The nucleotide sequence of the 5S rRNA from *Spiroplasma* species BC3 and *Mycoplasma mycoides* sp. *capri* PG3


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Received 19 April 1982

**ABSTRACT**

Using *in vitro* labelling techniques, the complete nucleotide sequence of the 5S ribosomal RNAs isolated from the honeybee pathogen, *Spiroplasma* species BC3 and *Mycoplasma mycoides* sp. *capri* PG3, have been determined. The latter shows only 3 differences from the reported sequence of *M. capricolum* 5S rRNA, indicating that these two species are very closely related. The *Spiroplasma* sequence is also 107 nucleotides long and a comparative analysis of the sequence confirms that this *Spiroplasma* species is closely related to the *Mycoplasma* species and that they and the Gram-positive eubacteria have descended from a common ancestor and in the process the cell wall-less organisms have lost a large percentage of their genome.

**INTRODUCTION**

Members of the family *Mycoplasmataceae* have been known for nearly a century but the first member of the family *Spiroplasmataceae* was only identified in 1967 when a cell wall-less organism was isolated from a plant source. Since then, these helical, highly motile mycoplasmas have been recognised to be associated with a variety of pathological conditions such as citrus stubborn disease, corn stunt disease and to cause cataracts, neurological disturbances and death in experimental infections of suckling rats. More recently, in 1976, a new species was identified in diseased honeybees. The relatedness among the individual *Spiroplasma* species is far from clear although four distinct serological groups have been identified. Even less clear is the relationship between the spiroplasma and other members of the order *Mycoplasmatales*, although comparison of 16S rRNA T1-RNase catalogues has indicated that the *Spiroplasma*, like the *Mycoplasma*, are related to Gram-positive eubacteria.

Previously, evidence we obtained concerning the 5S rRNA sequence from *Thermoplasma acidophilum*, helped establish that this species is not even a Eubacteria but it in fact a member of the Archaebacteria and because of the unique size of the 5S rRNA of the only *Mycoplasma* species so far reported...
(M. capricolum ATCC 27343, 107 nucleotides), we decided to investigate the nucleotide sequence of the 5S rRNA for phylogenetic purposes of M. mycoides sp. capri PG3 and of Spiroplasma species BC3 isolated from the honeybee.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Cells of Mycoplasma mycoides sp. capri PG3 were grown and the low molecular weight RNA isolated as previously described. Spiroplasma cells (grown under MAFF licence number PHF 78/13 and 78/52) were obtained from a 48 hr incubation of a 10% inoculum at 30° in PPLO broth (Difco) 2%; glucose, 0.2%; fructose, 0.2%; sucrose, 0.2%; sorbitol, 7.0% and horse serum, 5%. An optical density at 600 nm of around 0.1 was obtained which is equivalent to about 10⁹ cells/ml. Growth was in full 500 ml bottles, the cells were harvested in the usual way and the low molecular weight RNA (100 μg/ml) isolated as previously described. The RNA samples were then initially fractionated on a BD-cellulose column but whereas normally 5S rRNA is eluted first from this column, these 5S rRNAs were considerably retarded and could be found in the main UV-absorbing peak. Fractions of this peak were then subjected to polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis (1.0 kV for 7 hr on a 40 cm x 20 cm x 0.02 cm 8% slab) and the band corresponding to 5S rRNA eluted and used for sequencing.

Enzymes, radioactive materials, chemicals and most techniques were all as previously described.

Sequence data was obtained (1) by the use of 5'- and 3'-³²P in vitro end labelled 5S RNA by (a) nuclease P₁ treatment followed by electrophoresis and homochromatography (b) rapid gel sequencing methods using RNase T₁, U₁, Phy.M and from B. cereus. The 3'-labelled material was previously treated with calf alkaline phosphatase to remove observable heterogeneity in the products of enzymatic digestion (c) rapid gel chemical sequencing. (2) by the method of Stanley and Vassilenko as modified by Tanaka et al. The position of each nucleotide was independently deduced by at least two methods.

RESULTS

The sequences are given in the figure. No length or sequence heterogeneity was observed. No post-transcriptionally-modified nucleotides were detected. The 5S rRNA of Spiroplasma with 107 nucleotides is thus the same size as that of M. capri even though it has a higher mobility upon electrophoresis on a denaturing gel when compared with the Mycoplasma 5S rRNA.
The secondary structures are shown in the form suggested by De Wachter et al. Even though these mycoplasma 5S rRNAs are very short, they can still be accommodated in this model and when compared with a normal length 5S rRNA, helix E is shortened by deletion of bases from both strands of the helix. Thus when correctly aligned, *M. mycoides* sp. *capri* has one more base pair inserted in this helix than is found in the Spiroplasma species. *Acholeplasma laidlawii* 5S rRNA is 112 nucleotides long and contains three extra base pairs inserted in this helix (C. R. Woese, personal communication). It is known that the genome of these organisms is small and very A-T rich. As they have
evolved with the Gram-positive eubacteria from a common ancestor by loss of 
genetic material, they are now likely to be under some constraint to conserve 
the remainder for use in 'essential' functions only. This has already been 
demonstrated by the relatively low level of tRNA post-transcriptional 
activity and the probable use of tRNA to decode 4 codons CCN17. Thus 
it is tempting to speculate that many of the nucleotides normally found in 
5S rRNA in helix E are not essential for the adequate functioning of this 
molecule.

COMPARISON WITH OTHER 5S rRNAs

The homology shown between the 5S rRNA of M. capricolum (ATCC 27343) and 
M. mycoides sp. capri is greater than 97%. This infers that these are a minor 
species variation although serological evidence indicates that they are rather 
more distinct than this. Considerable homology exists between these two 
mycoplasmas and the Spiroplasma species BC3. Indeed, nucleotides 14-67 show 
90% homology. A comparative sequence analysis (H. Küntzel, personal 
communication), confirms that the Spiroplasma species is closely related to 
M. capricolum and that they share a common ancestor with the Gram-positive 
eubacteria.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful to Dr M. J. Daniels for providing us with the strain of 
Spiroplasma BC3 used in this work and to Dr H. Küntzel for analysing the data. 
M. W. K. and M. J. R. are both recipients of CASE awards with the P.H.L.S. 
Mycoplasma Reference Laboratory and we are grateful to Dr R. H. Leach for his 
advice and encouragement.

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