epithelial Cell Differentiation in HA Treated Tentacle Regenerates



NV1+/ tentacle ring	HA treated	111 ± 45	160 ± 28	158 ± 28	161 ± 23
	control	113 ± 44	133 ± 27	127 ± 25	130 ± 29
Epi/ tentacle ring	HA treated	1185 ± 427	1878 ± 570	1805 ± 238	1934 ± 289
	control	1178 ± 338	1478 ± 259	1510 ± 252	1527 ± 339

Hydra were incubated in 1 pM HA for 18 hr. Pieces of different size (heads, distal 1/4, distal 1/2, and whole animals) were then cut, as shown above. Tentacles were excised from all pieces and the pieces were incubated in hydra medium for 2 days to permit tentacle regeneration. The regenerated tentacles were scored in whole mounts for NV1+ cells, by antibody staining, and for epithelial cells by staining their nuclei with the DNA-specific fluorochrome DAPI. The numbers in the Table refer to the total number of cells in all tentacles of a regenerate (the number of tentacles per regenerate varied from 4-7). The means of HA-treated and control animals differ (95% confidence limit, Students t-test) for distal 1/4, distal 1/2 and whole animal pieces.

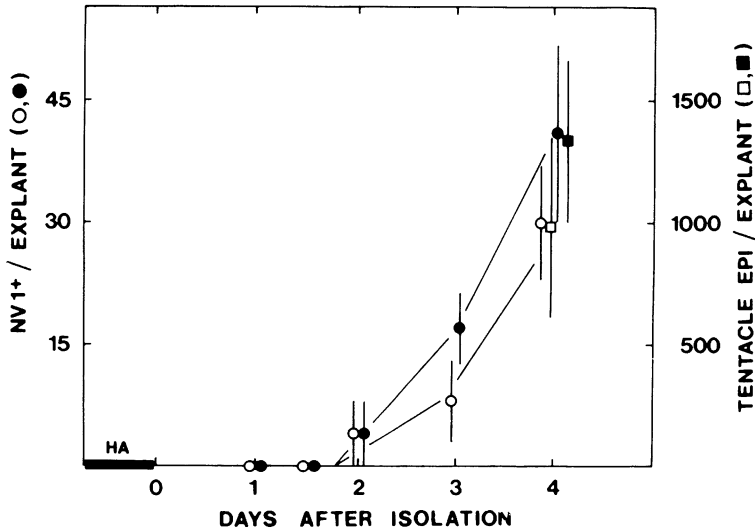


Figure 5. Kinetics of NV1+ and tentacle epithelial cell differentiation in distal gastric region explants of *Hydra* treated with 1 pM HA for 18 hr (closed symbols). Open symbols represent untreated control animals.

NV1+ cells was roughly the same. NV1+ cells filled almost the entire length of regenerated tentacles (Fig. 4A), while in intact animals there was a well defined distal boundary of NV1+ cells and an essentially empty area at the ends of the tentacles which corresponded to "old" tentacle tissue present at the time of grafting (Fig. 4B). Thus, NV1 precursors did not differentiate in association with already differentiated battery cells. Rather, it appears that the NV1-battery cell complex can only be formed by interaction between an interstitial cell precursor and a battery cell precursor.

5. Stimulation of NV1+ and Battery Cell Differentiation in Head Activator-treated Polyps

In order to characterize signals which control battery cell formation and to localize the site of their action in *Hydra* we have analyzed the effect of HA (Schaller, 1973) on differentiation of tentacle-specific NV1+ nerve cells and battery cells. Whole animals were incubated in 1 pM HA for 18 hr. Then tentacles were excised and after two days of regeneration in *Hydra* medium, the number of newly differentiated NV1+ nerve cells and tentacle epithelial cells was scored. In some animals, various amounts of proximal body column tissue were also removed. The results in Table 2 show that HA-treated animals contained about 25% more NV1+ nerve cells and tentacle epithelial cells than untreated control animals. Thus, HA stimulates formation of battery cells.

Truncated 1/4 and 1/2 animals differentiated the same number of NV1+ cells as intact animals and also showed the same HA effect (Table 2). In contrast, isolated head pieces regenerated reduced numbers of battery cells and showed no stimulation of NV1+ differentiation in HA treated animals (Table 2). Thus, head tissue itself is insensitive to HA.

Table 2 shows that pieces of *Hydra* which contained the distal gastric region responded to HA treatment with increased tentacle differentiation; head pieces which lacked this tissue did not respond. This suggests that tissue in the distal gastric region is the site of formation of the NV1-battery cell complex. To test this directly, we treated whole animals with 1 pM HA for 18 hr and then isolated the distal gastric region. Each isolated piece regenerated a small polyp with a head and tentacles. The first tentacle-specific NV1+ nerve cells appeared two days after isolation, coincident with the outgrowth of tentacle tips in both treated and untreated explants (Fig. 5). The number of NV1+ cells and the number of tentacle epithelial cells was about 30% higher in HA-treated animals than in control animals on day four.

In contrast, isolates from the proximal body column showed no stimulation of NV1+ differentiation by HA. From this we conclude that battery cell formation does not occur in this region. The distal gastric region seems to be the only site of battery cell formation in normal animals. In this region NV1 precursors and epithelial cell precursors interact to form a complex, which then differentiates to a battery cell during movement into the base of the tentacles.

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