

Identification of two genes of *Rhodobacter capsulatus* coding for proteins homologous to the ND1 and 23 kDa subunits of the mitochondrial Complex I

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A region of the genome of *Rhodobacter capsulatus* has been sequenced and shown to encode proteins homologous to the ND1 subunit and the 23 kDa subunit of the mitochondrial NADH:CoQ oxidoreductase (Complex I). The association of these two open reading frames in the *R. capsulatus* genome parallels the organisation of the chloroplast genome. It suggests that genes encoding subunits of the NADH:CoQ oxidoreductase must be clustered in the genome of *R. capsulatus*.

Rhodobacter capsulatus; NADH dehydrogenase; NADH:Q oxidoreductase; Complex I; Mitochondrion

1. INTRODUCTION

The NADH:CoQ oxidoreductase (Complex I) is the first complex of the mitochondrial respiratory chain. It catalyses electron transfer from NADH to ubiquinone Q10 in a process coupled with an active efflux of protons through the mitochondrial inner membrane. This enzyme is made-up of at least 35 subunits and contains one FMN cofactor and 4–6 iron–sulfur clusters (for a review see [1]). Seven of the subunits of the Complex I are encoded by the mitochondrial genome [2,3] while the remaining are encoded by the nucleus. Due to its high complexity, Complex I is the least understood of the mitochondrial respiratory complexes. Similar to the other respiratory complexes, the study of bacterial NADH:CoQ oxidoreductases may no doubt allow decisive progress in the understanding of the mitochondrial Complex I for the following reasons: (i) bacterial respiratory complexes are usually simpler than their mitochondrial counterparts [4,5]; (ii) bacterial genome organisation may allow faster progress in the cloning of the genes encoding the different subunits of the putative Complex I; (iii) bacteria allow for genetic studies hardly accessible with the mitochondrial enzyme. Actually, bacteria present two different types of NADH:CoQ oxidoreductases (for reviews see [6,7]). The type-II NADH:CoQ oxidoreductases show little relation with the mitochondrial Complex I; they are small dimeric enzymes with an associated FAD cofactor and no iron–

sulfur clusters. On the other hand, the type-I NADH:CoQ oxidoreductases display a great similarity with the mitochondrial complex I [6]. The type-I NADH:CoQ oxidoreductase of non-sulfur α -purple bacteria such as *R. capsulatus* and *Paracoccus denitrificans* is sensitive to rotenone [6,7] and shows EPR signals very similar to those associated with the mitochondrial Complex I [8–10]. This enzyme has been purified from *P. denitrificans* [11]. The genes encoding two of its subunits were recently cloned and proved to be homologous to the genes encoding the 24 kDa and the NADH-binding subunits of the mitochondrial Complex I [12,13]. In contrast, the type-I NADH:CoQ oxidoreductase of *R. capsulatus* appeared resistant to purification and biochemical characterisation [7]. The present paper deals with the cloning and characterisation of two genes of *R. capsulatus* which encode proteins highly homologous to the ND1 subunit and the 23 kDa subunit of the mitochondrial Complex I.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Genomic DNA was isolated from exponential cultures of *R. capsulatus* strain B10 according to Marmur [14]. DNA fragments were cloned in phage M13mp18 or in the bluescript phagemids KS⁺ or SK⁺ (Stratagene, USA). Polymerase chain reaction (PCR), Southern blotting and other genetic manipulations were done as described previously [15,16]. Generation of unidirectional deletions in the cloned DNA and production of single strand DNA phagemids were realised according to the procedure described by Stratagene. DNA sequencing was performed using the Pharmacia T7 DNA polymerase kit. Sequences were compiled, analysed and compared to the protein SWISS-PROT and PIR (NBRF) databases using the computer programs package DNASTAR (DNASTAR, UK).

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3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

We have observed that the 23 kDa subunit of bovine Complex I displays significant similarities both with the chloroplast *frxB* proteins and with the bacterial 8Fe-8S ferredoxins [15]. These observations allowed us to design degenerate oligonucleotides for the use as primers in a PCR experiment with *R. capsulatus* genomic DNA template. The forward degenerate primer corresponded to the protein consensus sequence $_{47}\text{TI(H/Q/N)YP(Y/F)EK}_{54}$ deduced from comparison of the mitochondrial 23 kDa with the chloroplast *frxB* proteins (numbering corresponds to the mitochondrial 23 kDa protein). For the design of the reverse primer, we chose the protein sequence $_{126}\text{CPVDA(I/P)}_{131}$ of the bovine 23 kDa subunit which shows a remarkable degree of conservation among bacterial 8Fe-8S ferredoxins. The product of the PCR was analysed by Southern blotting with the degenerate probe PH23 designed after the conserved protein sequence $_{77}\text{CIAC(E/K)(L/V)}_{82}$ corresponding to the first iron-sulfur insertion site of the bovine 23 kDa subunit. The PCR product yielded a strong hybridisation signal and was cloned into M13mp18 and sequenced. In one of the six reading frames, the cloned DNA fragment was shown to potentially encode for a peptidic sequence 81% similar to the central part of the 23 kDa subunit of the mitochondrial Complex I. This PCR product was used as a probe to analyse different restriction digests of genomic DNA of *R. capsulatus* (Fig. 1). The 1.6 kb fragment obtained by double digestion with the enzymes *Bam*HI-*Hind*III and the contiguous 300 bp *Hind*III fragment which hybridised with the probe (see Fig. 1) were cloned in bluescript and M13 vectors respectively. The initial PCR product overlapped both this short fragment and the *Bam*HI-*Hind*III sequence thus giving a continuous DNA fragment 1849 bases long (Fig. 2).

Taking into account the codon usage bias characteristic of Rhodospirillaceae [17] the sequence of the cloned DNA was searched in both directions for open reading frames longer than 100 bases. Three potential coding frames (orf) were identified which displayed ribosome binding sites (underlined in the Fig. 2) upstream to their start codon [18]. As expected, the protein encoded by the open reading frame from base 1338 to base 1826 proved highly homologous to the bovine 23 kDa subunit as well as the chloroplast *frxB* proteins (see Fig. 3). In view of the relationships with the 23 kDa subunit of mitochondrial Complex I and to be consistent with the nomenclature previously used for chloroplast *ndh* genes [15] we propose to call this gene *ndhI*. The corresponding NDH-I protein is 163 amino acids long (M.W. 18,848 Da). It is a ferredoxin-like protein characterised by the presence of two sequence motifs of the form Cx₄CxxCxxxCP (Figure 3) typical of 4Fe-4S cluster insertion sites. Thus this protein and its mitochondrial counterpart must contain two of the 4-6 iron-sulfur

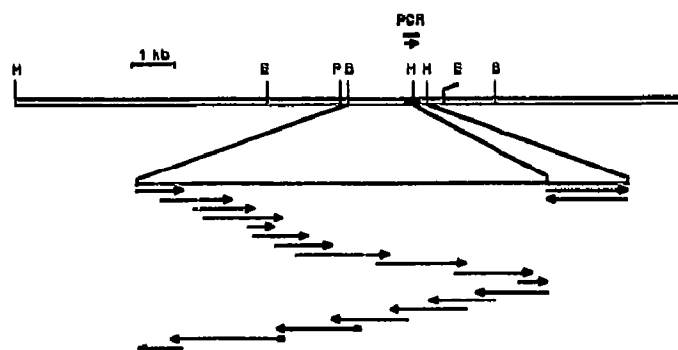


Fig. 1. Strategy for the cloning and sequencing of the *ndhA* and *ndhI* open reading frames. The initial PCR product potentially coding for a fragment of protein homologous to the mitochondrial 23 kDa subunit was used as a probe to analyse the restriction digests of *R. capsulatus* genome. This allowed us to design a restriction map of the region of the genome surrounding the probe. We cloned the 1.6 kb *Bam*HI-*Hind*III and the 0.3 kb *Hind*III fragments in Bluescript and M13 vectors, respectively (bold lines). The 1.6 kb fragment cloned in bluescript was sequentially deleted using the ExonucleaseIII-Mung Bean DNase deletion procedure. This allowed for the sequencing of quite the totality of the insert on both strands (→) using the universal M13 and T7 sequencing primers. One gap in the reverse strand sequence was sequenced using two specific primers. They are indicated by the two boxed arrows (⇝). The letters on the restriction map correspond to the following enzymes: B, *Bam*HI, E, *Eco*RI, H, *Hind*III and P, *Pst*I.

clusters identified in the mitochondrial and bacterial NADH:CoQ oxidoreductases.

The second open reading frame (from base 1057 to base 1335) was termed *orf1* (Fig. 2). It potentially codes for a 93 amino-acid long hydrophilic protein (M.W. 10,067 Da). The protein encoded by this orf displays no extended homology with any known protein of the SWISS-PROT and NBRF PIR databases or with known proteins of mitochondrial Complex I of similar molecular weight.

On the other hand, the third open reading frame (from base 17 to base 1051) corresponds to a 345 amino-acids long protein (M.W. 37,855 Da) homologous to the mitochondrial ND1 subunit or to the chloroplast NDH-A protein (see Fig. 4). Thus, this open reading frame should be named *ndhA*, and the corresponding peptide should be called NDH-A. In mitochondria this protein is located in the hydrophobic subfraction of the Complex I [1]. It is embedded in the mitochondrial inner membrane and bears the binding site(s) for ubiquinone and rotenoid inhibitors [21].

The seven mitochondrial genes (ND1 to ND6 plus ND4L) and three nuclear genes coding for the 49 kDa, the 30 kDa and the 23 kDa subunits of the mitochondrial Complex I display similarities with ten open reading frames (*ndhA-J*) identified in the genomes of chloroplast and blue algae [16,17,19,22-25]. These observations have led to the proposal that the putative chloroplast proteins encoded by these *ndh* genes are subunits of a NADH- or NADPH-plastoquinone reductase

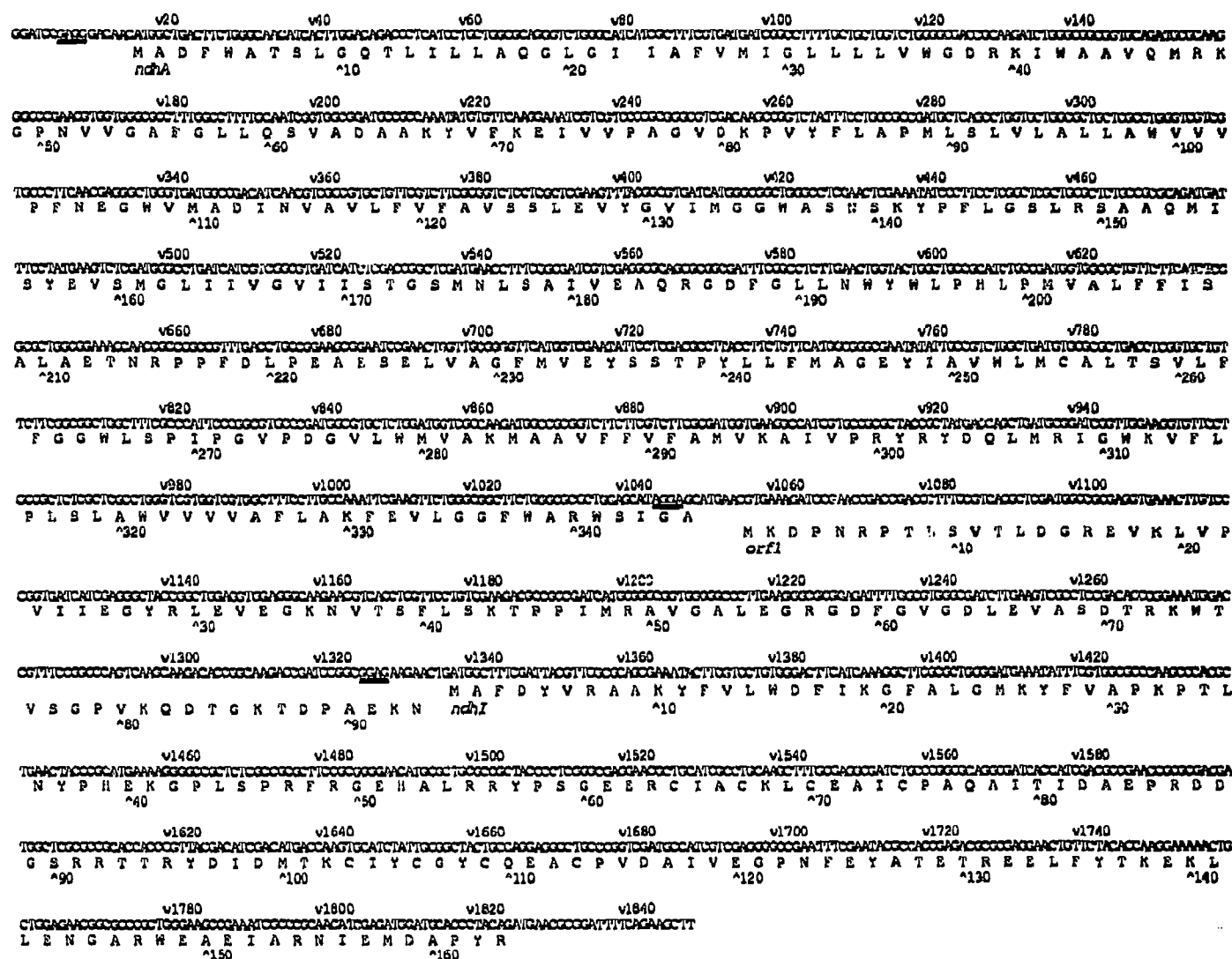


Fig. 2. Compiled sequence of the characterised DNA fragment and of its potential gene products. The DNA sequence of the 1.85 kb fragment was searched on both strands for open reading frames longer than 100 bases with codon usage bias characteristic of Rhodospirillaceae [17]. Three open reading frames were identified. The protein sequence of their encoded products is given under the DNA sequence. The potential ribosome binding site associated with each open reading frame is underlined [18].

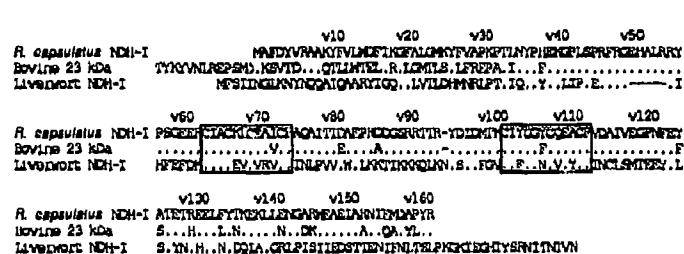


Fig. 3. Alignment of the protein sequences of the bacterial NDH-I with the mitochondrial 23 kDa subunit and chloroplast NDH-I proteins. The protein sequence of the NDH-I protein of *R. capsulatus* was aligned with the protein sequences of the 23 kDa subunit from bovine mitochondria [16] and the NDH-I protein from liverwort chloroplast [19]. The dots represent conserved residues. This representation was chosen to highlight the high degree of conservation between the mitochondrial and bacterial proteins. The boxed sequences correspond to the potential sites of insertion of iron-sulfur clusters.

closely related to the mitochondrial Complex I [23]. In the chloroplast genome, clustering of *ndh* genes seems reminiscent of an ancestral bacterial operon. In this regard the association of *ndhA* and *ndhI* genes in the genome of *R. capsulatus* parallels the organisation of the chloroplast genome. Cloning of the regions flanking the *ndhI* and *ndhA* genes of *R. capsulatus* is under progress. It will allow us to see if the similitude of organisation extends to the other *ndh* genes.

Extensive experimental evidence points to the similarity between the mitochondrial Complex I and the Type I NADH:CoQ oxidoreductase of *R. capsulatus* (reviewed in [7]). However, due to its lability, this enzyme has not been isolated yet and little is known of its molecular characteristics. The present study marks a decisive step in the molecular characterisation of the Type I

	v1	v10	v20	v30	v40	v50	v60																	
<i>R. capsulatus</i> NDH-A	MADF	WATSL	QGLT	LILL	AQGL	ITAF	VMIG	LLLL	VHGD	RKIWA	AVQMR	KGFNV	VVGAF	GLLS	QSVADA									
Human mitochondrial ND1	MFM	NL	LL	VPIL	AMAF	MLTE	LG	YM	L	.....	PY	.....	PF	.....										
Liverwort chloroplast NDH-A	MISN	INLED	KFFS	FFFT	LGFS	KEFFNF	WI	IFS	I	ILMG	T	V	V	.....	LE	S	T	Q	I	EYA	PL	TI	AL	..G
	v70	v80	v90	v100	v110	v120	v130	v140																
<i>R. capsulatus</i> NDH-A	AKYV	FKEIV	PAGV	DKPV	FLAP	MLSL	VLIAL	LAWV	VVFNE	GVMAD	INVA	LVFV	AVSS	LEVY	GVIM	GGWAS	NSKY	PF	FL					
Human mitochondrial ND1	M	LFT	..PLK	..TST	ITL	IT	..T	A	TI	..L	TPL	MPN	PL	NL	---	LGL	IL	T	..A	..SIL	WS	.....	N	ALI
Liverwort chloroplast NDH-A	I	LFL	..DIV	..QG	VWLF	NIG	I	V	IPVF	SYLY	NVIL	ANFS	---	G	F	WI	.....	VVPL	LL	A	YG	..N	S	..
	v150	v160	v170	v180	v190	v200	v210	v																
<i>R. capsulatus</i> NDH-A	GSL	RSA	----	AQ	MIS	YEV	SMGL	IIVG	VII	STG	SMNL	SAI	VEA	QRGD	FGL	NWY	WLP	PHL	PM	VAL	FFIS	ALAE	TNR	PPFDL
Human mitochondrial ND1	..A	..AV	-----	..T	....	TLAI	LLST	ILMS	..F	..TL	IT	..EHL	---	..L	..L	..SW	LAMM	..T	.....	T	.....	T	.....	
Liverwort chloroplast NDH-A	..G	..AV	IPFEA	..S	....	IPLA	SVLS	IALLS	N	LS	TV	....	SKY	GF	SWNL	RQPI	GT	..V	..AS	..CE	..L	....		
	v230	v240	v250	v260	v270																			
<i>R. capsulatus</i> NDH-A	PEAE	SELV	AGFM	VEYS	STPY	LLFM	AGEY	I	AVLM	CALTS	SVLF	GGW	LSPI	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
Human mitochondrial ND1	AEG	....	S	..NI	..AAG	FAL	F	....	TNI	IM	NT	..TTI	L	TTY	DALS	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
Liverwort chloroplast NDH-A	E	....	YQT	..GM	KFAF	YLAS	LNLL	VSS	LFVTI	YL	..HFS	..FF	SLFK	NFEWN	LM	NSNG	ISE	IVIS	IT	IT	IT	IT	IT	IT
	v280	v290	v300	v310	v320	v330	v340																	
<i>R. capsulatus</i> NDH-A	MVAK	MAV	FFVF	AMV	KAI	VPY	RYD	QLM	RIG	WKV	FLPL	SLAW	VVV	VAFL	AKFE	VLCG	FWAR	WSIGA						
Human mitochondrial ND1	F	T	TL	LL	TS	LWIR	TAY	..F	....	HLL	..N	....	T	LLM	WV	SMPT	ITISS	IPPQ	T					
Liverwort chloroplast NDH-A	TLV	SYL	FL	ISI	TRWT	..I	I	..LNL	..FL	..IA	GNLL	LT	TSF	QL	LL									

Fig. 4. Alignment of the protein sequences of the bacterial NDH-A with the mitochondrial ND1 subunit and the chloroplast NDH-A protein. The protein sequence of the NDH-A protein of *R. capsulatus* was aligned with the protein sequences of the ND1 subunits from human mitochondria [20] and the NDH-A protein from liverwort chloroplast [19]. The dots represent conserved residues.

NADH:CoQ oxidoreductase of *R. capsulatus*. It will allow the use of the powerful genetic tools developed in *R. capsulatus* for the study of this essential yet poorly understood enzyme.

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