Mapping of a Vaccinia Host Range Sequence by Insertion into the Viral Thymidine Kinase Gene

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Received 21 May 1984/Accepted 21 September 1984

A vaccinia virus mutant deleted of ca. 18 kilobase pairs at the left-hand end of the genome is unable to multiply on many human cell lines. To determine whether all or some of the deleted sequences were responsible for the host range property, the corresponding region from wild-type DNA was cloned in three pieces into a vaccinia transplacement vector containing the thymidine kinase gene on the HindIII J fragment. The next step was to transfer these pieces to the genome of the host range deletion mutant by in vivo homologous recombination around the thymidine kinase locus. Transfer of one 5.2-kilobase-pair EcoRI fragment was found to restore a wild-type phenotype on the host range mutant, thus demonstrating that only a small portion of the 18-kilobase-pair deletion contains the host range function(s). This result also illustrates that the method initially devised for inserting foreign genes into vaccinia virus DNA is useful for studies of the vaccinia genome.

Vaccinia virus can multiply in cells derived from numerous mammalian or avian species. The isolation of host range mutants from vaccinia (2, 13) or the closely related rabbit pox virus (4–6, 10, 12) suggests that the ability to cross species barriers requires virus-encoded functions. A vaccinia host range mutant (hr) we previously isolated is particularly interesting in that it is unable to multiply on cell lines derived from human tissues (2). The genome of this mutant is deleted of about 18 kilobase pairs (kbp) at one end of the molecule. The fact that a vaccinia variant with a smaller deletion in the same region of the genome did not display a host range phenotype on the human HeLa cell line (9, 11) suggested to us that only part of the wild-type sequences missing from the hr mutant is essential for multiplication on human cells. We therefore undertook to locate the region in wild-type DNA which once inserted into the hr deletion mutant could rescue the host range defect. The procedure developed by Mackett et al. (7) for insertion of foreign DNA into the thymidine kinase (TK) gene of the vaccinia genome also appeared appropriate for insertion of vaccinia wild-type DNA into the genome of a deletion mutant.

Restriction enzyme analysis of DNA from the hr mutant and the Copenhagen strain of the wild-type virus demonstrated that the deletion spanned an 18-kbp sequence in the left-hand end of the molecule (Fig. 1). The EcoRI fragments C, J, and K contained sequences overlapping the entire deletion as well as some undeleted material flanking both ends. We sought to clone these three EcoRI fragments into the vaccinia thymidine kinase gene contained in a plasmid vector pGS3. The pGS3 vector has been previously constructed by insertion of the vaccinia HindIII J fragment into a pBR328 vector whose EcoRI site had been removed (7). Copenhagen wild-type DNA was cleaved with EcoRI, and the fragments obtained were inserted by ligation with T4 DNA ligase into EcoRI-, alkaline phosphatase-treated pGS3. Escherichia coli HB101 was transformed with the ligation

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Mix to ampicillin resistance, and the three inserts we were looking for were selected by colony hybridization to nick-translated vaccinia Sau3A fragments C, G, and K that had been previously cloned (3). Molecular cloning was carried out according to published procedures (8). Figure 2 shows the restriction profiles of the recombinant plasmids obtained as well as the maps of each construct.

Transfer of the three thymidine kinase insertion mutations to the hr genome required in vivo recombination events.

This was carried out by first infecting chicken embryo fibroblasts with the virus strain hr ts 38 that carries both the hr mutation and a ts mutation mapping in the HindIII G fragment (3) and then cotransfecting cells with calcium phosphate-precipitated DNA from the hr mutant and one of each of the recombinant plasmids shown in Fig. 2. After incubation of the cells for 48 h at the nonpermissive temperature (39.5°C) for multiplication of the hr ts virus, a number of plaques appeared, presumably owing to rescue of the ts lesion by the addition of purified hr DNA. Since plaques could appear only when transfection of hr DNA had been successful, the procedure employing a hr ts virus enabled us to prevent any virus multiplication in infected cells that had not taken up exogenous DNA. Cells successfully transfected with hr DNA should also be competent for uptake of plasmid DNA which can participate in homologous recombination with hr DNA at or surrounding the TK locus. To reveal these recombination events cells containing plaques were frozen, thawed, and disrupted by ultrasonic treatment; the virus released was titrated on mouse LTK- cells in the presence of bromodeoxyuridine and on human HepII cells. Virus capable of multiplying on both cell lines was isolated from cells that had been transfected with the plasmid containing the EcoRI K fragment. Virus reisolated from HepII cells could also multiply on LTK- cells in the presence of bromodeoxyuridine, and vice versa. One virus isolate was further clonally purified and found to multiply with similar kinetics and to a similar yield as wild-type virus both on chicken cells and on HepII cells (not shown). These results suggest that the genetic information contained in the EcoRI K fragment from vaccinia DNA is capable by itself of

**FIG. 2.** Restriction digests and maps of vaccinia virus EcoRI fragments C, J, and K inserted into the pGS3 plasmid vector. (A) Restriction profiles of DNA from vaccinia virus (WT), the pGS3 plasmid vector and three plasmids derived from this vector after insertion of vaccinia fragments EcoRI C (10 kbp), J (6.2 kbp), and K (5.2 kbp). The viral DNA as well as the plasmid DNAs were digested to completion with EcoRI, and the fragments obtained were separated on an 0.6% agarose gel in the presence of ethidium bromide. (B) The vector pGS3 is represented as a circle; the thin line corresponds to pBR328 sequences, and the thick line corresponds to the vaccinia HindIII J fragment. Restriction maps of the three EcoRI fragments inserted into pGS3 are depicted beneath the plasmid. Abbreviations: E, (EcoRI); H, (HindIII); X, (XhoI), S, (SalI). The arrows indicate the polarity of the vaccinia fragments from left to right, with respect to the conventional vaccinia restriction maps.

**FIG. 3.** Restriction enzyme profile of DNA from the wild-type virus, the hr mutant, and the recombinant virus. DNA purified from the wild-type virus (WT), the hr mutant (HR) or the recombinant virus described in the text (REC) was digested with EcoRI or HindIII, and the fragments obtained were separated by electrophoresis on an 0.6% agarose gel. The gel was stained with ethidium bromide and photographed under UV light. The EcoRI fragments of particular interest (C, J, K) are indicated in the margin. The HindIII fragments discussed in the text are indicated with letters for J or M and with a cross for the two new fragments found in the recombinant virus.
restoring a wild-type phenotype on the hr mutant. To ensure that the EcoRI K fragment had indeed been inserted into the vaccinia TK gene, DNA from the wild type, the host range mutant and the newly isolated recombinant virus were submitted to restriction enzyme analysis. It is clear that the EcoRI K fragment is found in the recombinant virus DNA, whereas the EcoRI C and J fragments are missing (Fig. 3). Moreover digestion with HindIII demonstrates that the HindIII J fragment has disappeared from recombinant virus DNA. As expected from the map of cloned EcoRI K fragment in Fig. 2, the recombinant virus contains the HindIII M fragment and two new fragments of the predicted size. The largest of the new fragments is 5.4 kbp, and it corresponds to a fusion product of the left end of the EcoRI K fragment and the right end of the HindIII J fragment. The smaller of the new fragments is 2.7 kbp, and it is a fusion product of the right end of the EcoRI K fragment and the left end of the HindIII J fragment. Therefore, the EcoRI K fragment was inserted into the TK gene of the hr genome in a polarity opposite the one it assumed at the left-hand end of wild-type DNA.

These results have allowed us to more precisely locate a DNA sequence that is essential for multiplication of vaccinia virus in human cells. The outcome is consistent with the isolation by others (9, 11) of a non-host range variant of vaccinia WR that is deleted in a region corresponding approximately to our EcoRI fragments C and J. The function of this very large region containing more than 10 kbp is still unknown. Whether the entire 5.2-kbp EcoRI K fragment or only part of it is needed to rescue the hr mutant phenotype is now being investigated. As it has been shown that this region encodes a number of early viral proteins (1), one or several of them may be needed for multiplication in human cells. Our investigation demonstrates the usefulness of the procedure devised for inserting foreign DNA into the vaccinia genome to also solve problems in vaccinia genetics. Considerable shuffling of vaccinia sequences appears to be possible without any loss of virus infectivity.

We are grateful to André Kirn for support and encouragement during the course of this work. We are also grateful to Mike Mackett, Geoffrey Smith, and Bernard Moss for providing us with the pGS 3 vector.

This study was supported in part by a grant 82-333 from Direction des Recherches Etudes et Techniques.

LITERATURE CITED


