

## CALCIUM RELEASE-ACTIVATED CALCIUM CURRENT IN RAT MAST CELLS

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(Received 17 July 1992)

### SUMMARY

1. Whole-cell patch clamp recordings of membrane currents and fura-2 measurements of free intracellular calcium concentration ( $[Ca^{2+}]_i$ ) were used to study the biophysical properties of a calcium current activated by depletion of intracellular calcium stores in rat peritoneal mast cells.

2. Calcium influx through an inward calcium release-activated calcium current ( $I_{CRAC}$ ) was induced by three independent mechanisms that result in store depletion: intracellular infusion of inositol 1,4,5-trisphosphate ( $InsP_3$ ) or extracellular application of ionomycin (active depletion), and intracellular infusion of calcium chelators (ethylene glycol bis-*N,N,N',N'*-tetraacetic acid (EGTA) or 1,2-bis(2-aminophenoxy)ethane-*N,N,N',N'*-tetraacetic acid (BAPTA)) to prevent reuptake of leaked-out calcium into the stores (passive depletion).

3. The activation of  $I_{CRAC}$  induced by active store depletion has a short delay (4–14 s) following intracellular infusion of  $InsP_3$  or extracellular application of ionomycin. It has a monoexponential time course with a time constant of 20–30 s and, depending on the complementary  $Ca^{2+}$  buffer, a mean normalized amplitude (at 0 mV) of 0.6 pA pF<sup>-1</sup> (with EGTA) and 1.1 pA pF<sup>-1</sup> (with BAPTA).

4. After full activation of  $I_{CRAC}$  by  $InsP_3$  in the presence of EGTA (10 mM), hyperpolarizing pulses to –100 mV induced an instantaneous inward current that decayed by 64% within 50 ms. This inactivation is probably mediated by  $[Ca^{2+}]_i$ , since the decrease of inward current in the presence of the fast  $Ca^{2+}$  buffer BAPTA (10 mM) was only 30%.

5. The amplitude of  $I_{CRAC}$  was dependent on the extracellular  $Ca^{2+}$  concentration with an apparent dissociation constant ( $K_D$ ) of 3.3 mM. Inward currents were non-saturating up to –200 mV.

6. The selectivity of  $I_{CRAC}$  for  $Ca^{2+}$  was assessed by using fura-2 as the dominant intracellular buffer (at a concentration of 2 mM) and relating the absolute changes in the calcium-sensitive fluorescence (390 nm excitation) with the calcium current integral. This relationship was almost identical to the one determined for  $Ca^{2+}$  influx through voltage-activated calcium currents in chromaffin cells, suggesting a similar selectivity. Replacing  $Na^+$  and  $K^+$  by *N*-methyl-D-glucamine (with  $Ca^{2+}$  ions as exclusive charge carriers) reduced the amplitude of  $I_{CRAC}$  by only 9% further suggesting a high specificity for  $Ca^{2+}$  ions.

7. The current amplitude was not greatly affected by variations of external  $Mg^{2+}$  in the range of 0–12 mM. Even at 12 mM  $Mg^{2+}$  the current amplitude was reduced by only 23%.

8.  $I_{CRAC}$  was dose-dependently inhibited by  $Cd^{2+}$ . The concentration–response relationship for  $Cd^{2+}$  could be described by a Michaelis–Menten function with an apparent  $K_D$  of 0.24 mM and a Hill coefficient of 1.

9. All other tested divalent ions also dose-dependently and reversibly inhibited  $I_{CRAC}$ . The order of potency was determined by the relative blocking efficacy of 1 mM of the respective ions:  $Ba^{2+} \approx Sr^{2+} < Ni^{2+} < Mn^{2+} \approx Co^{2+} \approx Be^{2+} < Cd^{2+} < Zn^{2+}$ . The trivalent ion  $La^{3+}$  was the most potent blocker of  $I_{CRAC}$ .

10.  $I_{CRAC}$  excluded monovalent ions in the presence of divalent ions. Complete removal of divalent ions typically resulted in a triphasic conductance change: an initial decrease in the calcium current, an abrupt increase in inward current with modest inward rectification due to passage of monovalent ions, and a subsequent decrease in total current with a linear current–voltage relationship. At the same time, these changes were accompanied by a shift in the reversal potential from  $> +50$  to 0 mV.

11. While all the features of  $I_{CRAC}$  are compatible with an ion channel mechanism, there was no significant increase in current noise associated with its activation.

12. Our results suggest that the calcium current activated by depletion of intracellular calcium stores is a highly selective pathway for calcium entry into mast cells and may constitute one of the mechanisms underlying the plateau phase of elevated cytosolic calcium concentration following receptor-mediated release of intracellular calcium.

#### INTRODUCTION

An increase in free intracellular  $Ca^{2+}$  concentration  $[Ca^{2+}]_i$  is a ubiquitous mechanism by which cells control a variety of their functions. The rise in  $[Ca^{2+}]_i$  can occur either by release of calcium from internal stores or by influx of external calcium across the plasma membrane (Putney, 1990; Irvine, 1990; Meldolesi, Clementi, Fasolato, Zacchetti & Pozzan, 1991). In many cell types the increase in  $[Ca^{2+}]_i$  is due to both calcium release and calcium influx. The observed changes in  $[Ca^{2+}]_i$  in response to a calcium-mobilizing agonist are typically composed of a transient calcium spike due to  $Ca^{2+}$  release and a more prolonged plateau phase of elevated  $[Ca^{2+}]_i$  that critically depends on the presence of external calcium and thus is due to  $Ca^{2+}$  entry across the plasma membrane.

While the mechanism of receptor-mediated calcium release generally can be attributed to the actions of the second messenger inositol 1,4,5-trisphosphate ( $InsP_3$ ), the instruments of calcium influx in electrically non-excitable cells appear to be rather diverse (Berridge & Irvine, 1989; Sage, 1992). In some cases the agonist itself may gate ion channels permeable to calcium; in others, intracellular messengers generated by the agonist can serve this function (Meldolesi & Pozzan, 1987; Penner, Matthews & Neher, 1988; Matthews, Neher & Penner, 1989a; Mahaut-Smith, Sage & Rink, 1992). In most cases, these ion channels only poorly discriminate between mono- and divalent cations. Therefore, these currents are mainly carried by monovalent  $Na^+$  ions and their amplitudes have to be large in order to account for

changes in  $[Ca^{2+}]_i$ . In many cells, however, inward currents are not readily detectable, despite the registration of calcium entry by calcium-sensitive dyes (Meldolesi *et al.* 1991). This may be due to alternative, more selective calcium influx mechanisms that do not carry sizeable current.

As evident from a number of investigations, the regulation of  $Ca^{2+}$  entry is tightly linked to the filling state of intracellular calcium stores (Putney, 1990; Irvine, 1990). The mere depletion of internal  $Ca^{2+}$  stores seems to activate  $Ca^{2+}$  influx by an as yet unidentified signal transmitted from the organelles to the plasma membrane. Recently, we described the presence of a  $Ca^{2+}$  current in mast cells that can be activated by depletion of internal calcium stores (Hoth & Penner, 1992). We have termed this current  $I_{CRAC}$  (for calcium release-activated calcium), since the release of  $Ca^{2+}$  from intracellular stores by three independent mechanisms activated the same characteristic  $Ca^{2+}$  conductance. This current can be measured under favourable conditions where extracellular  $Ca^{2+}$  is high (10 mM) and intracellular  $Ca^{2+}$  is buffered to low levels by EGTA or BAPTA (10 mM).

In this study, we characterize the biophysical properties of the calcium release-activated calcium current  $I_{CRAC}$  in rat peritoneal mast cells. This study is based on the analysis of more than 700 single-cell experiments and provides data about the activation kinetics, the ionic selectivity, and the blocking effects of divalent metal ions. These indicate that  $I_{CRAC}$  is a highly specific current that is almost exclusively carried by  $Ca^{2+}$  ions. While most features of the current suggested that the conductance change is due to an ion channel mechanism, there was no detectable single-channel activity and no measurable increase in current variance. Since calcium influx following depletion of intracellular calcium stores is recognized as a rather ubiquitous phenomenon, these data should be helpful in identifying and comparing similar calcium influx mechanisms in other cell types.

## METHODS

### *Mast cell purification and culture*

Mast cells from rat peritoneum were obtained as described previously (von zur Mühlen, Eckstein & Penner, 1991). Male Wistar rats (200–300 g) were ether-anaesthetized and decapitated. A cell mixture was collected by peritoneal lavage with a Ringer solution containing (mM): NaCl, 140; KCl, 2.8;  $CaCl_2$ , 2;  $MgCl_2$ , 2; glucose, 11; HEPES-NaOH, 10; pH 7.2. Subsequently, mast cells were purified to more than 95% homogeneity by Percoll gradient centrifugation at 4 °C for 20 min (34000 *g*). The band containing mast cells was collected and resuspended in Ringer solution of the above composition and briefly centrifuged to obtain a pellet of mast cells. The supernatant was removed and the cells were resuspended in modified medium M199 supplemented with fetal calf serum (10%),  $NaHCO_3$  (45 mM), glucose (2.5 mM), streptomycin (0.12 mg ml<sup>-1</sup>), and penicillin (0.664 mg ml<sup>-1</sup>). Finally, using this medium, mast cells were co-cultured on glass coverslips with Swiss 3T3 fibroblasts and incubated at 37 °C and 10%  $CO_2$ . Cells were used within 1–4 days in which time no obvious changes relevant to the phenomena described in this study were noticed.

For comparison of calcium selectivity of  $I_{CRAC}$  with voltage-activated calcium currents, we used bovine adrenal chromaffin cells kept in short-term culture. The purification and culturing conditions for this preparation are described elsewhere (Fenwick, Marty & Neher, 1982a).

### *External and internal solutions*

For experiments, coverslips were transferred to the recording chamber and kept in a Ringer solution of the following composition (mM): NaCl, 140; KCl, 2.8;  $CaCl_2$ , 10;  $MgCl_2$ , 2; glucose, 11; HEPES-NaOH, 10; pH 7.2. In some experiments the divalent ion concentration of the external

solution was changed as described in the text or figure legends. In experiments where all divalent ions were omitted from the extracellular solution, remaining contaminations were chelated by addition of EGTA or EDTA (1 mM). For selectivity studies, extracellular  $\text{Na}^+$  and  $\text{K}^+$  in the standard Ringer solution were replaced by *N*-methyl-D-glucamine (142.8 mM). In some experiments active depletion of internal  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  stores was induced by extracellularly applied ionomycin (Calbiochem). Ionomycin stock solution (14 mM in dimethyl sulphoxide (DMSO)) was diluted to a final concentration of 14  $\mu\text{M}$  in Ringer solution. External solution changes were made by pressure ejection (10  $\text{cmH}_2\text{O}$ ) from a wide-tipped puffer pipette ( $\sim 10 \mu\text{m}$ ) positioned about 10–20  $\mu\text{m}$  from the cell under investigation. For recording of voltage-activated  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  currents in chromaffin cells, an extracellular solution of the following composition was used (mM): NaCl, 125; KCl, 2.8;  $\text{CaCl}_2$ , 10;  $\text{MgCl}_2$ , 2; tetraethylammonium chloride (TEA), 10; tetrodotoxin (TTX), 0.001; glucose, 11; Hepes-NaOH, 10; pH 7.2.

The standard intracellular solution contained (mM): potassium glutamate, 145; NaCl, 8;  $\text{MgCl}_2$ , 1; Mg-ATP, 0.5; Hepes-KOH, 10; pH 7.2. For recording of voltage-activated  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  currents in chromaffin cells, potassium glutamate was replaced by caesium glutamate. Active depletion of intracellular stores was induced by adding  $\text{InsP}_3$  (10  $\mu\text{M}$ , Amersham) to the pipette solution. In addition, EGTA or BAPTA (10 mM) were included to increase the driving force for calcium influx, to prevent refilling of the stores, and to reduce calcium-induced inactivation of  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$ . Fura-2 pentapotassium salt (Molecular Probes, Eugene, OR, USA) was added to the internal solution (100  $\mu\text{M}$ , unless otherwise stated).

#### *Current recording and data analysis*

Experiments were performed at room temperature (22–26 °C) in the tight-seal whole-cell configuration of the patch-clamp technique using Sylgard-coated patch pipettes with resistances of 2–5 M $\Omega$ . Series resistances were in the range of 5–20 M $\Omega$ . High-resolution membrane currents were recorded using an EPC-9 patch-clamp amplifier (HEKA, Lambrecht, Germany) controlled by the 'E9SCREEN' software on an Atari computer. All voltages were corrected for a liquid junction potential of 8 mV between external and internal solutions. High-resolution currents were low-pass filtered at 2.3 kHz and acquired at a sampling rate of 10 kHz, while a charting program on another computer synchronously recorded at low resolution (typically 2 Hz) parameters such as holding potential, holding current (low-pass filtered at 500 Hz), fura-2 fluorescence, and timing of solution changes.

Voltage ramps were of 50 ms duration, covering a range of  $-100$  to  $+100$  mV. In most experiments, thirty voltage ramps were applied immediately after establishment of the whole-cell configuration at maximal stimulation rate (about 1.5 Hz). Capacitance and series resistance were cancelled before each voltage ramp using the automatic neutralization routine of the EPC-9. Subsequent ramps were spaced at 10 s intervals. For analysis, the very first ramps before activation of  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  were digitally filtered at 1 kHz, pooled and used for leak subtraction of the subsequent current records.

A holding potential of 0 mV was used throughout this study, because it is close to the zero-current voltage under our experimental conditions and because the electrical driving force for calcium influx at this potential is moderate enough to be coped with by the intracellularly supplied buffers EGTA or BAPTA. For analysis of current amplitudes in some experiments, we have used the values obtained at  $-40$  mV (either from ramp currents or from currents induced by voltage pulses delivered specifically to this potential). The potential of  $-40$  mV was chosen because it is close to the reversal potential of chloride currents and thus minimizes small contaminations introduced by an occasional activation of  $\text{Cl}^-$  conductances (Penner *et al.* 1988; Matthews, Neher & Penner, 1989*b*).

Variance analysis was performed on-line at a rate of 0.5–1 Hz by sampling 500 ms sections of membrane currents with a sampling rate of 5 kHz and low-pass filtered at 500 Hz (effective bandwidth: 2–500 Hz).

#### *Fluorescence measurements*

Measurement of fura-2 fluorescence from single mast cells in the whole-cell configuration was essentially as described elsewhere (Neher, 1989). Cells were loaded with fura-2 by diffusion from the patch pipette and  $[\text{Ca}^{2+}]_i$  was calculated from the fluorescence ratio at two excitation wavelengths (360/390 nm).

Experiments for estimating calcium fluxes through  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  were performed by loading cells with a high concentration of fura-2 (2 mM). Leak currents were determined before activation of  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  and used for leak correction of currents induced by applying square voltage pulses to negative membrane potentials ( $-100$  mV). In chromaffin cells, fura-2 was used at 0.5 mM, which is sufficiently high to constitute the dominant buffer in chromaffin cells (Neher & Augustine, 1992), while producing a fluorescence signal comparable to 2 mM fura-2 in mast cells. This may reflect differences in the accessible volume of the two cell types. Voltage-dependent  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  currents in chromaffin cells were activated by depolarizing voltage pulses to  $+10$  mV and leak corrected by a P/4 protocol. For comparison of both cell types, leak-corrected current integrals and the absolute changes in the calcium-sensitive fluorescence signal of fura-2 (390 nm excitation wavelength) were used to assess the net calcium flux component of the currents according to

$$R = \frac{\Delta F_{390}}{\int I_{\text{CRAC}} dt},$$

where  $R$  is the ratio,  $\Delta F_{390}$  is the change in fluorescence at 390 nm, and  $\int I_{\text{CRAC}} dt$  is the integral of the calcium current over the voltage pulse. For details of relating fluorescence changes and  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  currents see Neher & Augustine (1992).

## RESULTS

### *Activation of $I_{\text{CRAC}}$ by depletion of calcium stores*

In a previous publication (Hoth & Penner, 1992), we demonstrated that depletion of intracellular calcium stores by three independent mechanisms (by addition of  $\text{InsP}_3$ , ionomycin or excess of intracellular  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  buffers) commonly induces the activation of an inwardly rectifying, voltage-independent calcium current which we termed  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$ . The activation of this current is demonstrated in Fig. 1A, which shows a three-dimensional plot of an experiment in which  $\text{InsP}_3$  (10  $\mu\text{M}$ ) and EGTA (10 mM) were included in the standard pipette solution. Immediately after obtaining the whole-cell configuration, a voltage-ramp protocol was run to obtain instantaneous current-voltage relationships in the range  $-100$  to  $+100$  mV from a holding potential of 0 mV (inset in Fig. 1A). The currents flowing in response to these voltage ramps are plotted as a function of time. It is seen that after a short delay, an inwardly rectifying current develops as a consequence of the active depletion of intracellular calcium stores by  $\text{InsP}_3$ . Since  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  is a voltage-independent calcium current with a reversal potential more positive than 0 mV, it is recorded as an inward current at 0 mV holding potential. The steady-state current flowing at 0 mV is shown in Fig. 1B. The shaded area at the beginning of the experiment corresponds to the time period in which the first twenty-seven short voltage ramps of Fig. 1A were applied. The spikes in Fig. 1B correspond to occasional sampling of unresolved currents evoked by the voltage ramps.

The fast activation of  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  by  $\text{InsP}_3$  was observed in 97% of the cells ( $n = 560$ ) investigated under similar conditions as in Fig. 1. The extracellular application of ionomycin (14  $\mu\text{M}$ ) was similarly effective in inducing current activation (34 of 34 cells). The procedure of activating  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  by perfusing mast cells with high concentrations of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  chelators was less reliable within the time span of a typical experiment (400 s). Under these conditions, calcium stores were not actively depleted but rather passively emptied by leakage of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  from the stores and, therefore, only 56% of the cells ( $n = 66$ ) showed a noticeable calcium current which developed after a variable lag period (see Table 1).

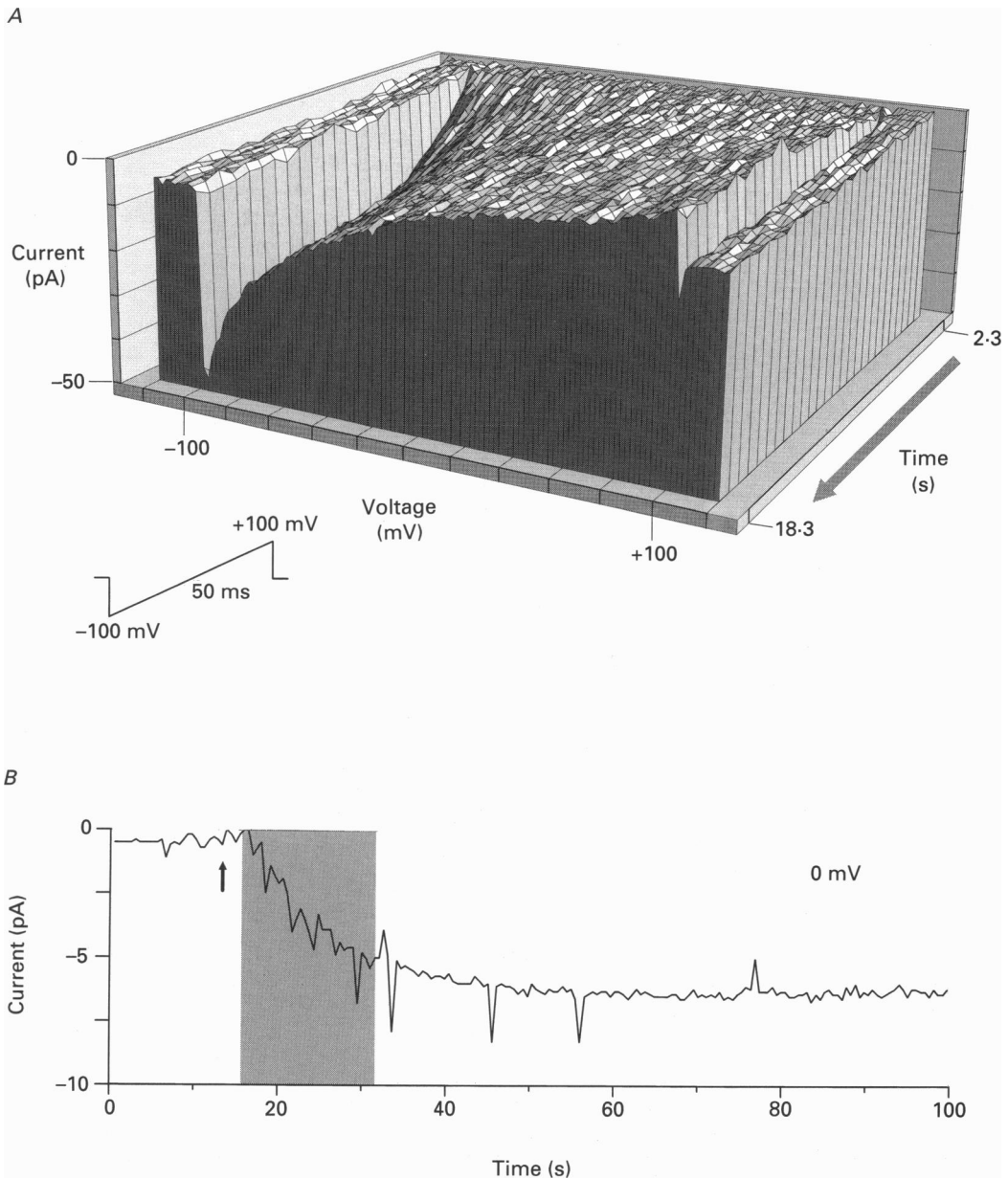


Fig. 1. Activation time course of  $I_{CRAC}$ . In this experiment,  $InsP_3$  ( $10 \mu M$ ) and EGTA ( $10 mM$ ) were added to the standard pipette solution. Extracellular  $Ca^{2+}$  concentration was  $10 mM$ . *A*, three-dimensional plot of high-resolution currents in response to the voltage-ramp protocol shown in the inset. Time progresses in direction of the arrow, with the first ramp current acquired 2.3 s after establishment of the whole-cell configuration. For clarity, only every fifth data point of the original sweeps (acquired at 10 kHz) were plotted. The first three ramps were pooled and subtracted as leak from all other sweeps. *B*, same experiment, showing the low-resolution current at the holding potential of 0 mV. The shaded area corresponds to the time period in which the ramps of *A* were acquired. The arrow indicates the time of establishing the whole-cell configuration.

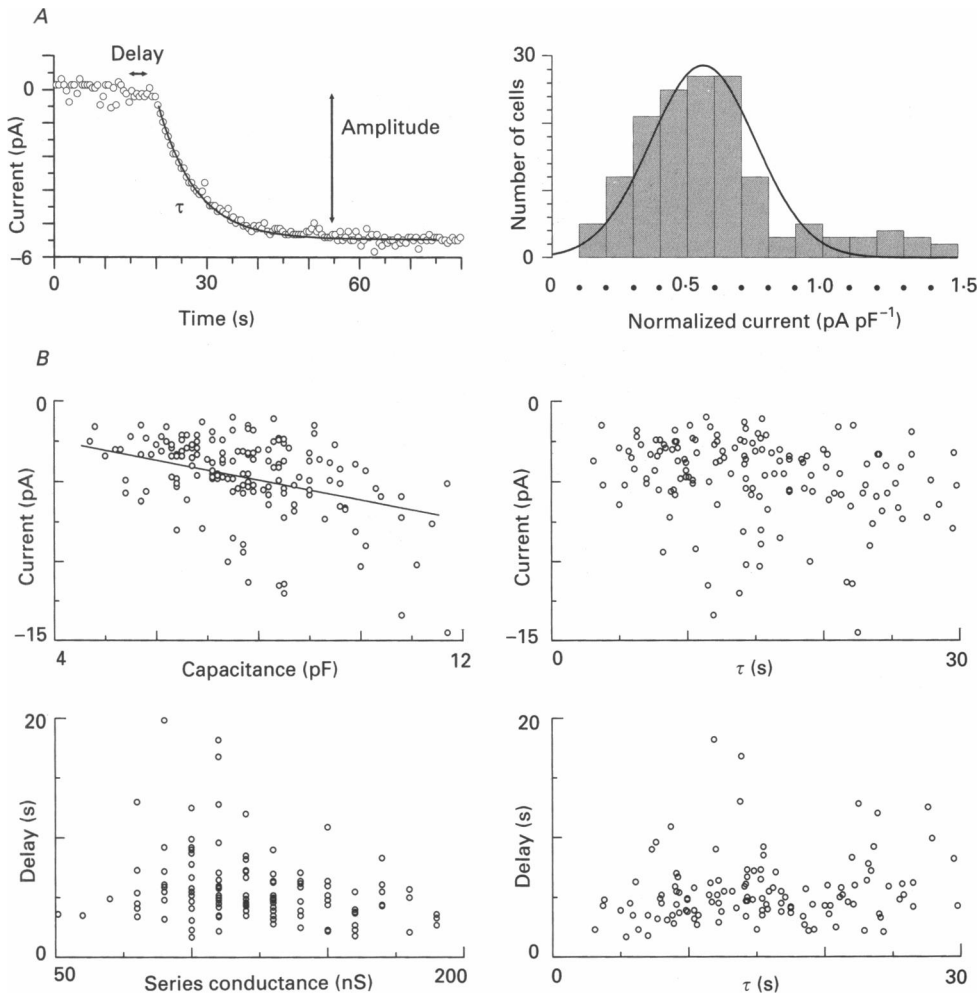


Fig. 2. Activation kinetics of  $I_{CRAC}$  and relationship to passive cell parameters. *A*, the left panel shows a typical time course of activation of  $I_{CRAC}$  at 0 mV (induced by  $10 \mu\text{M}$   $\text{InsP}_3$  and 10 mM EGTA). It could be fitted by a single-exponential function, yielding the time constant ( $\tau$ ) and the current amplitude. The delay represents the time from break-in until activation of  $I_{CRAC}$ . The right panel shows the amplitude distribution of leak-corrected currents normalized to capacitance in 155 cells analysed this way. The distribution was fitted by a Gaussian fit according to  $y = a \exp(-0.5(x-b)/c)^2$ , where  $x$  is the normalized current,  $y$  is the number of cells,  $a$  is the peak amplitude (29 cells),  $b$  is the mean current ( $0.57 \text{ pA pF}^{-1}$ ) and  $c$  is the half-width ( $0.19 \text{ pA pF}^{-1}$ ). *B*, plots of the various parameters (time constant, amplitude, delay, cell capacitance, and series conductance). Each data point corresponds to a single cell. Note the lack of correlation in all plots, except the relationship between capacitance and current, which was correlated as indicated by the linear regression line (slope =  $-0.6 \text{ pA pF}^{-1}$ , correlation coefficient = 0.31,  $P = 0.023$ ,  $t$  test).

*Activation and inactivation kinetics of  $I_{CRAC}$*

Figure 2 shows the analysis of the kinetic parameters of  $I_{CRAC}$ . The activation time course can be fitted by a single-exponential function, yielding parameters of

amplitude and activation time constant  $\tau$ . It is preceded by a delay, which reflects the time required for depleting the intracellular calcium stores and the activation steps involved in gating the plasma membrane conductance.

We analysed 160 experiments in which  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  was activated by  $\text{InsP}_3$  and EGTA. The current amplitudes were normalized to cell capacitance as a measure of surface

TABLE 1. Kinetic parameters of activation of  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$

Pipette solutions (*external application)	Delay (s)	Time constant $\tau$ (s)	Current/capacitance (pA pF <sup>-1</sup> )
EGTA	192 ± 33 (28)	44 ± 10 (12)	-0.48 ± 0.07 (12)
EGTA + $\text{InsP}_3$	6 ± 1 (128)	18 ± 1 (160)	-0.60 ± 0.02 (160)
EGTA + *ionomycin	4 ± 1 (5)	31 ± 5 (10)	-0.52 ± 0.05 (9)
BAPTA	306 ± 40 (14)	46 ± 16 (4)	-0.56 ± 0.10 (4)
BAPTA + $\text{InsP}_3$	5 ± 1 (10)	27 ± 3 (13)	-1.10 ± 0.13 (13)
BAPTA + *ionomycin	14 ± 4 (8)	18 ± 3 (7)	-1.03 ± 0.16 (4)
Fura-2 + $\text{InsP}_3$	6 ± 1 (11)	22 ± 3 (11)	-0.61 ± 0.08 (11)

Values represent means ± s.e.m. ( $n$ ) and were obtained by fitting a single exponential to the activation time course of  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  under the specified conditions (holding potential was 0 mV). EGTA and BAPTA were employed at 10 mM, fura-2 was added at 2 mM, and  $\text{InsP}_3$  was used at 10  $\mu\text{M}$ . Ionomycin was applied extracellularly at 14  $\mu\text{M}$ .

area, yielding an amplitude distribution of mean currents as shown in Fig. 2A. The amplitude distribution was fitted by a Gaussian function with a mean of  $0.57 \pm 0.19$  pA pF<sup>-1</sup> ( $\pm$  half-width), which corresponds to about 4.4 pA per cell, based on a mean mast cell capacitance of  $7.8 \pm 0.1$  pF ( $\pm$  s.e.m.,  $n = 160$ ). We have further analysed a possible correlation of the determined parameters (Fig. 2B). As expected, current amplitudes tended to increase in parallel with cell capacitance, indicating a constant current density with respect to membrane area. The delay to the activation of  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  was largely independent of the series conductance, suggesting that the initial activation step involving depletion of calcium stores by infusion of  $\text{InsP}_3$  was supramaximal and not limited by access resistance to the cytosol. Similarly, there was no correlation between the activation time constant and the measured delays or the current amplitudes (Fig. 2B), suggesting that the activation process follows an all-or-none behaviour and/or that there is an inherent rate-limiting step in the signal transduction process that is not imposed by the experimental conditions.

$I_{\text{CRAC}}$  also developed spontaneously when adding EGTA or BAPTA (10 mM) to the pipette solution. This effect of the  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  chelators is presumably due to the absorption of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  leaking from internal stores and preventing its reuptake, eventually causing depletion of calcium pools and activation of  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$ . Under these conditions, store depletion is passive and mainly depends on the leakiness of the stores. As a result, the delay before activation is considerably longer (see Table 1). The normalized current amplitude inducing passive store depletion by EGTA is not significantly different from experiments in which the calcium stores were actively depleted by  $\text{InsP}_3$ , whereas with BAPTA, current amplitudes were smaller than expected, considering the larger amplitudes seen in conjunction with active store depletion. The parameters for the activation of  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  under various experimental conditions are summarized in Table 1.



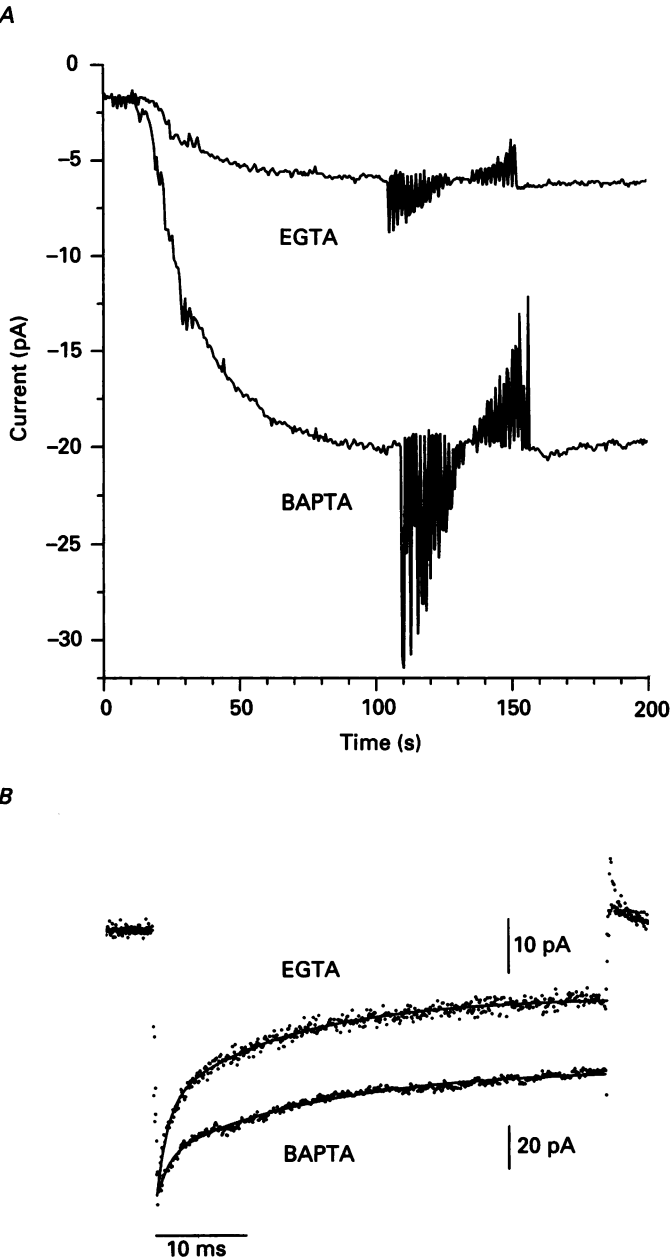


Fig. 3. Calcium-induced inactivation of  $I_{CRAC}$  with different  $Ca^{2+}$  buffers. *A*, superimposed low-resolution currents recorded at 0 mV after active depletion of  $Ca^{2+}$  stores by  $InsP_3$  ( $10 \mu M$ ) in the presence of EGTA or BAPTA ( $10 mM$ ). At steady state, voltage steps to different potentials were applied (seen as unresolved current spikes). *B*, superimposed high-resolution currents elicited by hyperpolarizing voltage steps to  $-100$  mV in the presence of EGTA and BAPTA, respectively. For comparison, the current sweep obtained with EGTA in the pipette was scaled to match the larger amplitude of the current under BAPTA. The continuous line is a double-exponential fit to the decay of the current according to  $y = c + a_1 \exp(-t/\tau_1) + a_2 \exp(-t/\tau_2)$ , where  $c$  is a constant corresponding

We asked whether  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  is subject to  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ -dependent inactivation by applying a short hyperpolarizing voltage pulse to  $-100$  mV after  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  had been activated by  $\text{InsP}_3$  in the presence of EGTA or BAPTA (Fig. 3). In response to such a voltage step, there was an instantaneous increase in inward current which subsequently decreased by  $64 \pm 3\%$  ( $n = 3$ ) within 50 ms when EGTA (10 mM) was used as the intracellular buffer (Fig. 3*B*). When using the faster  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  chelator BAPTA (10 mM) (Neher, 1986), the total whole-cell current was considerably larger than with EGTA (Fig. 3*A*, see also Table 1), while the decrease of the current amplitude in response to hyperpolarizing pulses was only  $30 \pm 6\%$  ( $n = 3$ ). We take this as evidence that the fast inactivation of  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  is  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  induced and that the lesser degree of fast inactivation and the larger whole-cell current amplitudes in the presence of BAPTA are due to its superior buffering kinetics as compared to EGTA.

#### Calcium dependence of $I_{\text{CRAC}}$

In the next series of experiments, we determined the dependence of the magnitude of  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  on extracellular calcium concentration. This was done by relating the amplitudes of the current activated by  $\text{InsP}_3$  in the presence of 10 mM external  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  with those after varying the  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  concentration (see Fig. 4*B*). The plot in Fig. 4*A* illustrates this relationship, showing the dependence of current amplitude of  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  on the concentration of extracellular  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ . The data could be approximated by a Michaelis–Menten function with an apparent dissociation constant ( $K_{\text{D}}$ ) of 3.3 mM and a Hill coefficient of 1. The current was not completely abolished even at very low extracellular  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  concentrations ( $< 10 \mu\text{M}$ ). The remaining inward current measured about 6% of the steady-state amplitude obtained with 10 mM  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  and may be due to monovalent cation fluxes.

#### Selectivity of $I_{\text{CRAC}}$

The current activated by releasing calcium from internal stores appears to primarily carry  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  ions, since the reversal potential of  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  is usually more positive than  $+50$  mV and removal of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  from the bath solution almost completely abolishes the inwardly rectifying conductance (see Fig. 4). Reversal potential measurements of  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  are compromised by its small amplitude and an occasional activation of a chloride conductance in mast cells (Matthews *et al.* 1989*b*). We have therefore used two alternative approaches to assess the specificity of  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$ . In the first type of measurement, we compared the selectivity of  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  with that of a known voltage-activated calcium current in chromaffin cells (Fenwick, Marty & Neher, 1982*b*). This was achieved by using fura-2 as the dominant intracellular buffer (0.5–2 mM) and recording both changes in the  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ -sensitive fluorescence (390 nm excitation wavelength) and  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  currents in chromaffin cells and mast cells. Under these conditions, all incoming  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  will be bound to fura-2 (Neher & Augustine, 1992)

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to steady-state current after inactivation,  $a_1$  and  $a_2$  are amplitudes,  $\tau_1$  and  $\tau_2$  are time constants. The parameters for the experiments shown were: EGTA ( $c = -17$  pA,  $a_1 = -19$  pA,  $a_2 = -16$  pA,  $\tau_1 = 14$  ms,  $\tau_2 = 1.2$  ms); BAPTA ( $c = -86$  pA,  $a_1 = -42$  pA,  $a_2 = -19$  pA,  $\tau_1 = 18$  ms,  $\tau_2 = 1.2$  ms).

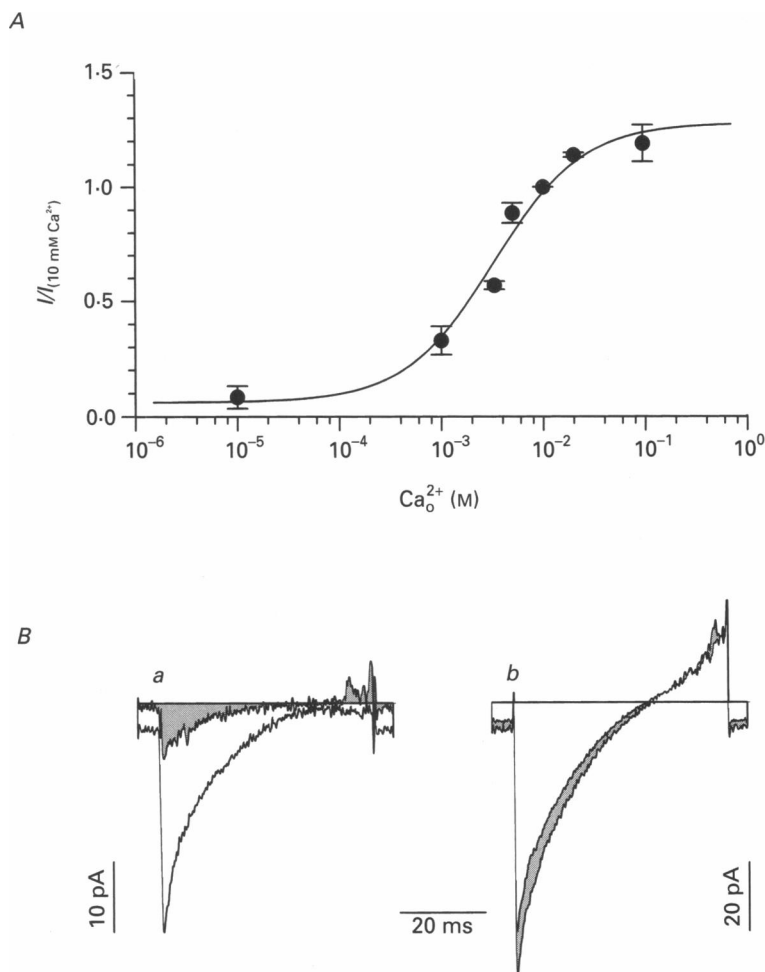


Fig. 4. Dependence of  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  on extracellular  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  concentration. *A*, 'dose-response' relationship for extracellular  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  concentration.  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  was activated by  $\text{InsP}_3$  and EGTA in 10 mM extracellular  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  and the desired test concentrations were applied from a puffer pipette. Data points correspond to the ratio of current amplitudes at  $-40$  mV at various extracellular  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  concentrations with respect to the standard  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  concentration of 10 mM. The datum point with the lowest  $[\text{Ca}^{2+}]_i$  was obtained in the presence of 1 mM EGTA with no  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  added, and arbitrarily set to  $10 \mu\text{M}$  (which we determined to be the free  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  concentration of our Ringer solution in the absence of added  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  and EGTA). Assigning the data point to lower  $[\text{Ca}^{2+}]_o$  values did not affect the fitted curve. The curve was fitted according to  $y = I_{\text{min}} + (I_{\text{max}} / (1 + (x/K_D)^n))$ , where  $x$  is the extracellular  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  concentration,  $y$  is the normalized current,  $I_{\text{min}}$  is the minimal current ratio (0.06),  $I_{\text{max}}$  is the maximal current ratio (1.21),  $K_D$  is the apparent dissociation constant (3.3 mM), and  $n$  is the Hill coefficient (1). The labels *a* and *b* next to the data points for 1 mM and 20 mM  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  refer to the ramp-current traces shown in *B*. *B*, examples of high-resolution ramp currents, showing the effects of different extracellular  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  concentrations on  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$ . The shaded ramp current was obtained after changing the extracellular  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  concentration from 10 to 1 mM (*a*) and 20 mM (*b*), respectively.

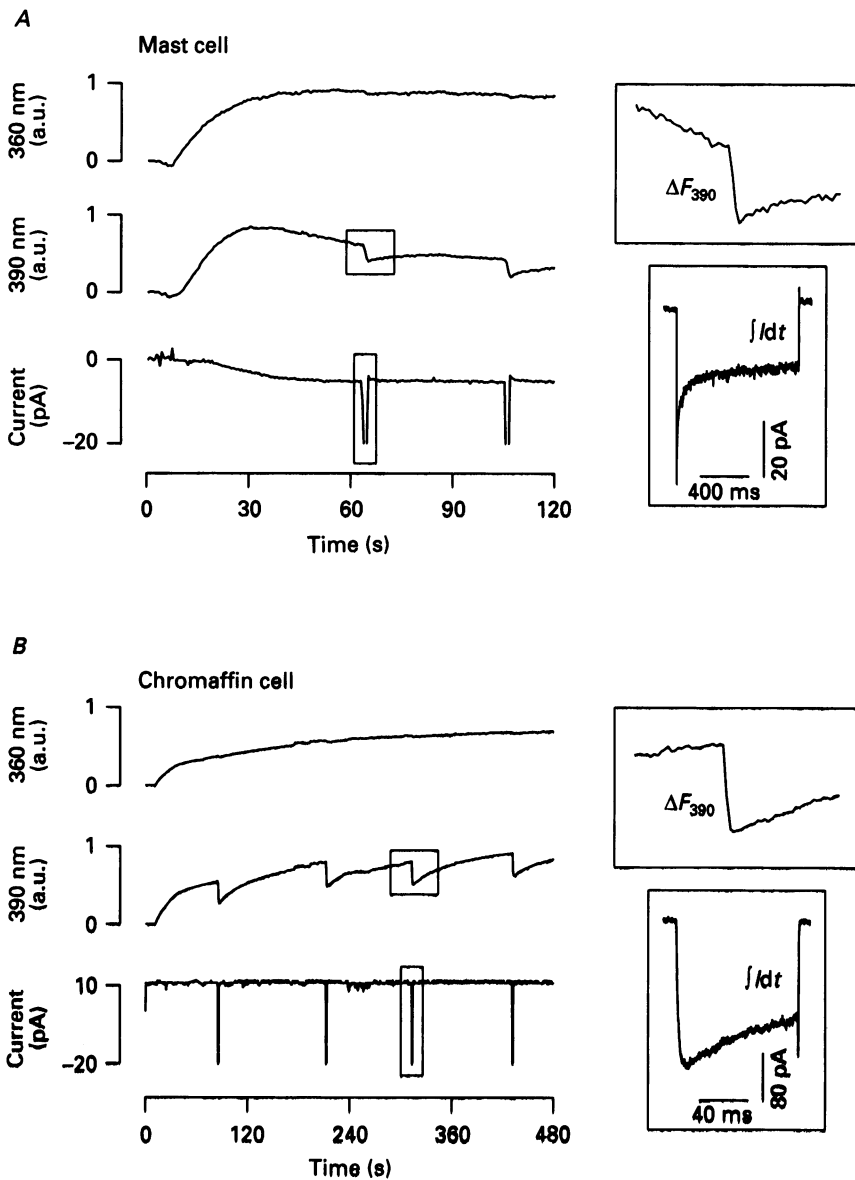


Fig. 5. Calcium fluxes through  $I_{CRAC}$  in mast cells and voltage-activated calcium currents in chromaffin cells. Effects of calcium currents on fura-2 fluorescence (360 and 390 nm) in mast cells (*A*) and chromaffin cells (*B*). Identical scalings apply to measured fluorescence values (in arbitrary units, a.u.) in both experiments, which were performed on the same experimental set-up on the same day. Shaded boxes in the low-resolution traces are magnified on the right, showing the change in the 390 nm signal and the inward current at higher resolution. *A*,  $I_{CRAC}$  was activated by  $InsP_3$  (10  $\mu M$ ) and fura-2 was the only  $Ca^{2+}$  buffer added to the standard pipette solution (2 mM). Changes in fluorescence were recorded in response to hyperpolarizing voltage pulses ( $-100$  mV) from the holding potential (0 mV), seen as truncated spikes in the low-resolution current trace. *B*, similar experiment to *A*, except that the pipette solution contained caesium glutamate instead of potassium glutamate and fura-2 was used at 0.5 mM. No  $InsP_3$  was included in the

and together with the current integral this can be used to quantify the relative proportion of calcium that entered the cell during the current flow.

Figure 5 shows experiments performed under almost identical conditions in a chromaffin cell and a mast cell, the only major difference being the alternative ways of activating calcium influx. In both experiments fura-2 was loaded through the recording pipette into the cytosol. After loading was completed, calcium influx was induced either by a short depolarizing voltage pulse to open voltage-dependent calcium channels (Fig. 5*B*, chromaffin cell) or by a hyperpolarizing voltage pulse to increase the inward current through  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$ , which was previously activated by infusion of  $\text{InsP}_3$  (Fig. 5*A*, mast cell). Both procedures induced an inward current which was accompanied by a decrease in the fura-2 fluorescence at 390 nm (see magnified insets in Fig. 5*A* and *B*). The absolute amount of fluorescence reduction (in arbitrary units) and the net charge transfer during the current flow (in pA s) can be quantified for both cell types by calculating the ratio (see Methods). The mean ratios were  $63 \pm 10 \text{ pA}^{-1} \text{ s}^{-1}$  ( $n = 5$ ) for chromaffin cells and  $79 \pm 20 \text{ pA}^{-1} \text{ s}^{-1}$  ( $n = 3$ ) for mast cells. If one compares these ratios, one arrives at an almost equivalent relative selectivity of 1:1.2 of voltage-dependent calcium currents in chromaffin cells and  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  in mast cells, respectively.

Another way of determining the selectivity of  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  for  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  was performed by replacing extracellular  $\text{Na}^+$  and  $\text{K}^+$  with *N*-methyl-D-glucamine and leaving  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  as the only charge carrier. Figure 6 shows that this resulted in a minor reduction of  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  which on average was  $9 \pm 2\%$  ( $n = 4$ ), which compares favourably with the residual current observed after removal of extracellular  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  in the reciprocal experiment (cf. Fig. 4) and further supports the notion that  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  is highly selective for  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  ions.

#### *Blocking effects of divalent ions*

A characteristic feature of calcium currents is that they are inhibited by other divalent ion species (Hille, 1992). We have tested for the blocking effects of various divalent cations on  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$ . Since these experiments were carried out in the presence of physiological  $\text{Mg}^{2+}$  concentrations (2 mM), we first investigated the effects of  $\text{Mg}^{2+}$  by varying its concentration in the external solution from 0 to 12 mM. Figure 7*A* illustrates the very minor effects on the amplitude of  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  of changing the  $\text{Mg}^{2+}$  concentration from 2 to 0 and 10 mM, respectively. Figure 7*B* summarizes the actions of  $\text{Mg}^{2+}$  on  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  and shows that the calcium current is well adapted to a wide range of extracellular  $\text{Mg}^{2+}$  concentrations.

Next we studied in some detail the blocking effects of  $\text{Cd}^{2+}$  and obtained a concentration-inhibition relationship for this ion as illustrated in Fig. 8*A*. The data points represent the percentage of inhibition as determined from ramp currents at  $-40 \text{ mV}$  or currents in response to hyperpolarizing square pulses to  $-40 \text{ mV}$ . Two examples for the inhibition of  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  by different concentrations of  $\text{Cd}^{2+}$  (50  $\mu\text{M}$  and 3 mM, respectively) are depicted in Fig. 8*B*. The block by  $\text{Cd}^{2+}$  was similarly effective

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pipette solution and  $\text{Na}^+$  and  $\text{K}^+$  currents were blocked by TTX (1  $\mu\text{M}$ ) and TEA (10 mM). Calcium influx was induced by depolarizing voltage steps to +10 mV from a holding potential of  $-70 \text{ mV}$ . See Methods and text for further details.

over the entire voltage range, suggesting a voltage-independent blocking mechanism. The data points could be adequately fitted by a Michaelis–Menten function, yielding an apparent  $K_D$  of  $240 \mu\text{M}$  and a Hill coefficient of 1.

In order to establish a ranking order of potency for various other divalent ions, we chose to quantify the blocking efficacy of 1 mM of the respective divalent ion. We

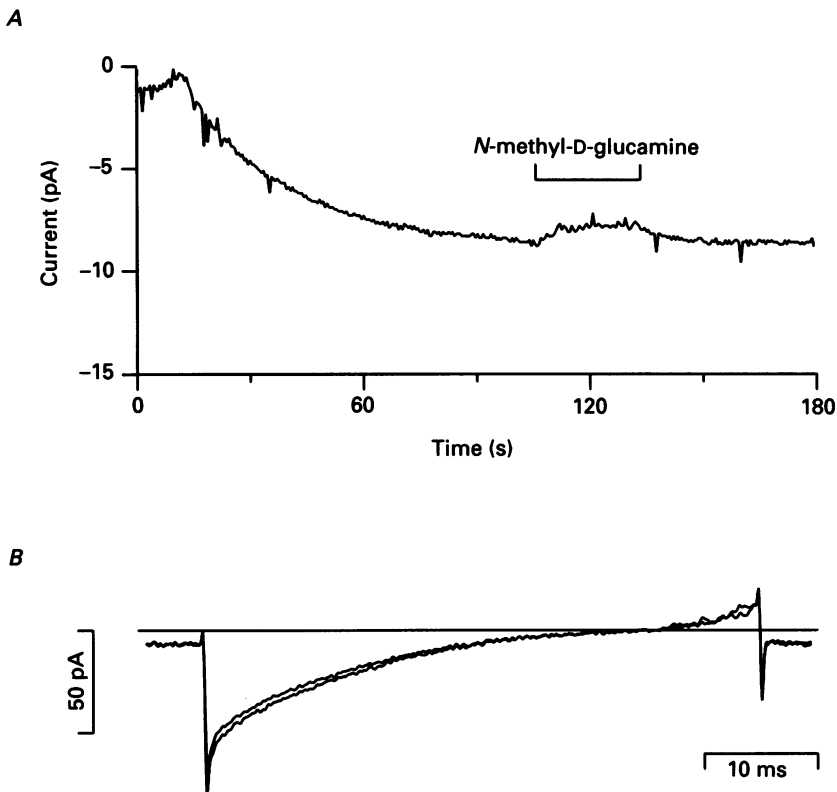


Fig. 6. Replacement of  $\text{Na}^+$  and  $\text{K}^+$  ions by *N*-methyl-D-glucamine. *A*,  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  was activated by  $\text{InsP}_3$  ( $10 \mu\text{M}$ ) and BAPTA ( $10 \text{ mM}$ ). Low-resolution inward current at a holding potential of  $0 \text{ mV}$ . During the indicated time the standard extracellular bath solution was exchanged for a Ringer solution that maintained  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  ( $10 \text{ mM}$ ), but in which  $\text{Na}^+$  and  $\text{K}^+$  were replaced by *N*-methyl-D-glucamine. *B*, superimposed high-resolution ramp currents (from  $-100$  to  $+100 \text{ mV}$ ) in standard Ringer solution and in the *N*-methyl-D-glucamine-based solution.

found that all tested ions inhibited  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  to variable degrees. Figure 9*A* shows the percentage of inhibition of  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  by 1 mM of the respective ion species.  $\text{Ba}^{2+}$  and  $\text{Sr}^{2+}$ , which we found previously to be poorly permeant through  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  (Hoth & Penner, 1992), are slightly inhibitory to currents carried by  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ . Examples for small, moderate, and strong blocking effects of  $\text{Ba}^{2+}$ ,  $\text{Mn}^{2+}$ , and  $\text{Zn}^{2+}$ , respectively are shown in Fig. 9*B* for both the current at  $0 \text{ mV}$  and for the full voltage range during a ramp.

$\text{La}^{3+}$  is recognized as a potent blocker of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  influx. We found this trivalent ion

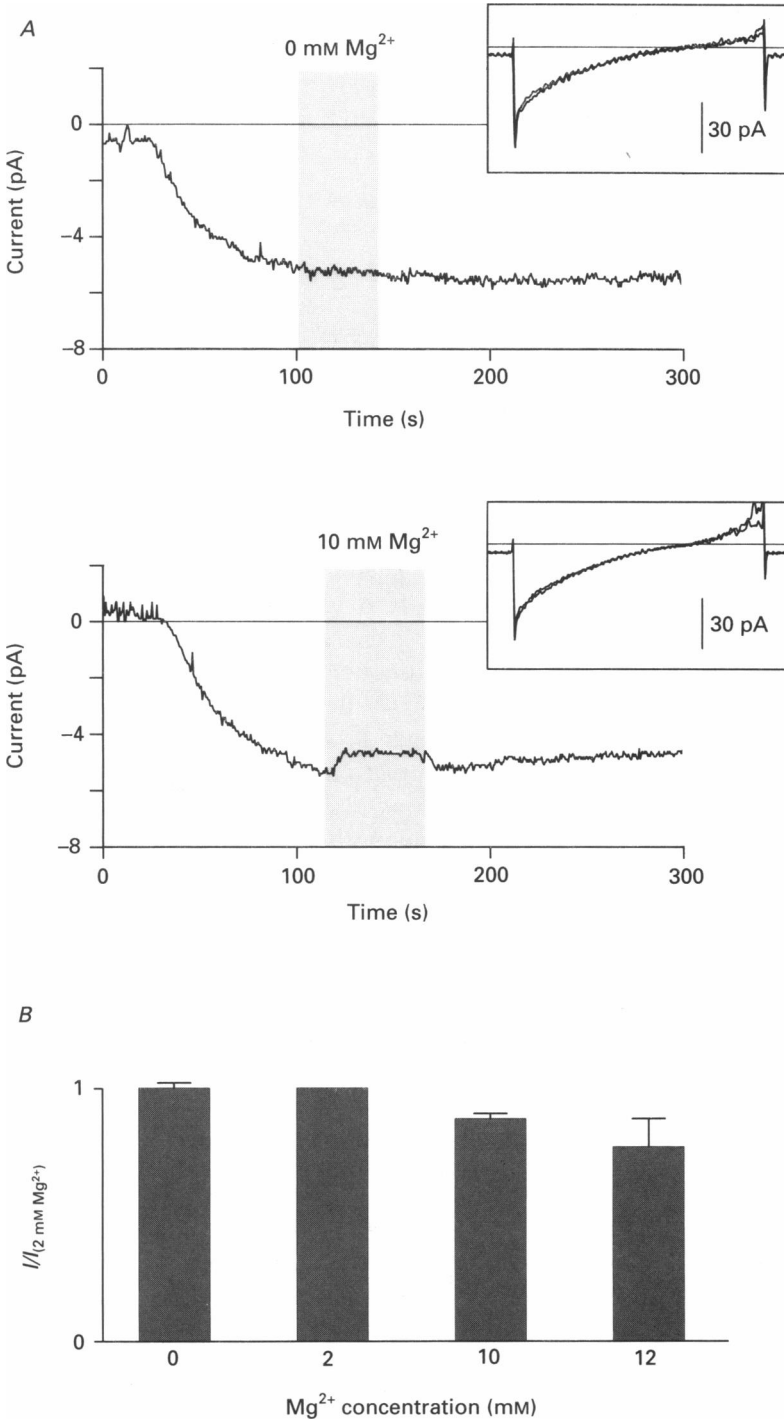


Fig. 7. Effects of extracellular Mg<sup>2+</sup> concentration on  $I_{CRAC}$ . A, low-resolution current recordings (holding potential = 0 mV) and high-resolution ramp currents of  $I_{CRAC}$ , activated by InsP<sub>3</sub> (10 μM) and BAPTA (10 mM). During the indicated times, the standard

to be the most effective blocker of  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$ . Like with  $\text{Zn}^{2+}$ , there was a complete block of  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  at 1 mM of  $\text{La}^{3+}$ . Comparing the blocking efficacy of the two ions at the lower concentration of 10  $\mu\text{M}$ , yielded an average reduction of  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  by  $\text{Zn}^{2+}$  of  $24 \pm 4\%$  ( $n = 3$ ) and by  $\text{La}^{3+}$  of  $94 \pm 3\%$  ( $n = 4$ ).

#### *Permeation of monovalent ions*

Voltage-activated calcium channels are known to lose their selectivity for  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  ions in the absence of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  (Almers & McCleskey, 1984; Hess & Tsien, 1984). This phenomenon is also seen with  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$ , but only after complete removal of all divalent ions including  $\text{Mg}^{2+}$ . The effects of complete withdrawal of divalent ions from the extracellular solution and addition of EDTA (1 mM) to remove trace amounts of divalents are illustrated in Fig. 10. In this experiment, which is representative of eighteen cells, there was a triphasic change in the current characteristics. Panel *A* shows the membrane current at  $-40$  mV and the currents in response to the standard voltage-ramp protocol are depicted in Fig. 10*B*.  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  was activated by  $\text{InsP}_3$  in the presence of 10 mM external  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  and shows the typical inward rectification (*a*, seen in all 18 cells). When removing the divalents from the bath, there was an initial block of the inward current and a more pronounced outward component at positive potentials (*b*, resolved in 12 cells). We interpret this initial block to reflect the removal of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  as a charge carrier, while the residual  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  ions impede the flow of monovalent ions. Subsequently, there was a sudden increase in inward current with moderate inward rectification and a shift in the reversal potential towards less positive potentials (*c*, seen in 17 cells). This current is presumably carried by  $\text{Na}^+$  ions after complete removal of divalents. The increase in inward current was only transient and decayed within some 20–30 s, after which the whole-cell current had a rather linear behaviour over the entire voltage range with a reversal potential around 0 mV (*d*, observed in 13 cells). The decay of the monovalent current as well as the shift of the reversal potential to 0 mV could be due to an increase in intracellular  $\text{Na}^+$ , resulting in the gradual reduction of the driving force. In addition, there could be inhibitory actions of intracellular  $\text{Na}^+$  on  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$ . Taken together, these results suggest that  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  undergoes a transition from a calcium-selective to a non-selective cation current upon removal of divalent ions.

#### *Variance analysis*

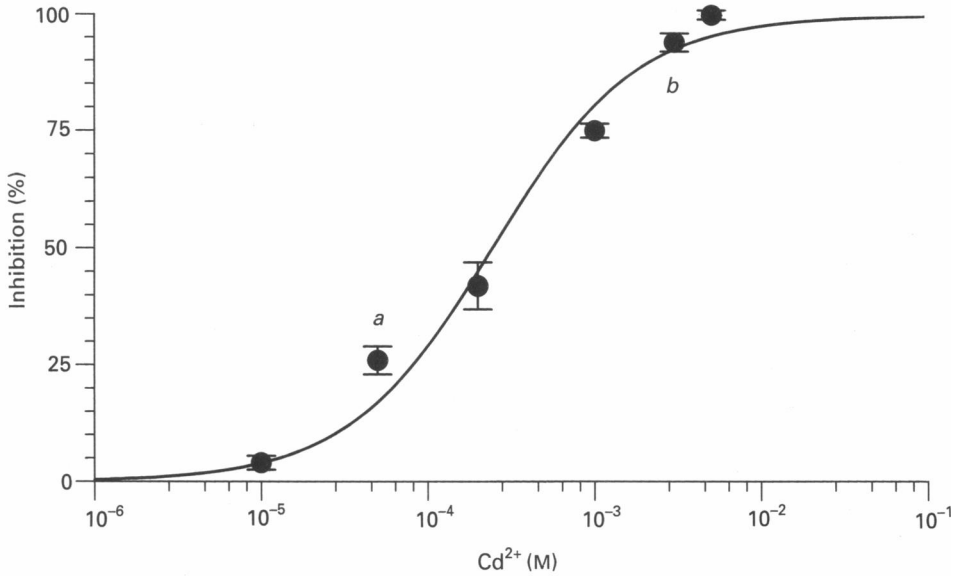
As can be seen in Table 1, the whole-cell current carried by  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  is rather small, even under optimal conditions (i.e. with high extracellular and low intracellular  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  concentrations). The current was due to a conductance change, suggesting an ion channel mechanism, although it was not accompanied by detectable single-channel activity. We therefore attempted to use variance analysis to assess the single-channel conductance from the changes in current variance. An experiment that illustrates the

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extracellular  $\text{Mg}^{2+}$  concentration was changed from 2 to 0 mM and 10 mM, respectively. *B*, mean relative changes in current amplitude at different extracellular  $\text{Mg}^{2+}$  concentrations with respect to the amplitude of  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  in the presence of 2 mM  $\text{Mg}^{2+}$ . Error bars are  $\pm$  s.e.m. ( $n = 2-7$ ).



A



B

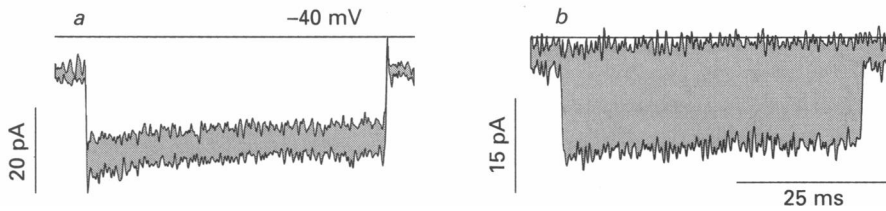


Fig. 8. Dose-dependent inhibition of  $I_{CRAC}$  by  $Cd^{2+}$ . *A*, 'dose-response' relationship for the inhibitory effects of extracellular  $Cd^{2+}$  concentration on  $I_{CRAC}$ .  $I_{CRAC}$  was activated by  $InsP_3$  and EGTA in 10 mM extracellular  $Ca^{2+}$  and the desired test concentrations of  $Cd^{2+}$  were applied from a puffer pipette. Data points correspond to the inhibition of current amplitudes at  $-40$  mV. The curve was fitted according to  $y = 100/(1 + (x/K_D)^n)$ , where  $x$  is the external  $Cd^{2+}$  concentration,  $y$  is the inhibition,  $K_D$  is the apparent dissociation constant ( $240 \mu M$ ), and  $n$  is the Hill coefficient (1). The labels *a* and *b* next to the data points for  $50 \mu M$  and  $3$  mM  $Cd^{2+}$  refer to the current traces shown in *B*. *B*, examples of high-resolution currents in response to square voltage pulses to  $-40$  mV, showing the effects of different extracellular  $Cd^{2+}$  concentrations on  $I_{CRAC}$ . The shaded area corresponds to the difference between currents acquired in the absence and the presence of  $50 \mu M$   $Cd^{2+}$  (*a*) and  $3$  mM  $Cd^{2+}$  (*b*), respectively.

changes in variance at different potentials before, during, and after activation of  $I_{CRAC}$  is shown in Fig. 11*A*. It is seen that the variance changes are extremely small and do not increase significantly after activation of  $I_{CRAC}$  by ionomycin.

Removal of divalent ions augments inward currents through  $I_{CRAC}$  (cf. Fig. 10). While this also caused an increase in current variance (Fig. 11*B*), this increase cannot

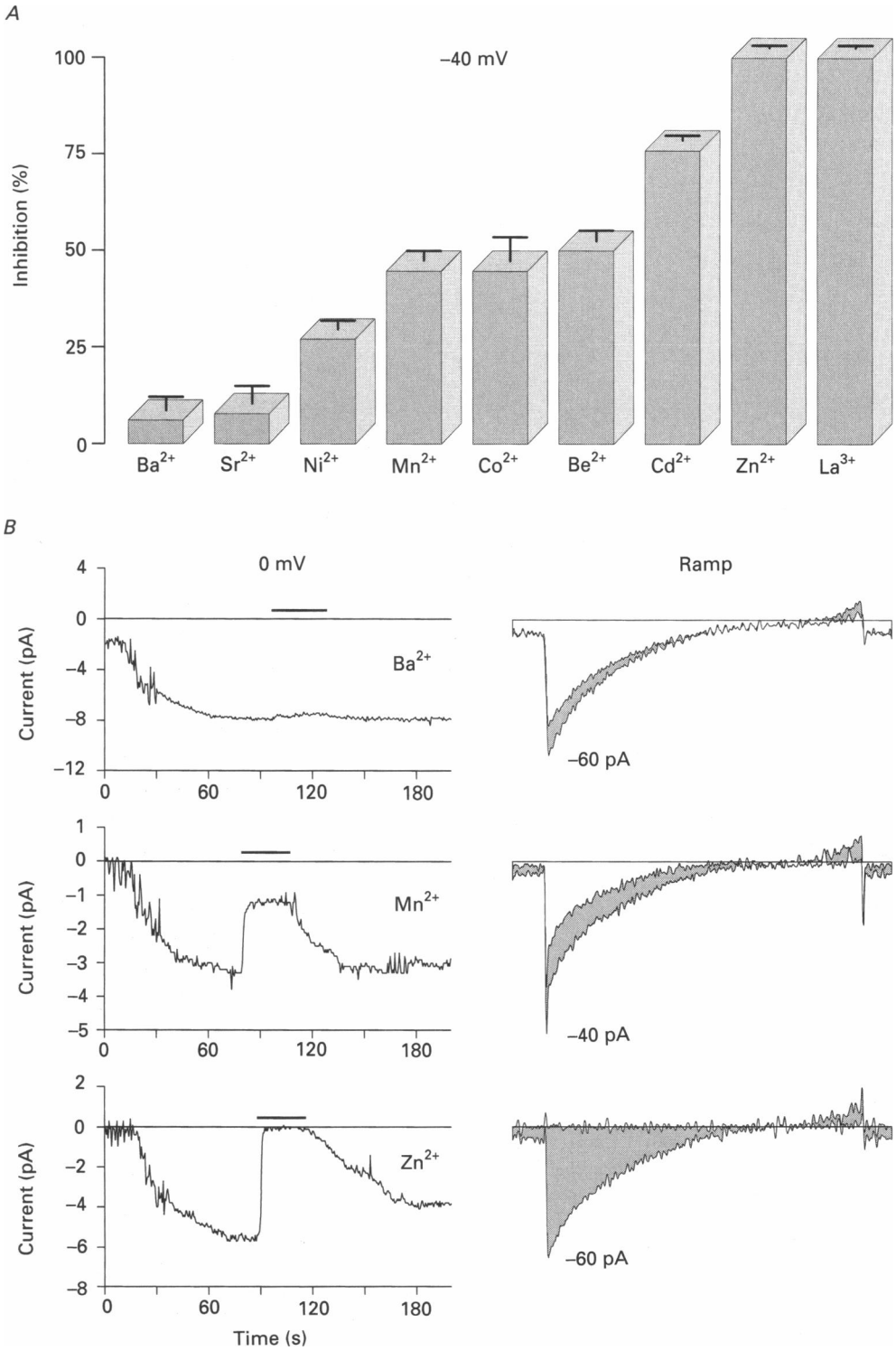


Fig. 9. For legend see facing page.

be utilized to assess the single-channel conductance, because upon changing the selectivity of  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$ , there is a concomitant shift in the reversal potential of the current. Variance analysis at more negative potentials is not feasible in mast cells, because the spontaneous activity of 50 pS cation channels (Matthews *et al.* 1989*a*) would mask a small variance change induced by  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$ . Nevertheless, this experiment suggests that the small increase in current noise reflects ion channel activity and that the single-channel conductance is likely to be well below 1 pS.

#### DISCUSSION

In this study, we have characterized the biophysical properties of the calcium current activated by depletion of intracellular calcium stores in mast cells. In particular, we have studied the kinetics and the selectivity of this current, the permeation of monovalent ions, and the blocking effects of divalent ions.

##### *Kinetic properties of $I_{\text{CRAC}}$ -active depletion*

In our experiments, the activation of  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  was usually induced by a high concentration of  $\text{InsP}_3$  (10  $\mu\text{M}$ ) in order to obtain an instantaneous depletion of intracellular calcium stores. The  $K_{\text{D}}$  for  $\text{InsP}_3$ -induced calcium release as determined in microsomal preparations is in the submicromolar range (Meyer & Stryer, 1990). Therefore, we assume that under our conditions, the delivered concentration of  $\text{InsP}_3$  was supramaximal and fully activated calcium release at the instant of achieving the whole-cell configuration. This is supported by the apparent independence of the delay of activation of  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  from the measured series conductance, which determines the effective diffusional access of the pipette solution to the cytosol.

The delay before activation of the current (about 5–6 s) is presumably due to various, presently unknown steps involved in the signal transduction process that lead to the activation of  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$ . The initial triggering step is the depletion of  $\text{InsP}_3$ -sensitive stores. Fura-2 diffuses into the cell with a similar time course as  $\text{InsP}_3$  and one can usually start to measure  $[\text{Ca}^{2+}]_{\text{i}}$  reliably within 1–2 s after breaking into the cell. Typically, at this time, one can already see the falling phase of the  $\text{InsP}_3$ -induced  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  transient, suggesting that the release process is rapid and probably completed within this period of time (Meyer & Stryer, 1990; Missiaen, De Smedt, Droogmans & Casteels, 1992). The fast onset of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  release by perfusing  $\text{InsP}_3$  through patch pipettes is in agreement with studies in lacrimal gland cells, in which  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  release was

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Fig. 9. Blocking efficacy of various divalent ions. *A*, ranking order of the inhibition of  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  by 1 mM of various divalent ions and the trivalent ion  $\text{La}^{3+}$ .  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  was activated by  $\text{InsP}_3$  and EGTA in 10 mM extracellular  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  and the desired test concentrations of blocking ions were applied from a puffer pipette. Values represent means  $\pm$  s.e.m. of 3 to 7 determinations and correspond to the inhibition of current amplitudes at  $-40$  mV. *B*, examples of small ( $\text{Ba}^{2+}$ ), moderate ( $\text{Mn}^{2+}$ ), and strong ( $\text{Zn}^{2+}$ ) inhibition of  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$ , activated by  $\text{InsP}_3$  (10  $\mu\text{M}$ ) and EGTA (10 mM). Low-resolution current recordings of  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  (holding potential = 0 mV) and high-resolution ramp currents. The desired blocking ions were added to the standard Ringer solution at 1 mM and were applied from a puffer pipette during the times indicated. The shaded area in the ramp currents corresponds to the difference between currents acquired before and during the application of the inhibitory ions, respectively.

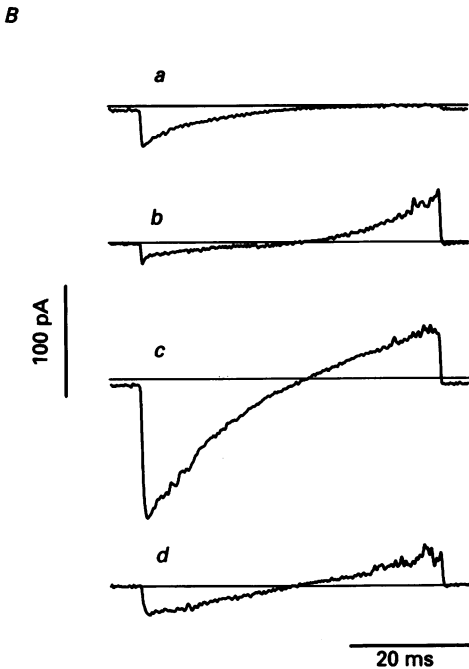
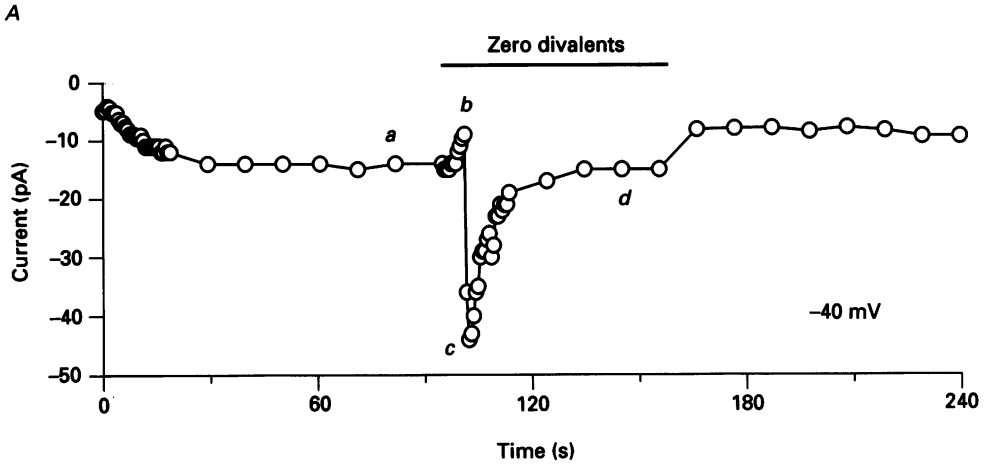


Fig. 10. Monovalent cation currents through  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$ . *A*,  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  was activated by  $\text{InsP}_3$  and EGTA in 10 mM extracellular  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  at a holding potential of  $-40$  mV. During the indicated time, the standard extracellular Ringer solution was replaced by a  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ - and  $\text{Mg}^{2+}$ -free solution, supplemented by EDTA (1 mM) to chelate possible contaminations of divalent ions. The labels *a-d* next to the data points refer to the ramp-current traces shown in *B*. *B*, examples of high-resolution currents in response to voltage ramps. Points *a-d* show the various phases of the transition of  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  from an inwardly rectifying  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  current (with no clear reversal potential in this experiment) to a non-specific monovalent cation current with a reversal potential around 0 mV. See text for further details.

monitored indirectly by the recording of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ -activated chloride currents (Marty & Tan, 1989).

The other method used in this study to achieve an active depletion of calcium stores, was by applying the  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  ionophore ionomycin. Ionomycin did not induce any

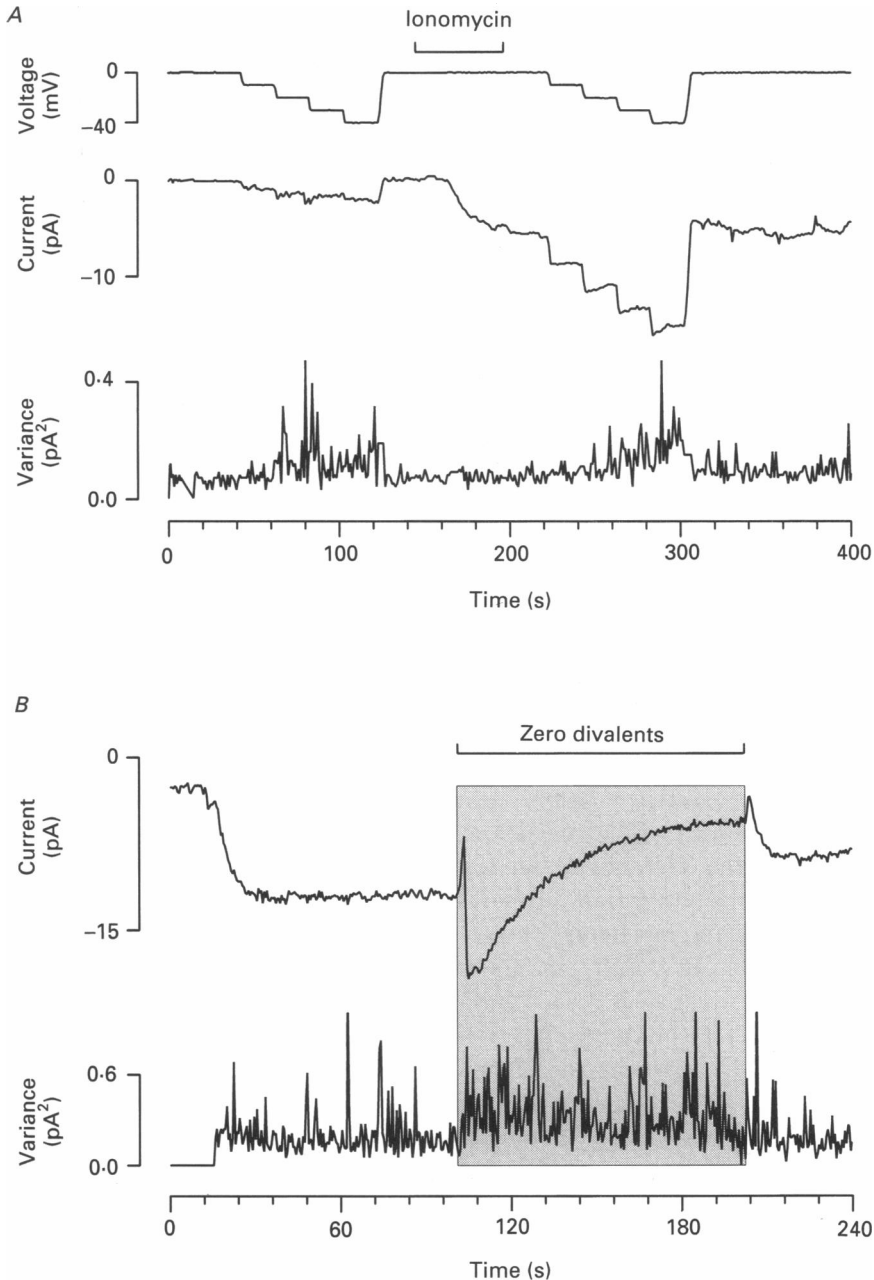


Fig. 11. Variance analysis of  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$ . *A*, changes in current and variance at various holding potentials before and after activation of  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  by ionomycin ( $14 \mu\text{M}$ ). Extracellular  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  concentration was 10 mM throughout, while the pipette solution was supplemented with 10 mM EGTA. Note that there is no increase in current variance during activation of  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$ . Similarly, there was no significant change in the current noise at various potentials following application of ionomycin. *B*, similar experiment to *A*, except that  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  was activated by  $\text{InsP}_3$  (holding potential was 0 mV throughout) and extracellular Ringer solution was replaced by a divalent-free Ringer solution (1 mM EDTA added) as indicated. Note the slight increase in current variance during monovalent influx through  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$ . See Methods and text for further details.

current by itself, which conforms with the concept that it translocates  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  across the plasma membrane by an electroneutral carrier mechanism (Liu & Hermann, 1978). Apparently, the ionophore not only affects the plasma membrane, but due to its lipophilic nature also reaches the calcium stores (Albert & Tashjian, 1986). It therefore constitutes a favourable tool to activate  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  any time during an experiment. The parameters of ionomycin-induced calcium currents were not significantly different from the ones determined with active store depletion by  $\text{InsP}_3$ . Again, this suggests that the activation of  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  is determined by the depletion of intracellular stores, regardless of the tool employed to achieve this.

The activation of the current was characterized by a single-exponential time course, largely independent of the activation mechanism used. There was no correlation of the activation time constant and the final current amplitude. This suggests that  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  was activated supramaximally and that the mechanisms and steps involved in its activation appear to be homogeneous when using saturating  $\text{InsP}_3$  concentrations. In most experiments, there was no or only a very small decay in the steady-state current within the typical duration of a measurement ( $\sim 400$ – $600$  s). This may be due to the presence of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  buffers in our experiments which do not permit the refilling of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  stores after they have been depleted. Under more physiological conditions, calcium influx through  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  will presumably inactivate after replenishment of empty stores. Occasionally, we have observed an inactivation of  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  in experiments in which the amount of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  entering across the plasma membrane was unusually large and could not be coped with by the pipette-infused buffers. This manifested as an increase in  $[\text{Ca}^{2+}]_i$  and a subsequent slow decrease of  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  (M. Hoth & R. Penner, unpublished observation), that we consider mainly due to refilling of calcium stores, possibly supplemented by a component of calcium-dependent inactivation (as discussed below).

As evident from the voltage pulses to negative potentials, the initial inward current showed fast inactivation properties. This was probably not due to an inactivation of the gating mechanism by the refilling of stores, but rather to a  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ -dependent inactivation of the ion channels themselves, since this inactivation was alleviated by BAPTA, which is a  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  buffer with fast association kinetics (Neher, 1986). This action of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  may be effective only at high concentrations of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  and restricted to local domains near the channels. It thus appears that  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  may be regulated through  $[\text{Ca}^{2+}]_i$  by a mechanism equivalent to calcium-induced inactivation of voltage-activated  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  channels (Eckert & Chad, 1984). At first sight, it may seem surprising that the normalized steady-state current amplitudes of  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  measured at 0 mV holding potential were larger by a factor of two when BAPTA was used as  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  chelator instead of EGTA. This may be accounted for by the same mechanism of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ -induced inactivation, since even at 0 mV there is still a considerable influx of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  due to the driving force provided by the concentration gradient of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  across the plasma membrane. This influx is sustained by a source of 10 mM extracellular  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  and a sink provided by the intracellular  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  buffer, which may generate locally a sufficiently high  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  concentration at the cytoplasmic side of the plasma membrane to attenuate  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  in the presence of EGTA, but to a lesser degree when using BAPTA.

*Kinetic properties of  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$ -passive depletion*

When activating  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  by  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  chelators, the delays are considerably longer, probably reflecting a passive depletion of calcium pools by leaks. The buffers then capture the  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  in the cytosol and prevent its reuptake into the stores. This would result in the gradual depletion of the pools and eventually in the activation of  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$ . Interestingly, the normalized current amplitudes of  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  induced by passive depletion with BAPTA were not bigger than with EGTA. This result is somewhat surprising, in view of the enhanced current amplitudes when BAPTA is used in conjunction with active store depletion. The basis for this difference remains unresolved and may point to uncertain side-effects of the two chelators. The time constants of activation of  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  were slightly longer than the ones seen with active depletion of calcium stores by  $\text{InsP}_3$ , although this effect was not as pronounced as might have been expected from the long delays before activation of  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$ . One possible explanation for this virtually all-or-none behaviour of the activation process could reside in a high co-operativity of the mechanism that senses the calcium contents of the stores.

In analogy to the effects of intracellularly administered chelators, depletion of intracellular stores may also occur when removing extracellular calcium for extended periods, thus extracting intracellular  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  into the extracellular medium. The ensuing activation of  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  could be one mechanism for an enhanced influx of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  after readmission of calcium to the extracellular solution. The depletion of calcium stores by  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  buffers is also analogous to the actions of thapsigargin, cyclopiazonic acid, and 2,5-di-tert-butylhydroquinone, all of which are thought to deplete the stores passively by interfering with  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  uptake by pumps (Takemura, Hughes, Thastrup & Putney, 1989; Thastrup, Cullen, Drobak, Hanley & Dawson, 1990; Mason, Garcia-Rodriguez & Grinstein, 1991).

*Calcium selectivity of  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  and blocking effects of divalent ions*

From several experimental approaches, we conclude that  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  has an almost exclusive selectivity for  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  ions, comparable to voltage-activated  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  channels. First, the current is completely abolished by removal of extracellular  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ . Second, most other divalent cations reduced  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$ . This includes  $\text{Ba}^{2+}$  and  $\text{Sr}^{2+}$ , which normally permeate effectively through voltage-dependent calcium channels (Almers & McCleskey, 1984; Hess & Tsien, 1984). However, we have noticed a complex behaviour of  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  when replacing  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  by  $\text{Ba}^{2+}$  ions. In some experiments we have observed an initial reduction and a subsequent slow increase in inward current with complex kinetics and complicated current-voltage relationship (M. Hoth & R. Penner, unpublished observations). Third, replacing  $\text{Na}^+$  by *N*-methyl-D-glucamine did not significantly reduce  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$ , suggesting little if any permeation of monovalent ions. Only when all divalent ions are removed from the extracellular medium does the current lose its selectivity and become permeable to monovalent ions, a phenomenon that is also observed with voltage-activated calcium channels (Almers & McCleskey, 1984; Hess & Tsien, 1984). Fourth, the calcium selectivity of  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  was comparable to the selectivity of voltage-dependent calcium currents in chromaffin cells when correlating the flux of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  by the charge movement across the membrane and the resulting fluorescence change of fura-2 in both cell types. Since the

permeability ratio of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  and  $\text{Na}^+$  ( $P_{\text{Ca}}/P_{\text{Na}}$ ) for voltage-activated  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  channels is about 1000/1 (Hille, 1992), we assume a similarly high ratio for  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$ .

The activation of calcium influx through  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  is the most effective way of raising  $[\text{Ca}^{2+}]_i$  in mast cells and probably also in those cells in which this mechanism is present. The presence of a highly selective calcium current in mast cells has been postulated before, based on the correlation of extremely small whole-cell currents and changes in  $[\text{Ca}^{2+}]_i$  following application of agonists and  $\text{InsP}_3$  (Penner *et al.* 1988). The high selectivity of  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  for  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  and its sustained activation impose constraints on the cell-tolerable amplitude of the current, thereby preventing cytotoxic effects due to  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  overload. Probably the small amplitude of this current under physiological conditions has hampered its detection in other cells in the past.

A rather selective  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  current with similar current-voltage characteristics to  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  but with oscillatory behaviour has been identified in lymphocytes (Lewis & Cahalan, 1989). This current developed spontaneously after establishment of the whole-cell configuration. In their report, Lewis & Cahalan have studied the  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  current under conditions permissive for depletion of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  stores by using intracellular  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  buffers (EGTA and BAPTA). In the light of the present study, the observed behaviour of the  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  current in lymphocytes may have resulted from a cyclical depletion and refilling of intracellular stores.

Like other calcium-selective currents,  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  was blocked by divalent metal ions. The relative potency of various divalents was assessed by applying them at 1 mM in the presence of 10 mM extracellular  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ . The sequence of blocking efficacy is quite similar to the one found in smooth muscle cells (Murray & Kotlikoff, 1991) and rat basophilic leukaemia cells (RBL-2H3; Hide & Beaven, 1991). The surprising finding that  $\text{Ba}^{2+}$  and  $\text{Sr}^{2+}$  also reduced  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  is quite different from the situation in voltage-dependent  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  currents, where these ions do not block but permeate even better than  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  does (Almers & McCleskey, 1984; Hess & Tsien, 1984). Probably, there is some permeation of  $\text{Ba}^{2+}$  and  $\text{Sr}^{2+}$  through  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$ , as reported by a change in the fluorescence properties of fura-2 (Hoth & Penner, 1992). The small blocking effects of these ions may arise from a small permeation through  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  which then impedes the calcium flux.

There appears to be one major complication in relating  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  to results obtained in other cell types. The current appears to exclude  $\text{Mn}^{2+}$ , which is often used to study  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  influx induced by receptor stimulation or depletion of calcium stores (Jacob, 1990; Missiaen *et al.* 1990; Clementi, Scheer, Zacchetti, Fasolato, Pozzan & Meldolesi, 1992). The entry of  $\text{Mn}^{2+}$  can be monitored by a quench of fura-2 fluorescence. Under the conditions used in this and a previous study (Hoth & Penner, 1992), there was a block of  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  and only a vanishingly small quench of fura-2 fluorescence by externally applied  $\text{Mn}^{2+}$ . This does not rule out a small permeation of  $\text{Mn}^{2+}$  through  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$ , which will probably remain undetected because of the high concentrations of intracellular buffers. BAPTA and EGTA will compete with fura-2 for  $\text{Mn}^{2+}$  and since they were used at much higher concentrations, preclude the binding of  $\text{Mn}^{2+}$  to the dye. Experiments designed to test for sources of  $\text{Mn}^{2+}$  influx have revealed that  $\text{Mn}^{2+}$  quenching of fura-2 can occur in mast cells under conditions that favour the activation of  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  (C. Fasolato, M. Hoth & R. Penner, unpublished observation) and can also happen through receptor-activated non-selective cation



channels (C. Fasolato, M. Hoth, G. Matthews & R. Penner, unpublished observation).

*Is  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  an ion channel mechanism?*

The current activated by depletion of intracellular  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  stores was not associated with detectable single-channel activity. Nevertheless, several arguments support the notion that  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  influx through  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  is due to ion channels. The current was clearly due to a conductance change, since short hyperpolarizing voltage steps up to  $-200$  mV produced an instantaneous, non-saturating current, which was characterized by Nernstian behaviour. Several other features such as the block by divalent metal ions and the permeation of monovalent ions in the absence of divalents are similar to voltage-activated  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  channels and further support an ion channel hypothesis. However, the analysis of current variance showed that the changes in current noise are too small to be resolved in this cell type. This could be either due to an extremely small single-channel conductance of considerably less than 1 pS, or to the kinetic properties of the single channels, which would not flicker between open and closed states but may be characterized by long-lived open times.

*Activation mechanisms of  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$*

It seems that the trigger for the activation of  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  is provided by any mechanism that results in depletion of intracellular calcium stores. As a consequence of this depletion, there appears to be a mechanism that senses the  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  content of the pools and generates a signal that induces the activation of  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$ . This signal has not been identified so far. At least three mechanisms appear conceivable: (1) a direct coupling of a membrane-spanning protein in the organelles that associates with the calcium channels in the plasma membrane; (2) a cognate mechanism through an enzymatic reaction such as phosphorylation or dephosphorylation of plasma membrane channels by organelle enzymes; (3) an indirect activation by an unidentified signalling molecule (a third messenger) generated by an unknown signal transduction cascade in the organelles.

For the first two mechanisms, there must be a close proximity of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  stores and the plasma membrane. There is evidence from a number of studies that in some cells there is an adjacent co-localization of the plasma membrane and parts of the endoplasmic reticulum (ER) (Rossier, Bird & Putney, 1991; McPherson, McPherson, Mathews, Campbell & Longo, 1992). The ER appears to act, at least in some cells, as a storage organelle for  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  (Baumann, Walz, Somlyo & Somlyo, 1991). Other microsomal storage organelles (calciosomes) have been described (Volpe *et al.* 1988) but their localization needs further characterization. Recently, a microsomal fraction carrying  $\text{InsP}_3$  binding properties has been shown to be associated with the plasma membrane (Rossier *et al.* 1991) and disaggregated by cytochalasin, a treatment that interferes with cytoskeletal elements.

A direct protein-protein interaction appears as an intriguing mechanism for signal transduction between organelles and plasma membrane, particularly in view of a closely related mechanism found in skeletal muscle that operates in the reverse direction. There, the mechanism of excitation-contraction coupling is thought to involve a plasma membrane protein (the dihydropyridine receptor, a putative

calcium channel) that activates a calcium release channel of organelles (the ryanodine receptor in the sarcoplasmic reticulum) through a protein-protein interaction. It has been suggested that in non-muscle cells this physical coupling mechanism is provided by the  $\text{InsP}_3$  receptor in the storage organelles and the inositol 1,3,4,5-tetrakisphosphate ( $\text{InsP}_4$ ) receptor in the plasma membrane (Irvine, 1990). However, we have so far been unable to find any effect of  $\text{InsP}_4$  on  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  influx in mast cells. In addition,  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  appears to be activated under conditions in which neither  $\text{InsP}_3$  nor  $\text{InsP}_4$  are expected to be generated.

A similarly tight activation mechanism could involve an enzymatic transduction mechanism provided by organelle-associated enzymes that modify the plasma membrane channels. This may be accomplished by phosphorylation or dephosphorylation of the channels by kinases or phosphatases associated with the calcium stores. Although there is little known about the modulation of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  influx in non-excitable cells, the fact that voltage-activated calcium channels are modulated by phosphorylation reactions (Kameyama, Hescheler, Hofmann & Trautwein, 1986) would not render this possibility unlikely.

A less tight and stringent mechanism of activation may be operational through the generation of a signalling messenger released from the calcium stores upon depletion of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ . Such a mechanism, involving cytochrome P450 or one of its metabolites, has been proposed based on the inhibitory effects on  $\text{Mn}^{2+}$  entry of substances that inhibit microsomal cytochrome P450 (Alvarez, Montero & Garcia-Sancho, 1992). However, the same substances also appear to inhibit voltage-activated  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  influx (Villalobos, Fonteriz, Lopez, Garcia & Garcia-Sancho, 1992), which are not gated by depletion of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  stores. Our data do not add much evidence to decide which of the possible mechanisms may be responsible for the activation of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  influx through  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$ . Based on the finding that there was a persistent activation of  $I_{\text{CRAC}}$  for minutes in the whole-cell configuration, in which the cytosol is constantly and effectively dialysed, one should be surprised if the conductive state of the channels was controlled by a constant supply of a diffusible 'third' messenger.

We thank M. Pilot for technical assistance. This work was supported in part by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (grant 243/3-1), the Sonderforschungsbereich 236, and the Hermann-und Lilly-Schilling-Stiftung.

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