Sequences hybridizing to mRNA, oligo(dT) and dsRNA from pre-mRNA are contiguous in the cloned mouse DNA fragments

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ABSTRACT

Fragments from the DNA of mouse embryos produced by restriction endonuclease HindIII were cloned in pBR322 plasmid and examined for the ability to hybridize in situ with \[^{32}P\] labeled cDNA synthesized from the polysomal poly(A)^+ mRNA template. Several of the selected clones were examined for the presence of specific sequences inside the cloned mouse DNA fragments by the blotting procedure of Southern /1/. The data obtained indicate that the majority of the cloned mouse DNA fragments contained sequences hybridizing with cDNA, oligo(dT) and double-stranded regions from pre-mRNA. The results of hybridization experiments and double digestion with HindIII+HaeIII endonucleases provide evidence that these sequences could be contiguous in the given restriction DNA fragments.

INTRODUCTION

Complementary sequences and double-stranded structures of different types were found in the nuclear precursor of mRNA (DNA-like RNA, dRNA, heterogeneous nuclear RNA, hnRNA) /2-5/. According to our classification /6/, dsRNA-A represents long (300-800 or more base pairs in length) double-stranded structures which cannot snap back after pre-mRNA melting. They arise mainly during pre-mRNA isolation as a result of the interaction of long complementary sequences. DsRNA-B and dsRNA-C (100-200 and 20-30 base pairs in length, respectively) can snap back after melting of pre-mRNA and thus represent true hairpin-like structures in pre-mRNA. The function of these sequences in pre-mRNA and eukaryotic genomes is yet unknown. It has been suggested that dsRNA-B may serve as signal sequences for the processing of pre-mRNA /7-8/. Different complementary sequenc-
the processing events necessary for mRNA formation. On the other hand, they can be specific and functionally significant only for certain, for example, repetitive structural genes.

Further progress in our understanding of the structural organization and the functional role of these sequences may be based on the analysis of cloned DNA fragments which contain structural genes and sequences complementary to dsRNA. The isolation of clones containing sequences complementary to hamster /9/ and mouse /10/ dsRNA from pre-mRNA has been recently described. Molecular hybridization analysis of the DNAs of such clones suggests that they contain two most abundant types of dsRNA sequences accounting for 50-75% of the total dsRNA-B /10/.

In the present work, we have selected several clones hybridizing with mouse polysomal mRNA (or cDNA) and found out that the majority of the cloned mouse DNA fragments contained sequences hybridizing to cDNA transcribed from polysomal mRNA, oligo(dT) and dsRNA from pre-mRNA. The results of molecular hybridization experiments and double digestion with restriction endonucleases provide evidence that these sequences are contiguous in two individual restriction DNA fragments.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Bacterial plasmids and strains. A small (2.6x10^6 daltons) plasmid pBR322 (a gift of Dr. H.Boyer) conferring resistance to ampicillin and tetracyclin /11/ was used as a vector. E.coli, strain HB101, was used for growing plasmid pBR322. E.coli, strain J1776 (a gift of Dr. R.Curtiss), was used as a host for the recombinant plasmid DNA transformation and cloning in a P3 physical containment.

Preparation of DNA. Mouse DNA was prepared from the Ehrlich ascite cells by the procedure of Gross-Bellard et al./12/. For cloning, DNA was obtained from mouse embryos /12/. Plasmid pBR322 DNA was isolated according to Bolivar et al./11/. Recombinant plasmids were grown according to Curtiss et al./13/ with further purification using the ethidium bromide CsCl density gradient centrifugation /11/. DNAs of recombinant clones containing sequences homologous to dsRNA-B1 (B1+clone) and
dsRNA-B2 (B2+ clone) were prepared as described /10/.

**Preparation of recombinant plasmids.** 20 µg of HindIII digested mouse embryonic DNA and 0.05 µg of HindIII digested pBR322 plasmid DNA were ligated in 200 µl of a solution containing 100 mM NaCl, 50 mM Tris-HCl buffer (pH 7.5), 10 mM MgCl₂, 10 mM β-mercaptoethanol, 0.08 mM ATP, 50 µg/ml of bovine serum albumin and DNA ligase (a gift of Dr. G. Dolganov). After a 1 hr incubation, the reaction mixture was diluted 10-fold with the ligase buffer, more ligase was added, and the reaction was continued for 16 hrs.

Isolation of polysomal poly(A)⁺mRNA was performed as described /6/.

Isolation of pre-mRNA and its double-stranded regions (dsRNA). Ehrlich ascites carcinoma cells (2x10⁸ cells) were incubated in 25 ml of the Eagle medium containing 5 mCi of [³H] uridine for 1 hr. Pre-mRNA was isolated by the hot phenol fractionation procedure /14/ or by the Scherrer and Darnell method /15/ (in the latter case, the cells were labeled in the medium containing 0.05 µg/ml of actinomycin D). DsRNA was isolated from pre-mRNA (>18S) by digestion with a mixture of pancreatic and T₁ RNAases and gel filtration through Sephadex G-75 as previously described /4/.

**Preparation of cDNA.** DNA complementary to mouse polysomal poly(A)⁺mRNA was synthesized in a reaction mixture containing 50 mM Tris-HCl (pH 8.1), 5 mM MgCl₂, 10 mM dithiothreitol, 50 mM KCl, 100 µg/ml of actinomycin D (Calbiochem), 0.5 mM each of dATP, dGTP, and dTTP, 50-100 µCi [³²P]dCTP (350 Ci/mmole) (Amersham), mRNA (50 µg/ml), oligo(dT)$_{12-18}$ (4 µg/ml) (Collaborative Research), RNA-dependent DNA polymerase from avian myeloblastosis virus (240 units/ml) (provided by Drs. D. and J.W. Beard). The solution was quickly vortexed and incubated for 1 hr at 37°C. The reaction mixture was then made 10 mM EDTA and 0.1 M NaOH and heated to 65°C for 30 min. After readjusting the pH of the solution to 7.5, the sample was placed on a Sephadex G-50 column equilibrated with 0.1 M NaCl - 0.01 M Tris-HCl (pH 7.5). The excluded fraction was collected and precipitated with ethanol.
Identification of recombinant clones. Colonies of transformed bacteria were screened for the presence of cDNA sequences by colony hybridization according to the procedure of Grunstein and Hogness /16/. 10x10^6 cpm of the [32P]labeled cDNA were hybridized to each of 8 cm nitrocellulose filters in 5xSSC for 24 hrs at 65°C. After hybridization, the filters were extensively washed with 2xSSC at 65°C, 2xSSC-7 M urea - 0.1% sodium dodecyl sulfate at 42°C, and 2xSSC at room temperature. Autoradiography of the dried filters was performed with an intensifying screen at -70°C for 1 to 5 days. Colonies which gave positive autoradiography response were picked from the replica plates, grown individually in suspension cultures, and plasmid DNA was isolated as described /11/.

Restriction endonuclease digestion and gel electrophoresis. DNA was digested with restriction endonucleases HindIII and HaeIII (provided by Dr. V. Nosikov) in 10 mM Tris-HCl, pH 7.6, 10 mM MgCl2, 1 mM dithiothreitol, 50 mM NaCl at 37°C. The number of enzyme units used and the time of digestion varied with different batches of enzymes.

Native or digested plasmid DNAs were fractionated by electrophoresis in slab gels of 1 or 3% agarose. The gels were stained with 10 μg/ml of ethidium bromide to visualize the DNA bands.

Transfer of DNA to nitrocellulose filters and hybridization. The DNA in the agarose slab gels was denatured in 1 M NaCl-0.5 M NaOH for 30 min. After neutralization of the solution with 1.5 M NaCl - 0.5 M Tris-HCl, pH 7.0, the DNA was transferred by blotting the gel onto nitrocellulose filters overnight according to the procedure of Southern /1/ in the presence of 6xSSC. Thereafter, the nitrocellulose filters were rinsed in 2xSSC, air-dried, baked at 80°C for 5 hrs in a vacuum oven, soaked in a 2-fold concentrated Denhardt's solution /17/, and hybridized to [32P]labeled cDNA, [32P]labeled nick-translated DNA or [125I]labeled dsDNA in a mixture containing 2xSSC, 0.1% sodium dodecyl sulfate, 2x Denhardt's solution, 100 μg/ml of denatured E.coli DNA, and 100 μg/ml of poly(U) for 16 hrs at 65°C. Washing and autoradiography of the filters were carried out as described above.
Molecular hybridization assays. Non-radioactive plasmid DNAs immobilized on the filters were hybridized to \( ^{32}\text{P}\) labeled cDNA or \( ^{3}\text{H}\) labeled mRNA in a solution containing 0.4 M NaCl, 0.01 M Tris-HCl (pH 7.5), 0.001 M EDTA, 0.2% sodium dodecyl sulfate and 100 \( \mu \text{g/ml} \) of poly(U) for 15 hrs at 65°C. After annealing, the filters were washed 3 times for 2 hrs with 7 M urea in 2xSSC - 0.1% sodium dodecyl sulfate at 42°C and 3 times for 1 hr with 2xSSC at 65°C. In some experiments, to remove the cDNA fraction enriched in sequences complementary to dsRNA-B1 and dsRNA-B2, the total cDNA was repeatedly hybridized to the DNAs of B1\(^+\) and B2\(^+\) clones immobilized on nitrocellulose filters. Non-hybridized cDNA (B1\(^-\), B2-depleted cDNA) was then used for hybridization to the DNA of the studied recombinant clones.

In vitro labeling. DsRNA was labeled with \( ^{125}\text{I} \) according to the procedure of Prensky et al. /18/. The reaction was performed at 80°C for 6 min. Before hybridization, \( ^{125}\text{I} \) labeled RNA was passed through nitrocellulose filters (0.45 \( \mu \text{m} \)). The total mouse DNA and the DNAs of B1\(^+\) and B2\(^+\) clones were labeled with \( ^{32}\text{P} \) by nick translation to a specific activity of 5x10\(^7\) cpm/\( \mu \text{g} \) according to /19/.

Isolation of DNA fragments from agarose gel. This was done by electrophoretic elution /20/. The eluted samples were concentrated 10-fold and NaCl was added to a concentration of 0.5 M. Then the DNA solution was passed through Dowex 50Wx8 to remove ethidium bromide and DNA fragments were precipitated with ethanol.

RESULTS

1. Analysis of cloned mouse DNA fragments

Mouse DNA digested with restriction endonuclease HindIII was ligated to HindIII-digested pBR322. Under the conditions used, up to 90% of the transformants that harboured hybrid plasmids were obtained. These recombinant clones were tested for hybridization of their DNA to \( ^{32}\text{P} \) labeled cDNA by the technique of colony hybridization /16/. 100-120 clones of 500 tested gave strong positive hybridization. Several of them
were chosen at random for further study.

The purified DNAs from the selected plasmids were digested with HindIII restriction endonuclease and fractionated by electrophoresis in a 1% agarose gel. The results shown in Fig. 1 demonstrate the presence of more than one insert in the majority of clones. This probably depends on the fact that under-restricted DNA was used for the ligation procedure. However, the secondary ligation of different mouse DNA fragments could not be excluded and therefore all different HindIII mouse DNA fragments even present in the same clone were considered as independent genomic fragments. Two clones, viz. 5 and 92, contain a single insert. The behaviour of clone M31 is rather unusual, perhaps due to elimination of the HindIII restriction.

Fig. 1. Electrophoresis of HindIII-cleaved mouse DNA fragments cloned in pBR322 plasmid.

Fig. 1. Electrophoresis of HindIII-cleaved mouse DNA fragments cloned in pBR322 plasmid.

Fragments separated in 1% agarose gel are visualized by staining with ethidium bromide followed by ultraviolet irradiation (input per track, 0.5 μg DNA).

a - UV visualization

b - graphic scheme; Pl - plasmid pBR322; λ DNA digested with EcoRI restriction endonuclease was used as size markers.
site during the cloning procedure. Although the hybridization properties of this clone are similar to the others, it was discarded in subsequent experiments. The majority of inserts ranged in size from 2 to 8 kilobases (kb). All of the individual restriction fragments were further analysed by the gel blotting technique using for the hybridization $[^{32}P]$ labeled cDNA and oligo(dT) synthesized by reverse transcriptase, $[^{125}I]$ labeled dsRNA from pre-mRNA, and $[^{32}P]$ labeled nick-translated total mouse DNA and DNA of clones containing B1 and B2 sequences. Experimental procedures for the isolation of the latters and their properties were described in the previous work /10/.

These clones contain two most abundant sequences transcribed into dsRNA-B, designated as dsRNA-B1 and dsRNA-B2, and accounting for up to 75% of the total dsRNA-B. They belong to a class of highly repetitive DNA sequences scattered throughout the whole mouse genome and only a part of them (about 1/4) is organized in palindromic structures.

The results of the hybridization experiments are shown in Fig. 2 and summarized in Table 1. Almost all fragments of the clones hybridize to cDNA. The only exception is fragment 98b. The same fragments which hybridize to cDNA also bind dsRNA. No exception was found with our fragments. Only in the case of fragment 87a, hybridization to dsRNA was much weaker. For those fragments which do not comigrate with plasmid DNA, it was also possible to determine the nature of dsRNA binding sequences by hybridization with labeled DNA of plasmids containing B1 and B2 sequences (Fig. 2c,d). Two fragments, 87a and 87c, hybridized with neither B1 nor B2 sequences. All the others bound either B1 or B2, or both of them. The results are in agreement with the previous data showing B1 and B2 sequences to be responsible for the formation of the most abundant classes of dsRNA-B /10/.

Ten of the fourteen fragments hybridizing to cDNA also bind oligo(dT) (Fig. 2e). Thus, these two types of sequences are also very often (but not always) located in the close neighbourhood in the mouse genome.
Fig. 2. Autoradiography of HindIII DNA fragments after blot-hybridization to: a) [\(^{32}\text{P}\)]cDNA; b) [\(^{125}\text{I}\)]dsRNA; c) [\(^{32}\text{P}\)]DNA of B1+ clone; d) [\(^{32}\text{P}\)]DNA of B2+ clone; e) [\(^{32}\text{P}\)]oligo(dT).

Hybridization to oligo(dT) was performed in a 2xSSC solution at 28° overnight; after hybridization, the filter was washed with the 2x SSC solution at room temperature, dried, and exposed to X-ray film for 3 hrs.
Table 1. Properties of mouse DNA fragments cloned in plasmid pBR322

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- Total [125I]dsRNA: dsRNA isolated from pre-mRNA by RNase digestion and in vitro labeled with [125I];
- [32P]DNA of B1+ and B2+ clones: nick-translated mouse DNA fragments from recombinant clones containing sequences complementary to dsRNA-B1 and dsRNA-B2;
- [32P]oligo(dT): DNA homopolymer synthesized from poly(A) sequences by RNA-dependent DNA polymerase from avian myeloblastosis virus.

2. The contiguity of sequences hybridizing to cDNA and dsRNA

The most intriguing feature is the hybridization of individual fragments with both cDNA and dsRNA. It may be explained either (i) by the contiguity of genes and sequences coding for dsRNA or (ii) by the existence of sequences complementary to dsRNA in cDNA preparations. The second explanation seemed to be plausible as we found that clones containing B1 or B2 sequences bound from 1 to 2% of polysomal mRNA or cDNA in the hybridization reaction (unpublished data).

To choose among the two possibilities, the following experiments were performed. First, the DNA of clones was hybridized with cDNA from which B1 and B2 sequences have been removed. For this, the total cDNA was repeatedly (2-3 times) hybridized to the DNAs of B1+ and B2+ clones immobilized on nitrocellulose filters. The non-hybridized fraction of cDNA (B1-, B2-depleted cDNA), the total cDNA and mRNA were then used for molecular hybridization experiments with the DNAs of different clones. The results of these experiments are listed in Table 2. It was found that the percentage of hybridization...
Hybridization of cloned DNAs immobilized on nitrocellulose filters was carried out as described in Methods. 1x10^6 cpm of [32P]cDNA and 5x10^6 cpm of [3H]mRNA were taken in the experiments. Control filters containing pBR322 DNA bound 100-150 cpm of [32P]cDNA and 30-40 cpm of [3H]mRNA. These backgrounds were subtracted from the experimental figures.


was reduced significantly in the case when B1-, B2-depleted cDNA was used as compared with the total cDNA and mRNA. It is not surprising because the fraction of repetitive cDNA sequences was removed from the reaction. However, hybridization was yet detected for all clones. For several clones (NN 71, 92, 98), the percentage of hybridization was high enough. The results of these experiments suggest the presence of structural gene sequences in the tested DNAs. However, this suggestion needs some further direct support as we still cannot exclude the possibility that some other dsRNA sequences remaining in cDNA after removal of B1 and B2 participate in the hybridization reaction. Therefore, in the second series of experiments, we tried to separate physically sequences hybridizing to cDNA and to dsRNA. Fragments 98a and 71a were chosen for the analysis. For this, fragment 98a (together with comigrated plasmid DNA) was eluted from 1% agarose gel, purified, and additionally digested with restrictase HaeIII. DNA of the clone NN 71 was
also digested with restrictases HindIII+HaeIII. The subfragments obtained were analysed by the blotting technique followed by hybridization to total cDNA, B1-, B2-depleted cDNA and total dsRNA. The results are shown in Fig. 3 (A and B, tracks 3-5). The number and location of the subfragments derived from the inserted sequences and plasmid vector DNA are depicted in

![Fig. 3](image)

**Fig. 3.** Analysis of DNA subfragments obtained after HaeIII digestion of fragment 98a (A) and fragment 71a (B).

1. SV40 DNA digested with HindIII used as site markers. Fragments in 3% agarose gel were visualized by ethidium bromide staining.
2. DNA subfragments in 3% agarose gel were visualized by ethidium bromide staining.
   (A) Fragment 98a and comigrated plasmid DNA were digested with HaeIII.
   (B) Total DNA of clone 71 was digested with HindIII+HaeIII. The hybridizing subfragments derived from 98a and 71a are shown with arrows.
3-7. The corresponding radioautograms after Southern hybridization with:
   - $^{32}$P-cDNA, $(1-5) \times 10^6$ cpm input per blott (3);
   - $^{125}$I-dsRNA, $(5-7) \times 10^5$ cpm input per blott (4);
   - $^{32}$P-B1-, B2-depleted cDNA, $(1-2) \times 10^6$ cpm input per blott (5), control hybridization to DNA of B1* and B2* clones was not detected (data not shown);
   - $^{32}$P-oligo(dT), $(0.5-1) \times 10^6$ cpm input per blott (6);
   - $^{32}$P-total mouse DNA, $(1-2) \times 10^6$ cpm input per blott (7); hybridization to unique DNA represented by fragment 98b was not observed under the conditions used (data not shown).
The hybridizing subfragments are shown with arrows. Three subfragments derived from 98a were hybridized to total cDNA (Fig. 3A, track 3) but only one of them (the upper one) could hybridize to total dsRNA (Fig. 3A, track 4). The two lower subfragments could hybridize only to cDNA. A similar digestion of fragment 71a yielded two subfragments from which the upper one hybridized more efficiently to cDNA and the lower one to dsRNA (Fig. 3B, tracks 3 and 4). Consistent with these data are our results from experiments in which the blotted HaeIII subfragments of 98a and of 71a were hybridized to B1-B2-depleted cDNA (Fig. 3A and B, tracks 5). In this case, no hybridization was observed to control DNA (B1+, B2+ clones; data not shown); this means that only the hybridization to cDNA is detected.

It is evident that three subfragments derived from 98a and one subfragment (the upper) derived from 71a contain cDNA or presumptive structural gene sequences. Sequences homologous to dsRNA are located in one (the lower) subfragment derived from 71a and in one (the upper) subfragment derived from 98a. Thus, these results demonstrate the sequences hybridizing to cDNA and dsRNA to be contiguous in the single restriction fragments 98a and 71a. Possibly, by using suitable restriction endonucleases, one can demonstrate a similar situation also for other fragments studied.

3. Further studies on cDNA binding fragments

Among the fragments studied, one should reveal those which hybridize exclusively to cDNA, i.e. contain presumptive structural genes. These are the subfragments of fragments 98a and 71a excised by restriction with endonuclease HaeIII and possibly fragment 87a excised from clone N 87 by digestion with endonuclease HindIII (Fig. 2). Of greatest interest is fragment 71a which binds more than 0.1% of total cDNA even in the case of the B1-, B2-depleted cDNA, i.e. it hybridizes to the abundant class of cDNA or mRNA.

Further hybridization experiments were performed with these subfragments to know the location of oligo(dT) hybridizing sequences. It is clearly seen that the two upper subfragments derived from 98a and 71a can bind oligo(dT) (Fig. 3, A
and B, tracks 6). A small subfragment derived from 71a and practically not hybridizing to cDNA and dsRNA also hybridized with oligo(dT) (Fig. 3B, track 6). No hybridization was detected with other subfragments including the two subfragments derived from 98a and containing cDNA sequences.

The subfragments were also hybridized with total mouse DNA labeled with $^{32}$P by nick translation. Under the given experimental conditions, hybridization to unique DNA (fragment 98b) was not observed (data not shown) and only repetitive sequences could be detected. As it can be seen from Fig. 3 (A and B, tracks 7) all the HaeIII subfragments of 98a and of 71a hybridize to total [$^{32}$P]DNA, although less effectively than fragments which contain B1 and B2 sequences. It means that sequences complementary to cDNA which are within fragments 98a and 71a are repetitive in mouse genome but not to such an extent as dsRNA hybridizing sequences.

DISCUSSION

The main result of the paper is the demonstration of the contiguity between sequences hybridizing to cDNA and to dsRNA (in particular to dsRNA-B1 and dsRNA-B2) in the individual fragments of mouse genome. Different interpretations of this observation are possible.

It has been shown previously that ds sequences in pre-mRNA (dsRNA-B) are characterized by the following typical features: they are transcribed from repetitive regions of the genome, have low complexity, identical or similar in different pre-mRNA molecules and can hybridize to polysomal mRNA to some extent /6-8, 21/. Two types of sequences (B1 and B2) responsible for the synthesis of about 2/3 of all dsRNA-B were isolated later /10/. It has been suggested that dsRNA-B may serve as signal sequences for the processing which are located at the borderline between mRNA and non-informative regions of pre-mRNA /7, 8/.

Consistent with this hypothesis are the above mentioned findings showing that the individual cloned fragments can hybridize to both cDNA and dsRNA. However, the situation seems to be more complex. We have found that a small but significant
fraction of cDNA transcribed even from purified polysomal mRNA hybridizes with B1 or B2 sequences. B1 and B2 sequences are ubiquitous in the genome and this can explain why very many DNA fragments give a positive test upon hybridization to cDNA. The nature of mRNA (cDNA) molecules containing sequences complementary to dsRNA is not clear. They comprise only a few percent of the total chains.

Nevertheless, at least in two cases, we could demonstrate that, besides sequences hybridizing to dsRNA, the DNA fragments also contained sequences binding cDNA exclusively and that these two types of sequences were localized close one to another. The question arises what is the nature of sequences binding this "real" cDNA. One possibility is that most of the genes are neighboured by repetitive sequences transcribed in dsRNA and used as signal sequences. This idea is corroborated by the results demonstrating that, even after a complete removal of B1 and B2 sequences from cDNA, it still hybridizes to cloned DNA fragments (Table 2). If such an interpretation is correct, the B1 or B2 sequence can be used as a guide for the search of a structural gene in a close neighbourhood.

The second possibility is that only a specific set of transcribed genetic elements is flanked by B1, B2 or other repetitive sequences responsible for dsRNA formation. For example, these may be multiple genes similar to mobile dispersed genes of Drosophila melanogaster /22,23/. The latters are known to be framed with direct repeats /24/.

One should consider in this respect that, in both cases analyzed in detail, the sequence hybridizing exclusively to cDNA was represented by a repetitive sequence of the mouse genome. Further analysis of these questions should lead to their solving and to a better understanding of the mammalian genome organization.

An additional result of this investigation is the demonstration of contiguity of oligo(dA·dT) clusters and sequences hybridizing to cDNA. The cases of coincidences are not so regular as for dsRNA-hybridizing sequences but their percentage is higher than could be expected from the random occurrence of oligo(dA·dT) clusters in the mouse genome. Moreover, we
could note a high degree of coincidence between highly repetitive sequences of B1 and B2 types and oligo(dA·dT) clusters within individual cloned fragments. The sequencing of three cloned B1 sequences discovered the existence of dA-rich clusters in close neighbourhood to them (Kramerov, Kraev et al., manuscript in preparation). This is in accordance with the data obtained by Flavell et al. /25/. These authors have shown by fractionating the total rabbit DNA on poly(U)-Sephadex that 50% of fragments 400 kb long which contain an oligo(dA·dT) cluster comprise highly repetitive sequences as well.

The significance of these data also depends on the solving of the above mentioned question about the nature of genetic elements studied here.

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