

1206 Sesqui- and Sesterterpenoids of Cotton: Biosynthesis and Function

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ABSTRACT

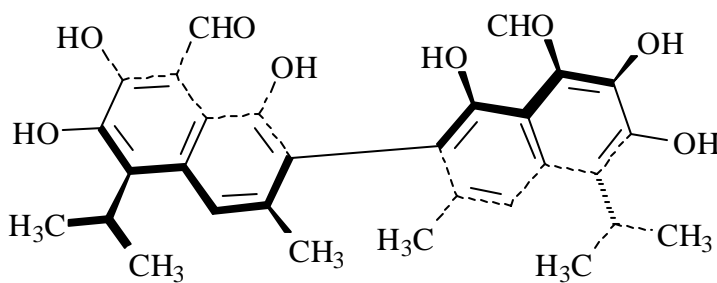
Cotton produces a diverse mixture of sesquiterpenoids and sesterterpenoids that protect the plant from pathogens and insects. These compounds may be preformed and/or induced by pathogen attack or insect herbivory. The preformed compounds occur in subepidermal lysigenous glands, while the pathogen-induced compounds are synthesized by specialized cells such as paravascular cells appressed to xylem vessels infected by fungal pathogens or in palisade or mesophyll cells adjacent to infection sites on leaves. Some of the genes involved in the biosynthesis of these compounds have been identified and the structures of several biosynthetic intermediates have been elucidated. The structures, occurrence, biological activity toward fungal pathogens and insects, and biosynthesis of these compounds are the subjects of this paper.

Structures and Occurrence

Sesquiterpenoids – Sesquiterpenoids are a class of terpenes that consist of three isoprene units.

Gossypol (top row, Fig. 1), which is the most widely studied cotton terpenoid, is produced in the plant by the dimerization of two

molecules of hemigossypol and, as such, it is best classified as a dimeric-sesquiterpenoid. Due to hindered rotation around the binaphthyl bond, gossypol exists as two enantiomers



(S)-(+)-Gossypol

(i.e., mirror images of one another and not super imposable). There are significant differences in the biological activity of these enantiomers.

Sesquiterpenoids that are structurally related to gossypol, such as, desoxyhemigossypol and hemigossypol and their methylated derivatives (second row, Fig. 1), are phytoalexins. Phytoalexins are antibiotics produced by a plant that is under microbial attack and are toxic to the attacking organism. These phytoalexins were first identified in pathogen-infected stele tissue of *Gossypium barbadense* (Bell et al., 1975; Stipanovic et al., 1975a). Desoxyhemigossypol and hemigossypol may occur in cottonseed but only in very low concentrations. The predominant terpenoid in seed is gossypol which may occur at levels as high as 3.6% of the total embryo weight (*G. davidsonii*; Stipanovic et al., 2005). In some species, gossypol is accompanied by relatively moderate concentrations of gossypol-6-methyl ether and gossypol-6,6-dimethyl ether (top row, Fig. 1).

In the D genome cotton species *G. aridum*, *G. davidsonii*, *G. klotzchianum*, *G. lobatum*, *G. thurberi*, *G. trilobum* and *G. turneri*, gossypol is the only sesquiterpene found in cotton leaves (Stipanovic et al., 1977a; Altman et al., 1990); however, in other species in the D genome (eg., *G.*

gossypioides and *G. raimondii*), very little gossypol occurs in the leaves. In *G. raimondii*, the predominant terpenoid aldehyde is raimondal (**2**) (Fig. 2) (Stipanovic et al., 1980). A related terpenoid, raimondalone (**3**) was isolated from the leaves of a plant derived from a *G. hirsutum* x *G. raimondii* hybrid (Stipanovic et al., 1994). In *G. hirsutum*, an AADD allotetraploid species, hemigossypolone (left center, Fig. 1) is the primary sesquiterpene found in the foliar-glands (Gray et al., 1976). Hemigossypolone-6-methyl ether (right center, Fig. 1) occurs with this compound in other *Gossypium* species (Stipanovic et al., 1977a; Bell et al., 1978; Altman et al., 1990).

Stipanovic et al. (1975b, 1981) identified in aged cotton bracts 2,7-dihydroxycadalene (**17a**) (Fig. 3) and lacinilene C (**18a**) plus their methyl ether derivatives **17b** and **18b**. Davila-Huerta et al. (1995) reported 7-hydroxycalamenene (**13**) in cotton leaves that were inoculated with *Xanthomonas campestris* pv. *malvacearum* (*Xcm*). Beckmann and Heitefuss (1998) reported that *Xcm* elicits the synthesis of desoxyhemigossypol and hemigossypol (second row, Fig. 1) in cotyledons. Davila-Huerta et al. (1995) also reported the isolation of *trans*-7-hydroxycalamenen-2-one (**15**) (Fig. 3) and *cis*-7-hydroxycalamenen-2-one (**16**) from *Xcm*-infected leaves. Isomerization between **15** and **16** can not be excluded; therefore, only one of these compounds may actually be present in the plant. Stipanovic et al. (1998) identified 3-hydroxy- α -calacorene (**14**) in cold shocked *G. hirsutum* seedlings. Lastly, Zhang et al. (1998) reported the identification of two new sesquiterpenoid glycosides **1a** and **1b** (Fig. 2) from cotton oil cake.

Sesterterpenoids – Terpenoids resulting from the combination of five isoprenyl units are referred to as sesterterpenoids. Analysis of leaves and squares from *G. hirsutum* showed the presence of a group of sesterterpenoids that are referred to as heliocides (bottom rows and middle, Fig. 1) (Stipanovic et al., 1977b; 1978a; 1978b; Bell et al., 1978). Fourteen genotypes of *G. hirsutum*, with terpenoid contents that varied from normal to very high, were grown at five diverse locations in

Texas over 2 years (Altman et al., 1989). Squares and terminal leaves were analyzed for gossypol, hemigossypolone, and heliociides H₁, H₂, H₃ and H₄. Mean concentrations of terpenoids in tissues from different locations varied from less than twofold for flower bud heliocide H₂ to as high as eightfold for leaf hemigossypolone. Genetic x environment interactions gave smaller variance components than genetic variance components in all instances. The authors concluded that selection for higher terpenoid levels is an attainable goal.

Biological Activity

Insects and pathogens - In glanded plants, terpenes such as hemigossypolone and the heliocide H₁, H₂, H₃, and H₄ (bottom half, Fig. 1) together with gossypol (top row, Fig. 1) are found in the subepidermal pigment glands (Elzen et al., 1985). These compounds are toxic to herbivorous insects (Stipanovic et al., 1977a). Gossypol shows greater toxicity than other glandular terpenoids in the laboratory, but field studies show that the levels of heliociides H₁ and H₂, and hemigossypolone correlate with resistance better than gossypol (Hedin et al., 1992). Herbivorous insects, especially early instars, avoid feeding on the glands (Parrott et al., 1983). Cotton terpenoids affect the rate of insect development. For example, gossypol at very low concentrations stimulates growth and feeding while, at higher concentrations, it is an antifeedant/toxin (Williams et al., 1987; Gunasena et al., 1988). Volatile terpenes also occur in foliar glands and some volatile terpenoids enhance the toxicity of gossypol to the tobacco budworm (*Heliothis virescens*) larvae (Gunasena et al., 1988).

Insect feeding damage can affect the whole plant inducing biosynthesis of acyclic and homo-terpenoids that may be absent or present in only minute quantities in undamaged plants. These acyclic and homo-terpenoids are not found in the subepidermal glands (Donath and Boland, 1995; Paré and Tumlinson, 1998). In a feeding choice test, *Spodoptera littoralis* larvae fed

predominately on young leaves from an undamaged plant compared to undamaged leaves from a previously damaged plant (Alborn et al., 1996). In a no-choice test, this same study found that third instar *S. littoralis* larvae that were fed undamaged young leaves from a damaged plant died by the seventh day while larvae fed young leaves from an undamaged plant survived and pupated in 11 days. McAusland and Alborn (2000) reported that when *S. littoralis* larvae were placed on the terminal foliage of cotton, they moved down the plant to feed and they fed more extensively on foliage at the bottom of plants that were previously damaged compared to undamaged plants. Larvae feeding sites were evenly distributed on glandless plants and no differences were noted in preferred feeding sites between damaged and undamaged glandless plants. **These same authors** (McAuslane and Alborn, 1998) reported that larvae also preferred (33:1) to feed on leaves from undamaged plants compared to leaves from plants that had been damaged by *S. littoralis* larvae seven days prior to the trial. When the same test was conducted on glandless plants the undamaged leaves were preferred but only by a margin of 2.6:1. Seven days after herbivory, the concentration of heliocides H₁ increased 3.5 times over the levels in control plants, and heliocide H₄ increased almost 4 times that found in the controls. Hemigossypolone and gossypol showed a smaller but significant increase (1.5 times and 1.2 times, respectively). Bezemer et al. (2004) findings were somewhat different. They found that seven days after feeding by *S. littoralis* larvae on mature cotton (*G. herbacium*) leaves, the synthesis of hemigossypolone and heliocides H₁, H₂, H₃, and H₄ in young leaves was induced but not in the damaged leaves. Gossypol levels, in general, were not enhanced. Root herbivory by wireworms (*Agriotes lineatus*) also induced synthesis in both mature and young leaves, but the levels were lower than found after foliage herbivory. After root herbivory, the concentration of hemigossypol in root tissue increased 4.0 times compared to control

plants, and methoxyhemigossypol increased 3.3 times compared to the controls; gossypol levels increased slightly (1.4 to 1.9 times).

Bell (1967) showed that xylem and boll endocarp tissues, which are normally devoid of terpenoids, rapidly synthesize gossypol and related terpenoid aldehydes in response to infection by fungal pathogens. After inoculation with *V. dahliae*, accumulation of hemigossypol, desoxyhemigossypol and their 6-methyl ethers (second row, Fig. 1) can be detected in stele tissue 24 hours sooner in resistant *G. barbadense* cultivars than in susceptible *G. hirsutum* (Bianchini et al., 1999). The terpenoid aldehydes are synthesized by paravascular cells appressed to the xylem vessels and are exuded first into the vessels and then into the surrounding intercellular spaces (Mace, 1978; Mace et al., 1976; 1989; Daayf et al., 1997). The use of histochemical methods allowed Mace et al. (1976) to show that one of the induced phytoalexins, hemigossypol, was deposited on fungal hyphae in xylem vessels *in situ*. Hemigossypol is the major compound formed in *G. hirsutum*, but its more toxic naphthofuran precursor, desoxyhemigossypol, is also present. The latter occurs at about 1/3 the concentration of hemigossypol by 48-72 hours after inoculation with fungal spores; however, 20 µg/ml of desoxyhemigossypol will kill all mycelia of the defoliating *V. dahliae* isolate V-76 while 35 µg/ml of hemigossypol is required to achieve the same effect. The solubility of desoxyhemigossypol at pH 6.3, the pH of infected cotton stele tissue, is 50 µg/ml (Mace et al. 1985) which is significantly higher than the concentration required to kill mycelia or conidia of *V. dahliae* and *Fusarium oxysporum* f. sp. *vasinfectum* (*F.o.v.*) (Zhang et al., 1993). Howell et al. (2000) showed that the biocontrol agent *Trichoderma virens* induces the biosynthesis of hemigossypol and desoxyhemigossypol in cotton roots and that this induction is an essential mechanism in the biocontrol of *Rhizoctonia solani*-incited seedling disease.

The mechanism of action of desoxyhemigossypol (second row, Fig. 1) has been investigated. Stipanovic et al. (1992), and Mace and Stipanovic (1995) found that the toxicity of desoxyhemigossypol to *V. dahliae* was correlated with its ability to form free radicals and hydrogen peroxide. These reactive species may oxidize critical fungal wall components causing membrane disruption and cell death.

Essenberg et al. (1982; 1990) found that inoculation of cotton leaves or cotyledons with *Xcm* elicits the synthesis of 2,7-dihydroxycadalene (**17a**) (Fig. 3) and lacinilene C (**18a**) as well as 2-hydroxy-7-methoxycadalene (**17b**) and lacinilene C 7-methyl ether (**18b**). All of these compounds are toxic to *Xcm* except **17b**; of the other three, 2,7-dihydroxycadalene was the most toxic to *Xcm*. Lacinilene C has one asymmetric center and, thus, exists as two enantiomers. Both enantiomers have been identified in different cotton cultivars. Of the two enantiomers, the (-)-enantiomer is more toxic to *Xcm* (Essenberg et al., 1982), and this enantiomer was identified in the cultivar that was more resistant to *Xcm*. The (-)-enantiomer has the *S* configuration at C-1 (Stipanovic et al., 1986a). *Xcm* also elicits the biosynthesis of desoxyhemigossypol and hemigossypol in cotyledons (Abraham et al., 1999).

Biosynthesis

Terpenoids are compounds derived from isopentenyl diphosphate (IDP). Terpenoids with two isoprene units (C-10 compounds) are designated as monoterpenes. The monoterpenoids β -ocimene and myrcene (center, Fig. 1) are incorporated into the final structure of the heliocides as discussed below.

Sesquiterpenes – A combination of three isoprene units leads to the production of sesquiterpenes (C₁₅). Early work based on ¹⁴C incorporation studies seemed to indicate that *Z,Z*-farnesyl diphosphate (**4**) (Fig. 2) was the biosynthetic precursor of gossypol (Heinstein et al., 1970). Later

however, Essenberg et al. (1985) using (1,2-¹³C₂) acetate found that 2,7-dihydroxycadalene (**17a**) (Fig. 3) is formed in *Xanthomonas*-infected cotton by a folding pattern consistent with *Z,E*-farnesyl diphosphate (*ZE*-FDP) (**5**) (Fig. 2) or an intermediate equivalent to the nerolidol cation (**7a**, **7b**) (Fig. 3). This finding led to a reevaluation of *ZZ*-FDP as the precursor to gossypol using ¹⁴C-labelled mevalonate (Masciadri et al., 1985) or (1,2-¹³C₂)-acetate (Stipanovic et al., 1986b). Both studies demonstrated that gossypol is derived from *E,E*-FDP or its equivalent (**6a**, **6b**), and not the *ZZ* configuration. Thus, it was established that the biosynthesis of the foliar phytoalexins and gossypol agree with the early steps established for cadinene sesquiterpenoids in other species. Benedict et al. (1995) used (1-*R,S*)-[1-²H]-(*E,E*)-farnesyl diphosphate (**6a**, **6b**) to study the biosynthesis of δ-cadinene (**11a**, **11b**). Cane et al. (1980) had previously established an ion pair intermediate in the conversion of farnesyl to nerolidyl diphosphate during the biosynthesis of cyclonerodiol in which the integrity of the protons on carbon-1 is retained. In the experiment by Benedict et al. (1995), the same scenario would produce the ion pair **7a** and **7b** from **6a** and **6b**. Electrophilic attack on the cation in **7a** and **7b** then gives the germacradienyl cation (**8**). The mass spectrum of deuterated δ-cadinene produced in the Benedict study clearly established the 1,3-hydride shift that occurs to give the allylic carbocation (**9**) during the cyclization as previously observed by Cane et al. (1993) in the biosynthesis of epicubenol. Thus, the cyclization of (1-*S*)-[1-²H]-farnesyl diphosphate (**6a**) gives [11-²H]-δ-cadinene (**11a**) while that of (1-*R*)-[1-²H]-farnesyl diphosphate (**6b**) gives [5-²H]-δ-cadinene (**11b**). Subsequently, Davis and Essenberg (1995) working with *Xcm*-infected plants showed that it is the δ-cadinene produced in cotton is the (+)-enantiomer. They also showed that δ-cadinene synthase is the first enzyme unique to the biosynthesis of the terpenoid aldehydes including gossypol (Fig. 1). Other work by Benedict's group (Alchanati et al., 1998) showed that cotton stele tissue infected with *V. dahliae* converts

[4,4,13,13,13-²H]-farnesyl diphosphate into [8,8,15,15,15-²H]- δ -cadinene. These data support the concept that *E,E*-farnesyl diphosphate undergoes isomerization in the enzyme pocket to form a stereochemically appropriate nerolidyl diphosphate cation (**7**) (Fig. 3) that undergoes cyclization (Benedict et al., 2001).

Utilizing a *G. arboreum* cell suspension culture, Chen et al. (1995) isolated two cDNA clones that contain open reading frames coding for proteins of 554 amino acids with M_r 64,096 and 64,118. The encoded protein from the XpC1 cDNA was expressed in *Escherichia coli* and purified. The protein synthesized (+)- δ -cadinene from *E,E*-farnesyl diphosphate. Purification of this enzyme also has been reported by Davis et al. (1996). In addition, a very similar (+)- δ -cadinene synthase gene has been identified and cloned from *G. arboreum* L. cv. Nanking (Chen et al., 1996). On the basis of sequence similarities, these three genes were grouped into two subfamilies, the *cad1-C* that includes C1 and C14, and the *cad1-A* gene. Davis et al. (1998) isolated a cDNA from *G. hirsutum* (*cdn1*) that was over 95% identical to the *G. arboreum cad1-C1* and *cad1-C14*. Meng et al. (1999) isolated a new member of the (+)- δ -cadinene synthase from *G. arboreum*. The cDNA clone encodes a protein that is 80% identical to the *CAD1-C1* and *C14* clones of (+)- δ -cadinene synthase from *G. arboreum*. Heterologous expression of this cDNA produced a 64 kD protein that catalyzed the cyclization of farnesyl diphosphate to (+)- δ -cadinene.

Luo et al. (2001) identified a cytochrome P₄₅₀ enzyme in cotton. When expressed in *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*, it catalyzed the hydroxylation of (+)- δ -cadinene to give 8-hydroxy-(+)- δ -cadinene (**12**) (Fig. 3). They proposed this to be an early step in hemigossypol biosynthesis.

Davis and Essenberg (1995) found that 7-hydroxycalamenene (**13**) (Fig. 3) in *G. hirsutum* is derived from (+)- δ -cadinene and, in this (+)- δ -cadinene, the carbon to which the isopropyl group is attached has the *S* configuration. Davis, Davila-Huerta, and Essenberg (personal communication)

also found that 3-hydroxy- α -calacorene (**14**) is derived from (+)- δ -cadinene. Stipanovic et al. (2006b) showed that the 3-hydroxy- α -calacorene in cotton is the (+)-enantiomer and determined that carbon-8, to which the isopropyl group is attached, also has the *S* configuration as shown (**14**). It appears likely that the sesquiterpenoid glycosides **1a** and **1b** (Fig. 1), identified by Zhang et al. (1998), also are derived from 3-hydroxy- α -calacorene.

Since the carbon atom to which the isopropyl group is attached has the *S* configuration in both (+)- δ -cadinene and in (+)-3-hydroxy- α -calacorene in *G. hirsutum*, it seems likely that 7-hydroxycalamenene in *G. hirsutum* has the *1R, 4S* configuration as shown in **13** (Fig. 3), and that compounds **1a** and **1b** (Fig. 2) have the *1S, 2S, 4S*, configuration. These latter assignments are conjectural and have not been confirmed.

The proposed steps involved in the biosynthesis of hemigossypolone (middle of Fig. 1) involve hydroxylation at C-4 of desoxyhemigossypol. The resulting product (4-hydroxydesoxyhemigossypol) is proposed to undergo subsequent oxidations to give hemigossypolone. These steps have not been substantiated.

G. raimondii produces raimondal (**2**) (Fig.2), but not hemigossypolone (left center, Fig. 1), while the interspecific hybrid *G. hirsutum* x *G. raimondii* produces raimondalone (**3**) (Fig. 2) (Stipanovic et al., 1994). Genetic analysis for raimondal and raimondalone has been investigated via F₁, F₂ and backcross progeny (Bell et al., 1994; Kohel and Bell, 1999). The study showed that segregation for raimondal was consistent with this character being controlled by two dominant genes with epistasis (i.e., hydroxylation at C-2 and methylation) and that raimondalone is formed by genes from both *G. raimondii* (C-2 hydroxylation and methylation) and *G. hirsutum* (C-4 hydroxylation).

The variation in the enantiomeric distribution of (+)- and (-)-gossypol observed in cottonseed (Stipanovic et al., 2005), and in root and foliar tissues (Stipanovic et al., 2006a) implies that a protein must control this dimerization. Studies on the protein that controls this ratio are presented elsewhere in these Proceedings (see Liu et al.).

Sesterterpenoids -- Helicoides H₁ and H₄, and H₂ and H₃ (bottom, Fig. 1) are the reaction products of hemigossypolone and either β -ocimene or myrcene, respectively. This biosynthetic process is a Diels-Alder reaction and it can be reproduced in the laboratory by dissolving hemigossypolone and either β -ocimene or myrcene in a nonpolar organic solvent and allowing them to stand for a few days (Stipanovic et al., 1977b; 1978a) to yield a mixture of the appropriate helicoides. In cotton, the glands appear to offer a similar reaction "vessel" in that hemigossypolone, and both β -ocimene and myrcene (Elzen et al., 1985) are dissolved in a lipophilic matrix in the glands. In the laboratory preparation, the ratio between helicoides H₄ and H₁, and between H₃ and H₂ are about 0.50 and 0.66, respectively. In contrast, in cotton tissue, these ratios vary greatly. In a study of fourteen cotton varieties at five different geographical locations, the H₄/H₁ ratio varied from 0.14 (\pm 0.01) to 0.33 (\pm 0.02) in flower buds and from 0.09 (\pm 0.01) to 0.24 (\pm 0.04) in leaves while the H₃/H₂ ratio varied from 0.32 (\pm 0.01) to 0.40 (\pm 0.01) in flower buds and from 0.34 (\pm 0.01) to 0.47 (\pm 0.01) in leaves (Stipanovic et al., 1988). These variations imply the involvement of a protein (Stipanovic, 1992). Evidence to support this proposal has been provided by research with other organisms, including the work by Oikawa et al. (1995) wherein they report the isolation of a Diels-Alderase enzyme from *Alternaria solani*.

O-Methylation of Terpenoids -- Addition of a methyl group to the phenolic group at the C-6 position of any of the sesquiterpenoids or sesterterpenoids (Fig. 1) reduces the biological activity of that terpenoid in cotton. For example, field or bioassay studies have shown that the methylation

causes the heliocides to be less toxic to the tobacco budworm (Stipanovic et al., 1977a), desoxyhemigossypol and hemigossypol to be less toxic to *Verticillium dahliae* and *Fusarium* (Mace et al., 1985, 1995), and gossypol to be a less effective spermatocide (Hoffer et al., 1987). Liu et al. (1999) purified, characterized and cloned the enzyme responsible for methylation of desoxyhemigossypol and showed that desoxyhemigossypol is the unique substrate for this enzyme (i.e., hemigossypol did not act as substrate). The cDNA that codes for a 365-residue polypeptide with a calculated molecular weight of 40.6 kDa was cloned (Liu et al., 2002). The cloned gene was successfully expressed in *Escherichia coli*. This enzyme controls the production of several terpenoids in cotton including hemigossypol-6-methyl ether, hemigossypolone-6-methyl ether, the B heliocides, gossypol-6-methyl ether and gossypol-6,6-dimethyl ether.

Conclusion

The cotton industry has seen a significant increase in the understanding of the cotton plant's secondary product chemistry and biochemistry. Developments in molecular biology are providing new tools for agricultural scientists to utilize the secondary plant metabolites, such as the terpenoids, to provide unprecedented technologies that enhance pest control, increase productivity, yield and utilization. The launch pad for many of these enhancements will continue to be our fundamental chemical and biochemical knowledge-based studies of plant secondary products — what they are, their mechanism of action, how they are synthesized in nature, and their role in pest resistance and biocontrol activity.

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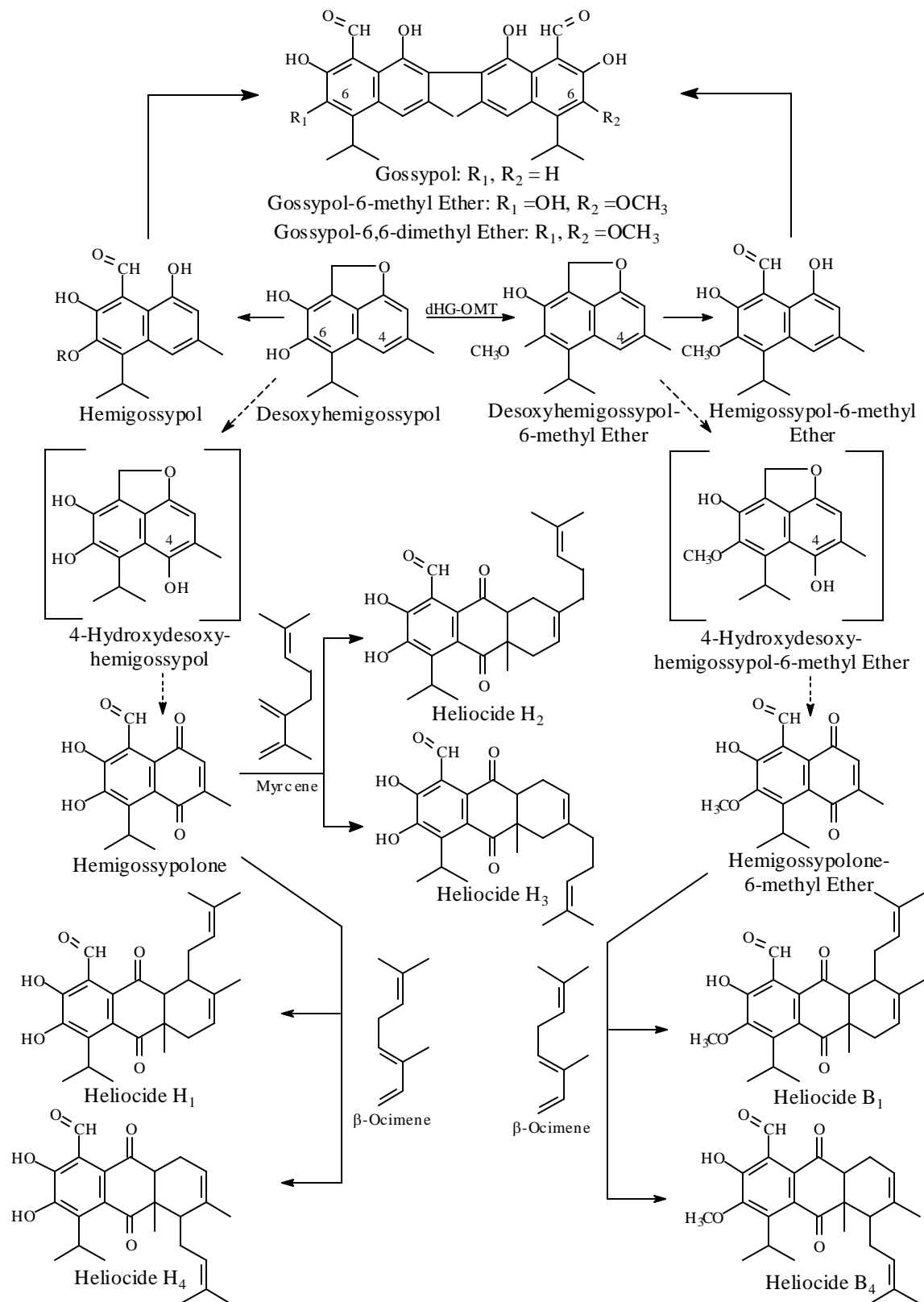


Figure 1. Proposed biosynthesis of foliar terpenoids in cotton.

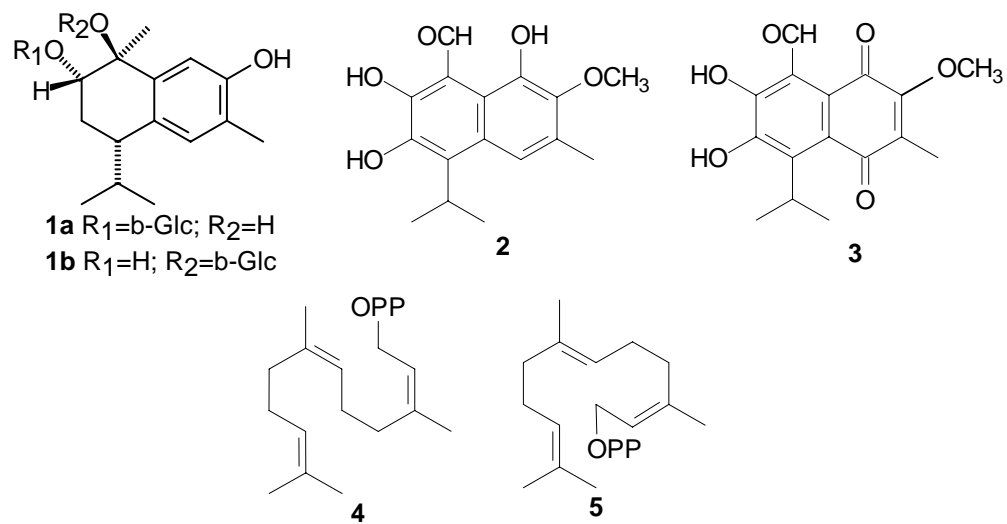


Figure 2. Terpenoids purported to occur or identified in various cotton tissues.

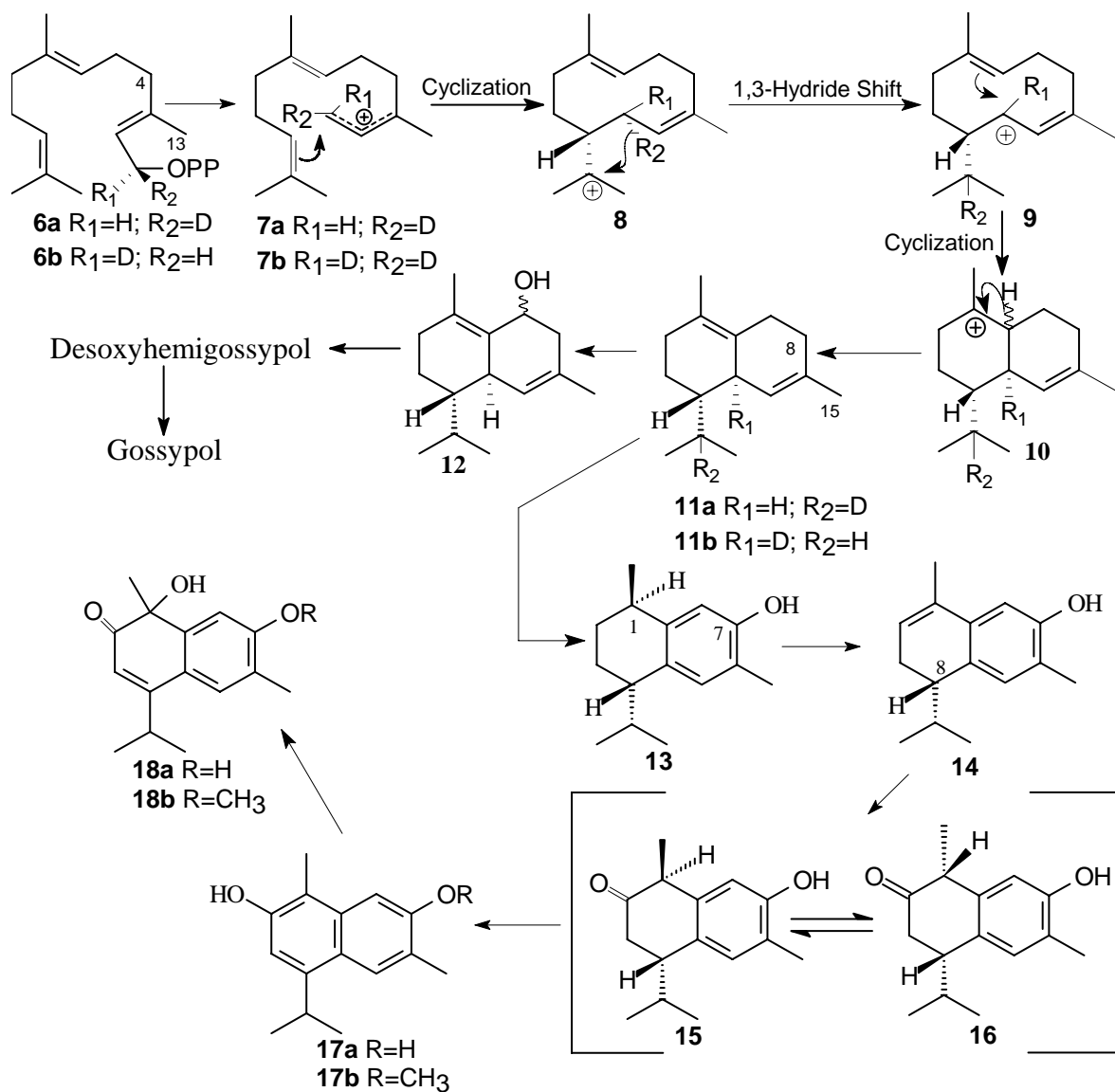


Figure 3. Proposed biosynthesis of 2,7-dihydroxycadalene, 2-hydroxy-7-methoxycadalene, lacinilene C and lacinilene C methyl ether.