Transfer of the 3' non-translated region of grapevine chrome mosaic virus RNA-1 by recombination to tomato black ring virus RNA-2 in pseudorecombinant isolates

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In grapevine chrome mosaic and tomato black ring viruses (GCMV and TBRV), as in many other nepoviruses, the 3' non-translated regions (3'NTR) are identical between the two genomic RNAs. We have investigated the structure of the 3'NTR of two recombinant isolates which contain GCMV RNA-1 and TBRV RNA-2. In these isolates, the 3'NTR of RNA-1 was transferred to RNA-2, thus restoring the 3' identity. The transfer occurred within three passages, and probably contributes to the spread of randomly appearing mutations from one genomic RNA to the other. The site of recombination is near the 3' end of the open reading frame.

Nepoviruses (Harrison & Murant, 1977) are members of the family Comoviridae (Mayo & Martelli, 1993). They have a bipartite, single-stranded, RNA genome (Murant et al., 1981). Their two genomic RNAs are polyadenylated at their 3' ends (Mayo et al., 1979) and covalently linked to a virus-encoded polypeptide (VPg) at their 5' ends (Mayo et al., 1982). They are translated into polyproteins which are further cleaved by a virus-encoded protease to yield the mature viral proteins (Fritsch et al., 1980).

In all the nepoviruses where this has been investigated, the 3' termini (and in some cases also the 5' termini) of the two RNAs display considerable sequence homology, or even complete identity (Dodd & Robinson, 1987; Greif et al., 1988; Le Gall et al., 1989; Rott et al., 1991; Scott et al., 1992; Ritzenthaler et al., 1991; Bacher et al., 1994). In the case of tomato black ring virus (TBRV; Greif et al., 1988) and grapevine chrome mosaic virus (GCMV; Le Gall et al., 1989) for instance, the entire 3' non-translated regions (3'NTR) of RNAs 1 and 2 are identical. In tomato ringspot virus (TomRSV), Rott et al. (1991) have speculated that this high level of homology is the result of RNA recombination as part of RNA-2 replication. However, the results of Bacher et al. (1994) showed that recombination is slower than the mutation rate in blueberry latent mosaic virus (BBLMV), a relative of TomRSV, which argues against such a model. In the case of tobacco rattle virus (TRV; a tobavirus), the 3' ends of the two genomic RNAs are also identical in field isolates, but Angenent et al. (1989) showed that differences in the 3' ends of RNAs 1 and 2 of pseudorecombinant isolates survived at least 25 successive passages in the greenhouse.

In order to assess the role of RNA recombination in the restoration of 3'-terminal identity in TBRV and GCMV, we have examined the 3'NTR of pseudorecombinant isolates obtained by mixing the genomic RNAs of GCMV and of the Scottish beet ringspot isolate of TBRV, TBRV-S (Doz et al., 1980). These two viruses differ both in the sequence and size of their 3'NTRs, so that the 3'NTR of the two genomic RNAs of such a pseudorecombinant should be different in the absence of recombination. The complete nucleotide sequence of the two parental viruses is known (Meyer et al., 1986; Greif et al., 1988; Le Gall et al., 1989; Brault et al., 1989).

When they were lyophilized 16 years ago, the pseudorecombinant isolates (all independently obtained) had been propagated three times in Chenopodium quinoa following their initial isolation. In order to confirm their individual RNA compositions we analysed extracts of plants inoculated with the lyophilized material by dot-blot hybridization using discriminating 32P-labelled RNA probes derived from the coding regions of each RNA of GCMV and TBRV (not shown). The two surviving pseudorecombinant isolates with GCMV RNA-1 and TBRV RNA-2 (GS21 and GS22) were selected for further use. GS21 was passaged three more times in the greenhouse before the analysis described here. All of the 12 isolates previously described to be in the other

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Table 1. Oligonucleotide primers used in the IC-PCR experiments*

| P1   | ATGGGAGAAGTGCTGG (+) | 4155 (GCMV) 4291 (TBRV) |
| P2   | AATCTTTTTGTGTCCAACA (-) | 4401 (GCMV) 4623 (TBRV) |
| P3   | CACAAGTATCACCTTG (+) | 6928 (GCMV) 7018 (TBRV) |
| P4   | GGGTAGCCTCCCTCATG (+) | 4240 (GCMV) |
| P5   | GGTTAACCTCTCTAACGGTAGA (+) | 4104 (GCMV) |
| P6   | TGTCCAACATAGCACCACAG (-) | 4613 (GCMV) 7307 (TBRV) |
| P7   | TGTTGCCAACAGCAAAAACAT (-) | 4393 (GCMV) 7164 (TBRV) |

* For each primer, its denomination (P1 to P7), sequence (from 5' to 3''), as well as the position of its 5'-most nucleotide along the sequences of the GCMV and TBRV genomic RNAs are given. A position given in parentheses indicates that the primer and the RNA have an imperfect match, and a blank that the primer will not hybridize to the RNA. The sequences are viral sense (+) or antisense (-).

As a first approach, we examined whether the 3'NTRs of GS are identical to those of its parents. For this purpose, we took advantage of the existence in the 3' region of TBRV of sequences with no aligned counterpart in GCMV to design oligonucleotide primers able to allow discrimination of the RT-PCR products obtained from each virus through their electrophoretic migration. The primer pair P1/P2 (Table 1) allowed amplification of a 333 bp fragment from TBRV RNA-2, or of a 247 bp fragment from GCMV RNA-2. The TBRV product contained 33 bp in the coding region, and 53 bp in the 3'NTR, which have no counterpart in GCMV. The use of P3/P2 similarly allowed amplification of a 300 bp fragment from GCMV RNA-2, or of a 247 bp fragment from GCMV RNA-1. The use of the virus-specific primers P4 to P7 allowed amplification of a 374 bp fragment from TBRV RNA-2, and of a 290 bp fragment from GCMV RNA-2.

RNA-1-specific IC-PCR products of the expected electrophoretic mobilities were observed for both parental viruses as well as for GS21 (not shown). However, the mobility of the RNA-2-specific product obtained from GS21 was intermediate between those expected and observed from GCMV and TBRV (Fig. 1 a). Only three passages after its primary isolation, GS21 yielded a product with the same electrophoretic mobility as that of GS21 (Fig. 1 a, lane 6). When extracts from plants infected with GCMV and TBRV were mixed and used as a control, only the two bands corresponding to GCMV and to TBRV were seen (Fig. 1 a, lane 3), indicating that the product of intermediate mobility is not an IC-PCR artefact. The use of virus-specific primers showed that whereas each parental virus gave the expected IC-PCR product when the proper pair of primers was used, only the pseudorecombinant isolate gave a signal with a pair composed of a TBRV-specific 5'-primer and a GCMV-specific 3'-primer.
specific 3'-primer, and only with this primer pair (Fig. 1b). Taken together, these results indicate that the RNA-1 of the pseudorecombinant isolate is, as expected, similar to that of GCMV at its 3' end, but that the 3' end of its RNA-2 is also derived from GCMV and not from TBRV.

Since recombination seemed to happen so soon, we tried to detect its occurrence during mixed (GCMV + TBRV) infections of C. quinoa, using virus-specific primers. We always failed in this attempt (not shown). Thus, if recombination occurs in this case, it is either at an undetectable level, or the recombinants are out-competed by the more efficient replication of the two parents.

To investigate the structure of the 3'NTRs of GS21, they were sequenced by the chain termination method using purified RNAs (Fichot & Girard, 1990). The RNA-1 of GS21 has a 3'NTR similar to that of GCMV (not shown), confirming the IC-PCR results described above. On the other hand, the sequence of the 3' end of the RNA-2 is also identical to that of TBRV (Meyer et al., 1986) is probably the result of a mutation since the TBRV isolate present in our laboratory has an A at this position, like GS21 (not shown). The identity between the two genomic RNAs of GS21 starts at heptanucleotide UCUUAGG, which is conserved between GCMV and TBRV and contains the translation termination codon (except for GCMV RNA-1; Le Gall et al., 1989). This heptanucleotide is the starting point of the identity in the two parental viruses as well (Greif et al., 1988; Le Gall et al., 1989). Thus, in the pseudorecombinant isolate obtained by mixing the genomic RNAs of GCMV and TBRV, the identity of the 3'NTR is restored by incorporation of RNA-1 sequences into RNA-2. It is interesting to note that, in the case of TomRSV where parts of the coding region are involved in the strong homology between the two viral RNAs, it also seems that sequences derived from RNA-1 are present in RNA-2 (Rott et al., 1991).

The complete nucleotide sequence of GCMV (Le Gall et al., 1989; Brault et al., 1989) has been determined from the same virus source as the one used in this work, but after a further 10 years of successive passages in the greenhouse. Beside showing the restoration of the 3'
identity in the GS isolates, in the present study five differences between the 3' NTRs of GS1 and the published GCMV RNA-2 sequence were detected: G/A4329 (Fig. 2), C/U4379, U/C4394, C/U4392 and G/A4357. These transitions must have arisen during the 10 year period separating the virus isolations for the two studies. Interestingly, all of these variations were found in both genomic RNAs of GS21, indicating that, unlike in
BBLMV (Bacher et al., 1994), the rate of recombination between RNA-1 and RNA-2 is higher than the rate of mutation in RNA-2.

We have recently described another instance of presumed RNA recombination that may have resulted in the transfer of an entire domain of the coding region from GCMV to the ED strain of TBRV (accompanying paper: Le Gall et al., 1995). However, this was probably the result of an isolated and rather ancient event in the history of TBRV-ED since there is already sequence divergence between the regions involved. We now describe the apparently rapid (less than three passages in GS22) and systematic (observed in both independent isolates in which it was investigated) replacement of RNA-2 sequences by RNA-1-derived sequences, a phenomenon that can be linked with the 3' identity of TBRV and GCMV. Thus, the genome of nepoviruses could be subject to 'accidental' natural recombination, as are the genomes of other plant viruses (Robinson et al., 1987; Allison et al., 1989; Edwards et al., 1992; Cervera et al., 1993; Fernández-Cuartero et al., 1994; Rathjen et al., 1994; Gibbs & Cooper, 1995), but, in addition, these viruses could also use such a mechanism in their replication, as suggested by Rott et al. (1991). This model predicts that the replication of RNA-2 happens after a copy choice during the negative strand synthesis, initiated on RNA-1. The data presented here on the GCMV/TBRV pair are in agreement with such a model, unlike those of Bacher et al. (1994) with BBLMV.

The common occurrence of RNA recombination and the resulting identity of the termini of the two genomic RNAs could be a characteristic of nepoviruses. According to the occurrence and extent of terminal identity, at least three sets of nepoviruses can be distinguished. In the first set, illustrated by TomRSV (Rott et al., 1991) and perhaps CLRV (Scott et al., 1992) and BBLMV (Bacher et al., 1994), both the 5' (including part of the coding regions) and the 3' ends are strongly homologous between the two genomic RNAs for over 1000 nucleotides, but a few differences exist and persist after several passages. The second set contains GCMV and TBRV, and is characterized by a strict identity of about 300 nucleotides only in the 3' NTRs. The homology in the NTRs is strong but not strict in viruses belonging to the third set, exemplified by GFLV. If the transfer of terminal sequences reflects a replication strategy specific to nepoviruses, then differences in the extent of this transfer might reflect differences in replication mechanisms between these subgroups. Interestingly, a similar clustering of nepoviruses was obtained by Martelli (1975) using unrelated criteria.

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References


Short communication


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