Generation of transposon insertion mutant libraries for Gram-positive bacteria by electroporation of phage Mu DNA transposition complexes

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Transposon mutagenesis is a powerful technique for generating collections of insertion mutants for genetic studies. This paper describes how phage Mu DNA transposition complexes, transpososomes, can be exploited for gene delivery to efficiently introduce selectable markers to genomes of Gram-positive bacteria. Mu transpososomes were assembled in vitro with custom-designed mini-Mu transposons, concentrated, and electroporated into cells of three Gram-positive bacterial species: Staphylococcus aureus, Streptococcus pyogenes and Streptococcus suis. Within cells, the complexes reproduced an authentic DNA transposition reaction and integrated the delivered transposons into the bacterial genomes, yielding single-copy insertions. The integration efficiency among different species and strains of Gram-positive bacteria ranged from $1 \times 10^1$ to $2 \times 10^4$ c.f.u. ($\mu$g introduced transposon DNA)$^{-1}$. The strategy should be applicable to a variety of other Gram-positive species after initial optimization of certain key factors affecting transposon delivery, such as the preparation method of competent cells and physical parameters of electroporation. This study extends the scope of the Mu transpososome delivery-based genomic DNA integration strategy to Gram-positive bacteria. Thus, a straightforward generation of sizeable mutant banks is feasible for these bacteria, potentiating several types of genomic-level approaches for studies of a variety of important bacterial processes, such as pathogenicity.

INTRODUCTION

Rapidly evolving techniques and strategies of bacterial genetics/genomics constitute powerful means to dissect diverse mechanisms involved in a variety of microbial functions (Boeke, 2002; McDevitt & Rosenberg, 2001). At present, the most efficient strategies typically involve the generation of genomic insertion mutant libraries and characterization of phenotypic properties of individual clones within the libraries, preferably in a setting in which it is possible to study a large number of mutants simultaneously (Hamer et al., 2001). A studied pool may be an ordered collection of insertion mutants, each mutant containing a defined mutation in a particular nonessential gene (Judson & Mekalanos, 2000), or it may be a random collection of insertion mutants (Berg & Berg, 1996). While the generation of ordered collections is extremely laborious and time-consuming, and in many cases non-applicable, transposon insertion mutagenesis strategies provide straightforward means to generate random insertion libraries for a number of bacterial species (Berg & Berg, 1996; Boeke, 2002).

Transposons have been exploited as genetic tools in a variety of organisms (Craig et al., 2002). Although most transposons operate only in vivo, several of the more advanced transposon-based insertion mutagenesis systems are functional also in vitro (Boeke, 2002). Furthermore, a combined in vitro and in vivo approach is currently feasible with two of the systems: Tn5 and Mu. With both of these transposons, the strategy involves an initial assembly of the transposition machinery in vitro, subsequent introduction of such machineries into recipient cells, and genomic integration of the delivered transposon DNA within these cells (Goryshin et al., 2000; Lamberg et al., 2002).

Bacteriophage Mu transposition is one of the best-characterized transposition systems (Chaconas & Harshey, 2002). In the simplest in vitro set-up, Mu transposition into an intermolecular target requires MuA transposase, transposon DNA and target DNA as the only macromolecular components (Haapa et al., 1999a). This minimal-component reaction proceeds via initial in vitro assembly
of a stable nucleoprotein complex, the Mu transpososome, which is catalytically inactive in the absence of divalent cations, but becomes activated for transposition chemistry in the presence of divalent cations such as Mg$^{2+}$ (Savilahti et al., 1995). Similarly, this activation can occur within bacterial cells following electroporation of assembled complexes, thus facilitating transposon integration into host chromosomal DNA (Fig. 1a), as demonstrated with Gram-negative bacteria (Lamberg et al., 2002).

Many important human and animal pathogens belong to the Gram-positive staphylococci or streptococci. Staphylococcus aureus remains a frequent cause of community-acquired and nosocomial infections ranging from minor skin ailments to life-threatening deep-tissue infections (Lowy, 1998). The morbidity and mortality from Staph. aureus infections are high because of the intrinsic virulence of the species: its ability to cause a diverse array of life-threatening infections and its ability to adapt to different host environments (Proctor, 2000). Streptococcus pyogenes causes a wide variety of human diseases, such as pharyngitis, impetigo, erysipelas, necrotizing fascitis and toxic-shock-like syndrome (Chelsom et al., 1994). Streptococcus suis is an important pig pathogen that causes severe infections, such as sepsis and meningitis, and occasionally it is life-threatening to humans (Staats et al., 1997).

Most of the transposition mutagenesis strategies currently in use for Gram-positive bacteria are based on transposon mobilization in vivo. Typically, these strategies may involve conjugal transposons (Scott, 1993), or they may utilize transposon delivery systems that employ temperature-sensitive replication-deficient vector plasmids (Youngman, 1993). Transposons Tn551, Tn917 and Tn916 have traditionally been used for insertional mutagenesis in staphylococci and streptococci, and these elements have proven valuable in gene identification in these organisms (Caparon & Scott, 1991; Mei et al., 1997; Novick, 1991; Slater et al., 2003). Similarly, Himar1-based transposons, as well as a derivative of Tn4001, have recently been utilized for efficient mutagenesis of staphylococci and streptococci (Bae et al., 2004; Barnett & Scott, 2002; Lyon et al., 1998; May et al., 2004).

![Fig. 1](https://example.com/fig1.png)

**Fig. 1.** (a) *In vivo* integration of *in vitro*-assembled Mu transpososomes. A tetramer of MuA transposase and mini-Mu transposon ends assemble into a stable protein–DNA complex. Upon encountering Mg$^{2+}$ ions *in vivo*, the complex executes a random two-ended integration of transposon DNA into the chromosome. (b) DNA substrates used in this study. Linear mini-Mu transposons in this study are defined as segments of DNA that contain 50 bp Mu R-end DNA as inverted repeats at each end (Haapa et al., 1999a; Savilahti et al., 1995). Em-Mu and Km-Mu mini-Mu transposons were released from their carrier plasmids by BglII digestion, which leaves four-nucleotide 5′ overhangs flanking the exposed transposon ends. In this pre-cut form, the transposon 3′ ends are exposed and readily available for the transposon integration reaction, also known as a strand transfer reaction (Craigie & Mizuuchi, 1987; Haapa et al., 1999a; Savilahti et al., 1995). *ermB* and *aph3*, adenine methylase and aminoglycoside 3′ phosphotransferase genes, respectively. Small arrows above the transposons indicate the binding sites of primers used for DNA sequencing. Restriction sites: Bg, BglII; B, BamHI; S, SaI. Cloning joints (see Methods) are indicated, with B1Bg, B1S and S1B referring to the combination of the restriction sites used.
Genomic-level approaches are needed for advanced studies on important bacterial processes such as pathogenicity, and many of these studies require the generation of large mutant collections. In this communication, we describe a general gene delivery strategy for introducing selectable markers into Gram-positive bacteria for the benefit of genomic studies, and discuss the merits and limitations of this DNA transposition-based strategy with respect to the most important technical variables. The methodology should be applicable to any bacterial species given that reasonable electroporation efficiencies can be achieved.

**METHODS**

**Bacterial strains and culture conditions.** *Escherichia coli* laboratory strain DH10B (Grant et al., 1990) was used for routine plasmid DNA isolation and as a standard cloning host. Wild-type *Staphylococcus aureus* ATCC 29213, *Streptococcus pyogenes* A8173 (Hytonen et al., 2000) and *Streptococcus suis* D282 (Vecht et al., 1989) were from the laboratory collection of J.F. at the University of Turku. *Staph. aureus* S30 was from William Kelley and Jacques Schrenzel, University of Geneva Hospital, Geneva, Switzerland. Control replicative plasmids for electroporation, pSK265 and pLZ12-Km (see Table 1), were isolated from *Staph. aureus* 8325-4 (Novick, 1967) and *E. coli* DH1 (Hanahan, 1983), respectively. All bacteria were grown at 37°C. For *E. coli* cultures, standard conditions with Luria–Bertani medium were used (Sambrook & Russell, 2001). *Staph. aureus* strains were cultured using brain heart infusion (BHI) medium (Difco). *Strep. suis* and *Strep. pyogenes* strains were cultured using THY medium, which consists of Todd–Hewitt broth (Difco) supplemented with 0.5% (v/v) yeast extract (Difco). For culture dishes, media were solidified by the addition of 1.5% Bacto agar (Difco). Liquid cultures of Gram-positive bacteria were grown using gentle agitation (100 r.p.m.), and on solid media, these bacteria were grown under anaerobic conditions produced by a gas generator (BBB GasPakPlus; BD Biosciences). For storage, each bacterial strain should be applicable to any bacterial species given that reasonable electroporation efficiencies can be achieved.

**Proteins and reagents.** Restriction endonucleases, Klenow enzyme and T4 DNA ligase were from New England Biolabs, RNase A was from Roche, and lysostaphin was from Ambi Products LLC. Calf intestinal phosphatase, protease K, DyNAzyme II DNA polymerase and MuA transposase (MuA) were from Finnzymes. Lysozyme, BSA, Ficoll 400 and heparin were from Sigma. Triton X-100 was from Fluka, and [α-32P]dCTP (1000–3000 Ci mmol⁻¹; 37000–111000 GBq mmol⁻¹) was from Amersham. Agaroses (NuSieve 3:1 and Seakem GTG) were from Cambrex.

**Standard DNA techniques.** Plasmid DNA from *E. coli* and *Staph. aureus* was isolated using purification kits from Qiagen, as recommended by the supplier, with the exception that collected DNA isolation and as a standard cloning host. Wild-type *Staphylococcus aureus* ATCC 29213, *Streptococcus pyogenes* A8173 (Hytonen et al., 2000) and *Streptococcus suis* D282 (Vecht et al., 1989) were from the laboratory collection of J.F. at the University of Turku. *Staph. aureus* S30 was from William Kelley and Jacques Schrenzel, University of Geneva Hospital, Geneva, Switzerland. Control replicative plasmids for electroporation, pSK265 and pLZ12-Km (see Table 1), were isolated from *Staph. aureus* 8325-4 (Novick, 1967) and *E. coli* DH1 (Hanahan, 1983), respectively. All bacteria were grown at 37°C. For *E. coli* cultures, standard conditions with Luria–Bertani medium were used (Sambrook & Russell, 2001). *Staph. aureus* strains were cultured using brain heart infusion (BHI) medium (Difco). *Strep. suis* and *Strep. pyogenes* strains were cultured using THY medium, which consists of Todd–Hewitt broth (Difco) supplemented with 0.5% (v/v) yeast extract (Difco). For culture dishes, media were solidified by the addition of 1.5% Bacto agar (Difco). Liquid cultures of Gram-positive bacteria were grown using gentle agitation (100 r.p.m.), and on solid media, these bacteria were grown under anaerobic conditions produced by a gas generator (BBB GasPakPlus; BD Biosciences). For storage, each bacterial strain

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Substrate DNA</th>
<th>Resistance to</th>
<th>Amount electroporated (ng)</th>
<th>Pre-incubation with MuA</th>
<th>Antibiotic-resistant colonies [c.f.u. (µg DNA)⁻¹]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Staph. aureus</em> ATCC 29213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Em-Mu</td>
<td>Em</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2 x 10⁴</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Em-Mu</td>
<td>Em</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Km-Mu</td>
<td>Km</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Km-Mu</td>
<td>Km</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pSK265‡</td>
<td>Km</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>4 x 10⁶</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pLZ12-Km§</td>
<td>Km</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ND, Not determined.

–, No colonies detected.

*The Km cassette does not confer resistance to Km in *Staph. aureus*, even when present within a multicopy plasmid.

†Replicative control plasmid isolated from *Staph. aureus* 8325-4.

‡Replicative control plasmid isolated from *E. coli* DH1.
water phase, and resuspended in 50 µl TE buffer (10 mM Tris/HCl, pH 7.5; 0.5 mM EDTA). DNA yields from standard 5 ml cultures ranged between 10 and 50 µg.

Plasmids. Plasmid pUC19 was from New England Biolabs. Plasmid pLZ21-Km (Hanski et al., 1992) is an E. coli–Streptococcus sp. shuttle vector that includes a gene (aphA3) encoding Km resistance, and it was obtained from Michael Caparon, Washington University, St Louis, MO, USA. *Staphylococcus* sp. plasmid pSK265 (Jones & Khan, 1986) includes a gene (cat) encoding Cm resistance, and it was obtained from William Kelley. Plasmid pLEB21 (Qiao et al., 1996) was obtained from Per Saris, University of Helsinki; this plasmid is a modified pUC68 (Vieira & Messing, 1991) in which a cloned *Lactobacillus reuteri* gene (ermB) encoding Em resistance (Axelsson et al., 1988) is inserted at a *Smal* site. Plasmid pVTFl is a derivative of plasmid pEntrapco-son-KanB (J–766; Finzymes), and it was obtained from Ville Tieaho, Finzymes. Instead of the entire vector backbone between two *BglII* sites, pVTFl contains a pUC19 origin of replication (nucleotides 848–1571 of pUC19, numbered as indicated by New England Biolabs). Furthermore, an additional *BglII* has been engineered into this origin at position 1197.

Mini-Mu transposons. The pUC19-derived carrier plasmids pLEB620 and pHTH2 for transposons Em-Mu and Km-Mu, respectively (Fig. 1b), were constructed as follows. The 1-27 kb *BamHI*/*BglII* fragment of pLEB21 that includes the *ermB* gene was ligated to the 0-92 kb *BamHI* fragment of pVTFl to yield pLEB620. Similarly, the 1-5 kb *SalI* fragment of pLZ21-Km that includes the *aphA3* gene was end-filled with Klenow enzyme and ligated to the end-filled 0-92 kb *BamHI* fragment of pVTFl to yield pHTH2. To confirm authenticity, these two plasmids were sequenced by using the Mu *in vitro* transposition-based DNA sequencing kit (Template Generation System, Finzymes). From their respective carrier plasmids, mini-Mu transposons were released by *BglII* digestion that leaves four-nucleotide 5’ overhangs flanking the exposed transposon ends. Such an end configuration in mini-Mu transposons ensures efficient assembly of stable transpososomes (Haapa et al., 1999b; Savilahti et al., 1995). DNA fragments were purified using anion-exchange chromatography, as described by Haapa et al. (1999b).

Electrocompetent cells

Electrocompetent cells for *E. coli* were prepared, stored and used as described previously (Lamberg et al., 2002). Electrocompetent cells for Gram-positive bacterial strains were prepared as described below. These preparations were used either directly (fresh) for electroporation, or they were frozen as aliquots in liquid nitrogen and stored at −80°C until thawed for electroporation. The viable counts of these preparations were routinely ∼5 × 10^10 c.f.u. ml⁻¹. Approximately 70% of the cells survived the freezing step.

*Staph. aureus*. An overnight culture in THY medium was diluted (1:500) in a total volume of 200 ml THY and grown at 37°C with gentle agitation to an OD₆₀₀ of ∼0-4. Cells were collected by centrifugation at 3000 r.p.m. (1248 g) in a Heraeus Biofuge Primo fixed-angle rotor at 4°C for 15 min. Cells were then washed by resuspension in 20 ml ice-cold 0-5 M sucrose and collected by subsequent centrifugation as above. This washing step was repeated. The cells were then resuspended in 10 ml ice-cold solution containing 0-5 M sucrose and 10% (v/v) glycerol, and sedimented again by centrifugation, as described above. Subsequently, the cell pellet was resuspended in 0-5 M sucrose and 10% glycerol, in a total volume of 0-5 ml.

*Strep. suis*. Cells were grown in THY medium supplemented with 30 mM glycine to an OD₆₀₀ of ∼0-2. Subsequently, the cells were prepared as described previously (Pulliajoki et al., 2003).
Table 2. Transposon integration sites and target site duplications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strain</th>
<th>Clone</th>
<th>Sequence*</th>
<th>Transposon orientation</th>
<th>Genomic location$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Staphylococcus aureus</em></td>
<td>SE1</td>
<td>tagggaacctACCC(Em-Mu)ACCCAaatgttacct</td>
<td>−  +</td>
<td>Malate:quinone oxidoreductase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SE2</td>
<td>taaaaggtATGT(Em-Mu)ATGTtagtaacct</td>
<td>+  +</td>
<td>Hypothetical protein</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>ATCC</em></td>
<td>S37</td>
<td>cggtagttACTAC(Em-Mu)ACTACgaaaataat</td>
<td>−  +</td>
<td>Transcription anti-terminator BglG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29213</td>
<td>SE5</td>
<td>atttccataCTAAC(Em-Mu)CTAACctaaagttgg</td>
<td>+  +</td>
<td>Intergenic (in pathogenicity island 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SE7</td>
<td>aactagacATATG(Em-Mu)ATATGcaacagccaa</td>
<td>−  +</td>
<td>Conserved hypothetical protein</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SE8</td>
<td>aattcgacAGAC(Em-Mu)ACACGcatacaggg</td>
<td>−  +</td>
<td>Ornithine aminotransferase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SE10</td>
<td>aaaaatctgTTGAT(Em-Mu)TTGATtattatga</td>
<td>+  +</td>
<td>ABC transporter ATP-binding protein</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SE15</td>
<td>gcagcagagGTGTA(Em-Mu)GTGTAattttattt</td>
<td>+  +</td>
<td>ATP-binding protein OppD</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Staphylococcus aureus</em></td>
<td>G1</td>
<td>tttaaaaattAGAA(Em-Mu)AGAAacactgcatg</td>
<td>+  +</td>
<td>Accessory gene regulator A, AgrA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>G2</td>
<td>attcactctCCAGA(Em-Mu)CCAGAgattgctct</td>
<td>−  +</td>
<td>5S rRNA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S30</td>
<td>G3</td>
<td>agatgttatCCCC(Em-Mu)CCCCGctcttttt</td>
<td>+  +</td>
<td>Intergenic (upstream of papA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>G4</td>
<td>attccccacCTTG(Em-Mu)TTTGTaaggaataa</td>
<td>+  +</td>
<td>ABC transporter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>G5</td>
<td>gtacacagCTGTG(Em-Mu)CTGTgacacctt</td>
<td>−  +</td>
<td>Fmp protein</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>G6</td>
<td>tacagcttgCTGA(Em-Mu)GCTGAgatagccct</td>
<td>+  +</td>
<td>D-serine/d-alanine/glycine transporter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>G7</td>
<td>gatttttaCACA(Em-Mu)ACACAccatatatt</td>
<td>−  +</td>
<td>Intergenic (downstream of porA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>G8</td>
<td>aaaaatctgTCCGGG(Em-Mu)TCCGGGcactaggcg</td>
<td>+  +</td>
<td>Glutaryl-CoA dehydrogenase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>G9</td>
<td>ttccagctaTGCTC(Em-Mu)TGCTCatacatattg</td>
<td>−  +</td>
<td>General stress protein 20U</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Streptococcus pyogenes</em></td>
<td>A1</td>
<td>gtttagctgTCTGG(Em-Mu)TCTGGtgttccaa</td>
<td>+  +</td>
<td>Aldose-1-epimerase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A1E1</td>
<td>ttcccggagACTAA(Em-Mu)ACTAAGttgtccaa</td>
<td>+  +</td>
<td>Laminin-binding protein</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A1873</td>
<td>A2</td>
<td>cggagttgtGTGGT(Em-Mu)GTGGTaacttgttaa</td>
<td>−  +</td>
<td>Malolactonizer permease MalC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A4E4</td>
<td>ggctttgctACCAA(Em-Mu)ACCAAatttctagg</td>
<td>+  +</td>
<td>Thioredoxin reductase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A4</td>
<td>ttaattctGGAAA(Em-Mu)GGGAAGggagact</td>
<td>+  +</td>
<td>SrtB involved in streptolysin S formation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Streptococcus suis</em></td>
<td>D1</td>
<td>tagaatcctCTTAT(Em-Mu)CTTATcaagctcct</td>
<td>+  +</td>
<td>Transcription termination protein NusB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D1E2</td>
<td>ggctttctcACCTG(Em-Mu)ACCTGGaaggactgta</td>
<td>+  +</td>
<td>GlnNac-6-D deacetylase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D282</td>
<td>D4</td>
<td>cggatggtcgCTAGC(Em-Mu)CTAGCgataaaatc</td>
<td>−  +</td>
<td>Conserved hypothetical protein</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D5</td>
<td>ttgtagctgCGAGT(Em-Mu)CGAGTgaaataata</td>
<td>−  +</td>
<td>Methionine sulfoxide reductase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D6</td>
<td>ttctctgtcAGGA(Em-Mu)AGGAacagcagactg</td>
<td>+  +</td>
<td>RNA methyl-transferase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D7</td>
<td>gtgtcatacGCTGA(Em-Mu)GCTGAcatactgcg</td>
<td>−  +</td>
<td>Aminopeptidase P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D8</td>
<td>tcactagctTTGTC(Em-Mu)TTTGCCaatatcct</td>
<td>+  +</td>
<td>RNA helicase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D9</td>
<td>ttaaagcctTTTTC(Em-Mu)TTTTCctgttcttt</td>
<td>−  +</td>
<td>Intergenic (upstream of mmp)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D10</td>
<td>gcagctgacAAGA(Em-Mu)AAGGgagaagccttt</td>
<td>+  +</td>
<td>Dextran glucosidase DexS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NA, Not applicable; genomic coordinate unknown.

*Target site duplications are shown in bold capitals.
†Compared with the genomic sequences shown, the transcription from the transposon proceeds from left to right (+) or from right to left (−).
‡Transcription from the transposon compared with the direction of local transcription within the specified genomic location; +, same direction; −, opposite direction.
§Genomic location of *Staphylococcus aureus*, *Streptococcus pyogenes* and *Streptococcus suis* insertions was determined by comparison with the following respective data: the complete sequences of *Staphylococcus aureus* N315 (GenBank accession no. NC_002745; Kuroda et al., 2001) or *Staphylococcus aureus* MRSAS252 (NC_002952; Holden et al., 2004); the complete genomes of *Streptococcus pyogenes* serotypes M1 (NC_002737; Ferretti et al., 2001) or M3 (NC_004070; Beres et al., 2002); and the unfinished sequence of *Streptococcus suis* P1/7 (NC_004549; Sanger Institute). Additionally, the genomic location of *Streptococcus pyogenes* clone AE10 insertion was determined by comparison with the *Streptococcus pyogenes* BL-T (AB030831; Karaya et al., 2001) lantibiotic streptin gene cluster.
||When applicable, encoded protein or transcribed RNA is indicated.

Fig. 1(b). SeqA, 5′-ATCAGCCGCGCGCATCC-3′; HSP-393, 5′-GATCAGCCGCGCGCATCC-3′; HSP-379, 5′-GGAATTGTATCGT-CGATCC-3′. Genomic transposon insertion site loci (Table 2) were identified by comparing the insertion site data to publicly available genomic sequences using BLAST database searches on the National Center for Biotechnology Information and the Wellcome Trust Sanger Institute servers. ORFs were analysed by using web-based programs on the European Bioinformatics Institute server.

RESULTS

Mini-Mu transposons

The Mu transpososome delivery-based genomic DNA integration strategy, initially developed for Gram-negative bacteria (Lamberg et al., 2002), is characteristically species
non-specific. Therefore, it was of interest to examine whether a similar strategy would yield genomic integrations in Gram-positive bacteria also. For these studies, we constructed two mini-Mu transposons with suitable properties and utilized three species of Gram-positive bacteria, *Staph. aureus*, *Strep. pyogenes* and *Strep. suis*, as model recipients cells. The transposons (see Methods and Fig. 1b) contain a marker gene selectable in Gram-positive bacteria and, at each end as an inverted repeat, a 50 bp segment of Mu right-end (R-end) sequence, including the critical MuA transposase binding sites that are necessary and sufficient for Mu transpososome assembly (Haapa-Paananen et al., 1999a; Savilähti et al., 1995). The Em-Mu transposon includes the selectable marker *ermB* and its constitutive promoter from *L. reuteri*, thereby conferring resistance to Em. Similarly, the Km-Mu transposon includes the *aphA3* gene and its control sequences from Tn*1545* for selection with Km. These gene cassettes were chosen for genomic mutagenesis because the *ermB* cassette has been used to generate chromosomal knockout mutants in *Lactococcus lactis* (Qiao et al., 1996), and the *aphA3* cassette has been used for signature-tagged mutagenesis in *Listeria monocytogenes* (Autret et al., 2001).

**Assembly and concentration of transpososomes**

Mu transpososomes were assembled by incubating Em-Mu and Km-Mu transposons with MuA transposase in the absence of divalent metal ions (see Methods), and transpososome assembly was monitored using native agarose gel electrophoresis as described (Lamberg et al., 2002). In this gel retardation assay, transpososomes are visualized as protein–DNA complexes that can withstand a challenge by heparin embedded in the gel. Both Em-Mu and Km-Mu produced transpososomes in similar amounts (data not shown), and the yields were comparable to those observed in previous studies with analogous mini-Mu transposons (Lamberg et al., 2002). The two transpososome preparations were then concentrated approximately ten-fold by centrifugal cartridges, and the preparations were desalted prior to electroporation (see Methods). Analytical gel retardation assay verified successful concentration of transpososomes and indicated that the pre-assembled complexes tolerated the treatments without disassembly (data not shown).

**Electroporation**

Results from the studies with Gram-negative bacteria (Lamberg et al., 2002) indicated that the major factors affecting the colony-formation capacity of each recipient strain include the method of preparing electrocompetent cells and the electroporation parameters. Therefore, we first optimized these factors for each strain studied by using replicative plasmids for electroporation and by varying cell culture conditions and pulse parameters (data not shown). In parallel, viable counts were determined following electroporation to evaluate corresponding cell survival rates. The optimized conditions varied among species and strains (see Methods), and electroporation efficiencies ranged from $5 \times 10^3$ to $4 \times 10^6$ c.f.u. ($\mu g$ introduced plasmid DNA)$^{-1}$ (Table 1). With all strains, approximately 50% of the cells survived electroporation under the optimized conditions. For genomic integration, an aliquot of the concentrated and desalted assembly reaction was electroporated into electrocompetent *Staph. aureus*, *Strep. pyogenes* or *Strep. suis* cells, and bacterial clones were selected for resistance of appropriate antibiotic. The colony-forming capacity among species ranged from $1 \times 10^6$ to $2 \times 10^8$ c.f.u. ($\mu g$ introduced transposon DNA)$^{-1}$. Notably, these values correlated with the electroporation efficiency values obtained with replicative plasmids, being consistently two to three orders of magnitude lower (Table 1); thus, the results underscored the importance of optimizing the method of preparing competent cells. Only those samples that contained detectable protein–DNA complexes yielded antibiotic-resistant colonies.

**Genomic integration**

Southern blot analysis with transposon-specific probes can be used to evaluate the presence and copy number of integrated transposons within genomic DNA. Digestion of chromosomal DNA with an enzyme that does not cleave the transposon DNA generates one fragment that hybridizes to the probe for each integrated transposon copy. Chromosomal DNA from seven *Staph. aureus* Em$^R$, ten *Strep. pyogenes* Em$^R$, and ten *Strep. suis* Km$^R$ clones was isolated, digested with *Pvu*I (which does not cut the transposon sequence), and analysed by Southern hybridization with appropriate transposon probes. All isolates generated a single, prominent band with a discrete and, for each clone, different gel mobility (Fig. 2). Control DNA from the recipient strains did not produce detectable bands in the analyses. These and additional data obtained by using several other restriction enzymes for chromosomal DNA digestion (data not shown) indicated that a single copy of the transposon DNA was present in the bacterial chromosome of each of the antibiotic-resistant clones studied.

**Chromosomal location of integrated transposons**

In general, transposon integration results in the duplication of the target sequence, manifested as a direct repeat that flanks the integrated transposon. In Mu transposition, this target site duplication is 5 bp in length (Allet, 1979; Haapa et al., 1999a; Haapa-Paanen et al., 2002; Kahmann & Kamp, 1979). To investigate the nature of the transposon insertions, we cloned transposon-genomic DNA borders from a total of 31 antibiotic-resistant clones of different strains and determined the sequences on both sides of the transposon by using transposon-specific primers (see Methods). DNA sequence determination revealed a perfect 5 bp target site duplication in each clone (Table 2), thereby confirming that the integrations were generated via authentic transposition and not by other types of DNA-structuring reactions. The insertion sites within...
chromosomes were then mapped by the aid of heterologous microbial genome sequences available in databases (Table 2). Transposons were distributed in different genomic locations; both ORFs and intergenic regions were represented in the collection of targeted loci.

**DISCUSSION**

In principle, a good starting point for the genetic analysis of any bacterial process is an initial generation of a library of insertion mutations. The collection should preferably contain a single insertion within a given genome, the distribution of the mutations should be random, and the number of clones in the library should be high enough to guarantee that each gene within the genome has been mutated at least once. Our present study describes a straightforward and general approach to introduce genetic material into the genomes of Gram-positive bacteria that should fulfil these criteria and allows generation of insertion mutant libraries without evident species barrier(s).

The methodology is based on electroporation of in vitro-assembled Mu DNA transposition complexes that become activated for transposition chemistry within bacterial cells and subsequently integrate the delivered exogenous DNA into the genome of the recipient cell, as previously shown with Gram-negative bacteria (Lamberg et al., 2002). However, to be useful with Gram-positive bacteria, the original strategy needed to be modified in two critical ways. First, we utilized mini-Mu transposons containing gene expression cassettes that are known to be functional in Gram-positive bacteria, and which confer resistance to the common antibiotics Em and Km, even when present as a single genomic copy (Autret et al., 2001; Qiao et al., 1996).

Second, an important transpososome concentration step was introduced in the protocol, which effectively increased the number of complexes available for penetration into cells in a given electroporation experiment.

Our data demonstrate the usefulness of the Mu transpososome delivery-based genomic DNA integration strategy with three pathogenic Gram-positive species: Staph. aureus, Strep. suis and Strep. pyogenes. The strategy was particularly efficient with Staph. aureus, and more than $10^8$ antibiotic-resistant colonies were obtained per microgram of input transposon DNA (Table 1). Such a high number guarantees an easy generation of exhaustive mutant libraries for this species. However, as the efficiency was lower in the other two species studied, construction of very large libraries for Strep. suis and Strep. pyogenes would require scaling up the procedure, e.g. by electroporating more aliquots of competent cells and/or further optimizing the procedures of preparing competent cells for these species. We were not able to use Em-Mu for mutagenesis of Strep. suis, as this strain was naturally resistant to Em. In addition, the KmR cassette did not confer resistance to Km in Staph. aureus, even when present within in a multicopy plasmid, perhaps reflecting differences in the mechanisms of how the

![Fig. 2](http://mic.sgmjournals.org) Southern blot analysis of insertions into the bacterial chromosome. Genomic DNAs of seven EmR Staph. aureus ATCC 29213 clones (a), 10 EmR Strep. pyogenes A8173 clones (b), and 10 KmR Strep. suis D282 clones (c) were digested with PvuII, which does not cut the transposon, and probed with Em-Mu or Km-Mu transposon DNA, as appropriate. Lanes: M, Fermentas MassRuler Mix molecular size markers; SE2–SE15, Staph. aureus transposon insertion mutants; 29213, genomic DNA of the original Staph. aureus ATCC 29213 recipient strain as a negative control; AE1–AE11, Strep. pyogenes transposon insertion mutants; A8173, genomic DNA of the original Strep. pyogenes A8173 recipient strain as a negative control; D1–D10, Strep. suis transposon insertion mutants; D282, genomic DNA of the original Strep. suis D282 recipient strain as a negative control.
studied bacterial strains recognize critical translation signals. These results underscore the importance of preliminary tests prior to any planned mutagenesis projects, i.e. the strain aimed for mutagenesis should be properly tested with regard to its resistance properties and the functionality of the planned resistance-determining cassette.

Electroporation efficiencies are usually higher in Gram-negative bacteria than in Gram-positive bacteria, due most likely to structural differences between the Gram-positive cell wall and the Gram-negative cell envelope. Electroporation efficiencies with Strep. pyogenes and Strep. suis were higher when fresh cells were used (data not shown). In contrast, the electroporation efficiency with Staph. aureus was highest when frozen cells were used, emphasizing the importance of optimizing for each given strain the conditions and treatments ultimately leading to electro-competence of the cells. In general, substances that inhibit the synthesis of the peptidoglycan cell wall of Gram-positive bacteria are beneficial when included in the growth medium (Eynard & Teissié, 2000). These reagents most probably directly affect the rigidity of the cell wall and make it more permeable to the incoming DNA. For this purpose, we used glycine in our experiments with Strep. suis. However, alternative reagents, such as penicillin G or Dl-threonine, may also be used (Mercenier & Chassy, 1988). Optimal electroporation pulse may also vary among different strains. Accordingly, prior to experimenting with transpososomes, the optimal pulse parameters should be determined for each strain by using a replicative control plasmid. Notably, the results of such control electroporation experiments are indicative of the usefulness of the Mu transpososome strategy; so far the yield of transposon-containing clones has correlated with the observed competence status of a given bacterial strain (Lamberg et al., 2002; this study). In summary, for the generation of sizeable mutant banks, reasonable, but not necessarily very high, electroporation efficiencies are required. Because multiple consecutive electroporations can be performed without too much extra effort, electroporation efficiencies ranging from $10^4$ to $10^5$ c.f.u. ($\mu$g replicative plasmid DNA)$^{-1}$ should be high enough for the generation of sizeable mutant libraries, which are adequate, for example, for microbial pathogenesis studies to identify novel virulence genes.

For the generation of mutant banks and experiments thereafter, it is essential that each individual clone contains only one newly introduced mutation. This was the case in the present study, as each analysed clone included a single integrated transposon. In addition, all of these clones contained an accurate 5 bp target site duplication, indicating that the gapped Mu transposition DNA intermediate with single-stranded regions can be repaired correctly by the host machinery of Gram-positive bacteria, and that the possible presence of host-encoded restriction systems or proteases does not impede MuA-mediated transposition. Furthermore, only those samples that contained detectable protein–DNA complexes yielded antibiotic-resistant colonies, reflecting the inability of the studied cells to efficiently recombine the incoming naked transposon DNA. Our protocol yielded a large number of integrant clones, indicating that the methodology is extremely suitable for the construction of exhaustive mutant libraries. For an average 2·0 Mb microbial genome, when an average ORF is estimated to be 1 kb, a tenfold per-gene coverage would require 20 000 individual mutant clones within a given library. Such a comprehensive mutant library has now been generated for Staph. aureus, and its analysis has revealed novel genes involved in bacterial biofilm formation (P. H. Tu Quoc, P. Genevaux, M. I. Pajunen, H. Savilahti, J. Schrenzel and W. L. Kelley, unpublished data).

Similar to Mu transpososome mutagenesis of Gram-positive staphylococci and streptococci (this study), Tn5 transpososomes have been used to directly mutagenize Gram-positive corynebacteria, mycobacteria and rhodococci (Derbyshire et al., 2000; Fernandes et al., 2001; Laurent et al., 2003; Oram et al., 2002; Takayama et al., 2003; Tanaka et al., 2002). In most cases, the reported genomic integration efficiencies were similar to those obtained in our study, and in some cases they were even higher. However, a direct comparison between the characteristics of these two related systems has not been documented.

Besides efficiency, the spectrum of selected target sites at the sequence level is a critical issue with regard to the usefulness of a given genomic mutagenesis strategy. At least in vitro, the Mu system selects its transposition target sites very randomly and without a strict sequence preference (Butterfield et al., 2002; Haapa-Paananen et al., 2002). Essentially identical targeting preference with only a weak selectivity has also been observed in an in vivo study that employed the expression of MuA transposase within E. coli and integration site analysis from plasmid targets (Mizuuchi & Mizuuchi, 1993). On the basis of the above studies, it is highly probable that a similar pattern will emerge with the MuA-catalysed genomic integration strategy as well, although we acknowledge that the conditions within cells may affect targeting to some extent. Determination of a statistically relevant number of transposon insertion sites within a given bacterial genome will ultimately reveal the targeting preference in each studied strain.

We have extended the Mu-transpososome-mediated genomic transposon integration methodology to Gram-positive bacteria, in particular to staphylococci and streptococci, allowing direct generation of sizeable insertion mutant libraries for genomics studies. In principle, it should be possible to use a similar strategy with other Gram-positive bacterial species, given that a reasonable protocol for the preparation of competent cells is available. Furthermore, the mini-Mu transposons can easily accommodate modifications that would enable their advanced usage, e.g. for the generation of reporter gene fusions (Hayes, 2003) and for signature-tagged mutagenesis (Hensel et al., 1995).
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