Identification of the *Escherichia coli* tonB Gene Product in Minicells Containing tonB Hybrid Plasmids

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Sodium dodecyl sulfate/polyacrylamide gel analysis of proteins encoded by a series of tonB+ plasmids in minicells has identified the tonB gene product as a protein with an apparent molecular weight of 36,000. A parallel analysis of seven tonB mutations which have been genetically crossed onto a tonB+ plasmid supports this identification; the 36,000 M₀ protein is absent from the set of proteins encoded by each tonB− plasmid. Four of the tonB mutations are apparently IS1 insertions. The locations of these insertions within tonB have been determined by restriction endonuclease mapping. Correlation of these IS1 insertion sites with the molecular weights of prematurely terminated tonB polypeptides suggests that tonB is transcribed in the direction opposite to that of the nearby tryptophan operon. In addition, a protein encoded by one of the inverted repeat sequences of the transposable element Tn5 has been tentatively identified.

1. Introduction

The product of the tonB gene in *Escherichia coli* appears to play a key role in a number of cell surface-related phenomena. Mutations in tonB are pleiotropic, affecting colicin sensitivity (Pugsley & Reeves, 1976, 1977; Konisky et al., 1976), bacteriophage sensitivity (Matsushiro, 1963), three different high affinity iron transport systems (Wang & Newton, 1969; Frost & Rosenberg, 1973, 1975; Wayne & Neilands, 1975; for a review see Neilands, 1977), vitamin B₁₂ transport (Bassford et al., 1976) and iron-dependent modification of certain transfer RNAs (Rosenberg & Gefter, 1969; McCray & Herrmann, 1976). Aside from these observations concerning the phenotypes of tonB mutations, little is known about the tonB gene product itself. There is evidence that in the cases of bacteriophage T1 and ϕ80 infections and vitamin B₁₂ transport, that the tonB gene product is involved in the energy-requiring steps for these processes (Hancock & Braun, 1976; Bassford et al., 1976). Recent data suggest that tonB mutations affect an element in the inner membrane (Wookey & Rosenberg, 1978). It also appears that the tonB gene product is functionally unstable (Bassford et al., 1977) and that it is consumed during its action (Kadner & McElhaney, 1978).

In a previous communication we described the *Hind*II and *Hind*III restriction endonuclease map of the attϕ80-tonB-trp region and localized the tonB gene within a 1730-base-pair *Hind*II fragment (Postle & Reznikoff, 1978). In this paper we have

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utilized minicells to analyze the proteins encoded by several cloned tonB+ restriction
fragments as well as fragments carrying tonB mutations. Such analyses allow us to
identify the tonB gene product. Indirect evidence suggests the direction of tonB
transcription. In addition a potential promoter region for the tonB gene has been
located.

2. Materials and Methods

(a) Media

Growth medium for minicells is the low-phosphate medium of Landy et al. (1967)
supplemented to 0.5% (w/v) glucose, 10−3 M-MgSO4, 1 µg B1/ml, 100 µg/ml each of methio-
nine, isoleucine, histidine, and valine, 40 µg adenine/ml, and 2 µg pyridoxine/ml.

Labelling medium for minicells is sterile Methionine Assay Medium (Difco), diluted
1 : 3 with M9 salts (per l: 6 g Na2HPO4; 3 g KH2PO4; 0.5 g NaCl; 1.0 g NH4Cl) and the
mixture supplemented to 0.5% glucose, 40 µg adenine/ml, and 2 µg pyridoxine/ml.

(b) Bacteria and bacteriophage strains

Bacterial strain Ymel ΔA is F− supF transduced to Δ(tonBtrpA)563 (obtained from
C. Yanofsky) with Plvir. The minicell-producing strain χ884 is F−minA1, tex63, purE41,
supE42, pkzC3, minB2, his53, metC65, rpsL97, T38, xyl-14, ilv277, cysB2, cysA1 and was
obtained from R. Curtiss III. Plasmids in the background Ymel ΔA are described in
Table 1. Strain m524 Muλλ2(λc1857St) used as a source of λ morphogenic proteins was
obtained from H. Kondoh.

Bacteriophage strains used are all tonB+trpA+ transducing derivatives of the λ-φ80
hybrid phage χ2 and have been described previously (Postle & Reznikoff, 1978).

Selection of tonB mutants with φ80vir and colicins V + B has been described previously
(Gottesman & Beckwith, 1969).

(c) Transformations and ligations

The chosen recipient bacterial strain was made competent (Mandel & Higa, 1970) and
transformed with 0.2 µg of ColE1 Neo+ tonB plasmid DNA prepared according to the
method of Blair et al. (1972). Transformed colonies were selected on agar plates according
to 1.5 h outgrowth. Transformants were screened for the presence of the correct plasmids by
agarose gel electrophoresis as previously described; ligation reactions have also been
described previously (Postle & Reznikoff, 1978; Barnes, 1977; Sgarrella, 1972). Colicin
E1 used in some selections was kindly supplied by L. V. Wray.

(d) Minicell analysis

Minicells were prepared essentially according to the methods of Roozen et al. (1971) and
Frazer & Curtiss (1975). Minicell-producing strain χ884 was grown to early stationary
phase in growth medium at 37°C. (All further manipulations were at room temperature
unless otherwise noted.) The majority of bacterial cells were removed by a low speed spin
(2000 revs/min, 5 min in a Sorvall GS3 rotor). The supernatant which consisted mostly of
minicells was then centrifuged at 9000 revs/min for 15 min in a Sorvall GS3 rotor. The
cell pellets were resuspended in 2 ml each of growth medium, vortexed vigorously for
2 min, and loaded onto 24-ml sucrose step gradients (8 ml 5% sucrose, 8 ml 12.5% sucrose,
and 8 ml 20% sucrose, all in low phosphate medium without supplements). After
centrifuging 10 min at 5000 revs/min in a Sorvall HB4 swinging bucket rotor, the
upper one-half of the minicell band was removed and diluted with an equal volume of
growth medium. This dilution was carefully done in a dropwise fashion to avoid drastic
changes which could lyse the minicells. The minicells were then centrifuged 15 min at
15,000 revs/min in a Sorvall SS34 rotor, resuspended in 10 ml growth medium and the
centrifugation was repeated. The pellet was resuspended vigorously (2 min of vortexing)
in growth medium and layered onto a 12-ml sucrose step gradient (4 ml each of 5%,
12.5%, 20% sucrose in low phosphate medium). The gradients were centrifuged 10 min at
5000 revs/min in a Sorvall HB4 rotor. The top half of the minicell band was collected and carefully diluted drop by drop with 5 ml of growth medium. The optical densities at a 550 nm wavelength of these cell suspensions ranged from 0.24 to 0.60 on a Bausch and Lomb Spectronic 20 instrument.

The minicells were centrifuged 15 min at 15,000 revs/min in the Sorvall SS34 rotor and washed twice with labelling medium. The final pellets were resuspended in 1 to 2 ml of labelling medium. (At this point an effort was made to resuspend the pellets in volumes such that the concentrations as judged by optical density were all equal.) 1 ml of the minicells in labelling medium was incubated at 37°C. After 60 to 90 min the culture was made 2 mg/ml in ampicillin and incubated for a further 90 min. At this point 10 μCi [35S]methionine (Amersham-Searle) were added. After 30 min the minicells were pelleted (20 min, 30,000 revs/min in a Beckman Ti59 rotor) and frozen. For sodium dodecyl sulfate/polyacrylamide gel analysis the pellets were resuspended in 50 to 100 μl sample buffer (Laemmli, 1970) and heated for 2 min at 90°C. 20 μl of sample were loaded per slot. 12.5% sodium dodecyl sulfate/polyacrylamide slab gels (20 cm × 20 cm × 1.3 mm) were run according to the method of Laemmli (1970). The gels were dried and autoradiographed at room temperature using Kodak X-Omat R film for 3 to 4 days.

(c) Preparation of [35S]methionine-labelled α structural proteins

A 10-ml culture of m524 MuR8 lysogenic for λI657S7 was grown in minimal M9 medium to early logarithmic phase at 37°C and then shifted to 42°C for 10 min. After the 42°C heat pulse, 100 μCi[35S]methionine (Amersham-Searle) was added and the culture was incubated 2-5 h at 37°C. The cells were pelleted at 4°C, lysed in chloroform, the cellular debris pelleted and the supernatant added to non-radioactive carrier phase of the same type. The lysate was band on a 10-ml CsCl equilibrium density gradient. The visible band of phase was removed from the gradient, dialyzed into 10 mm-Tris (pH 7.9), 20 mm-MSO₄, 5 mm-CaCl₂ and a portion counted for radioactivity. ~ 10,000 cts/min per 10 μl of phase lysate were obtained. Whole phase were mixed with non-radioactive bacteria and sodium dodecyl sulfate sample buffer (Laemmli, 1970) and heated 3 min at 95°C. 20 μl of this mixture were loaded per gel slot. Molecular weights and relative amounts of the α structural proteins were taken from Murialdo & Siminovitch (1972) and Casjens & Hendrix (1974).

(1) Inhibition of BglII cleavage by RNA polymerase

1 μl E. coli RNA polymerase at 4 mg/ml (generously provided by L. Maquat and S. Rothstein) was incubated with 2 μg of pRZ546 DNA for 30 min at 37°C in PBBX (Jones & Reznikoff, 1977) plus 100 mM-KCl. After incubation, the mixture was diluted 1 : 2 with 10 mm-Tris (pH 7.9), 6-6 mm-MgCl₂. All 4 ribonucleoside triphosphates were added to 400 μM each or else omitted and the mixtures incubated at 37°C for 15 min. Restriction enzymes were added and the mixtures incubated further at 37°C for 60 min. The DNAs were extracted with phenol once, extracted twice with ether, and analyzed on 3.5% polyacrylamide gels.

As a control pRZ546 was treated as above but without added polymerase or ribonucleoside triphosphates.

(g) DNA restriction digests and polyacrylamide gels

The DNA digestions and their visualization on 3.5% polyacrylamide slab gels have already been described (Postle & Reznikoff, 1978).

3. Results

(a) Minicell analysis of proteins encoded by tonB+ hybrid plasmids

We have previously described a series of Neo+ (neomycin-resistant) tonB+ hybrid plasmids (Postle & Reznikoff, 1978) which carry different extents of the tonB region between att480 and the tryptophan operon. The properties of these tonB+ plasmids
Fig. 1. [35S]methionine-labelled proteins produced by tonB<sup>+</sup> plasmids in minicells.

Labels on the right side of photograph indicate novel proteins produced by the 10,000 bp HindIII fragment as well as the 48,000 M<sub>r</sub> protein from the inverted repeat of transposable element Tn5. All plasmids are in strain χ984. (a) pRZ112: the parental plasmid; (b) pRZ429: the trpA<sup>+</sup> plasmid; (c) pRZ510: the cloned 10,000 bp HindIII fragment; (d) pRZ528: the cloned
are summarized in Table 1. In order to examine the proteins encoded by the tonB region these plasmids were transformed into the minicell-producing strain χ984. [35S]methionine-labelled proteins from minicell extracts were separated on 12.5\% sodium dodecyl sulfate/polyacrylamide slab gels, the gels were dried, and autoradiographed. An autoradiogram of proteins produced by the tonB+ plasmids is shown in Figure 1.

Plasmids of pRZ540 and pRZ546 (Fig. 1(f) and (g)) each carry the smallest (1730 bp) cloned tonB+ fragment and differ only in the orientation of the cloned fragment. Comparison of the proteins encoded by the parental plasmid, pRZ112, with the proteins encoded by either pRZ540 or pRZ546 reveals the presence of only one unique protein with an apparent molecular weight of 36,000. This protein is seen in the two minicell extracts regardless of the orientation of the 1730 bp HindIII fragment which apparently encodes it. The unique protein is also encoded by the other tonB+ hybrid plasmids (Fig. 1(c), (d) and (e)), all of which carry greater extents of the tonB region. These observations suggest that the 36,000 M_r protein is not an artifact of the cloning process in which fusion proteins are created by transcription across the boundaries of cloned restriction fragments. Its presence as the sole protein encoded by the 1730 bp tonB+ HindIII fragment suggests that it is the tonB gene product.

† Abbreviation used: bp, base-pair.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plasmid</th>
<th>Fragment cloned</th>
<th>Cloning site in pRZ12</th>
<th>Plasmid phenotype</th>
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<tr>
<td>pRZ540</td>
<td>1730 bp HindIII</td>
<td>Hpai</td>
<td>tonB+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pRZ546</td>
<td>1730 bp HindIII</td>
<td>Hpai</td>
<td>tonB+</td>
</tr>
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<td>2760 bp PvuII</td>
<td>EcoRI</td>
<td>tonB+</td>
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<td>Hpai</td>
<td>tonB+</td>
</tr>
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<td>10,000 bp HindIII</td>
<td>HindIII</td>
<td>tonB+</td>
</tr>
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<td>tonB+ (2121)</td>
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<td>tonB+ (2124)</td>
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<td>Hpai</td>
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<td>pRZ429</td>
<td>2990 bp HindIII</td>
<td>HindIII</td>
<td>trpA*</td>
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The trpA+ and tonB+ plasmids were constructed previously (Postle & Reznikoff, 1978). The tonB+ plasmids were constructed by homogenization, as described in Results, with the f2 phages indicated in the 4th column. The structure of the vehicle pRZ112 used in these constructions is diagrammed in Fig. 8.

† pRZ112 is a Neo7 ColE1 derivative constructed by R. Jorgensen.

‡ Opposite orientation to pRZ540.
(b) Introduction of tonB mutations onto tonB+ plasmid pRZ526

In order to confirm that the 36K protein was the tonB gene product, a number of tonB mutations were genetically crossed on to tonB+ plasmid pRZ526. Bacterial strain YmelΔA was lysogenized with each of the following tonB−trpA+ transducing phages by selecting for trpA+ colonies at 30°C: f2#22, f2#23, f2#24, f2#29, f2#31, and f2#17. Each of these lysogens was screened for tonB phenotype (φ80vir resistance) and subsequently transformed with pRZ526, the Neo+ hybrid plasmid which carries the 4900 bp tonB+ HpaI fragment, by selecting for Chr+ (chromium resistance) and Neo+. tonB+ cells are resistant to 100 μM-chromium on agar plates. The selections for Chr+, Neo+, and trpA+ have been previously described (Postle & Reznikoff, 1978; Jones & Reznikoff, 1976).

tonB+ transformants were grown to saturation in nutrient broth. Neo+ colonies simultaneously resistant to φ80vir and colicins V+B were selected on agar plates. tonB Neo− colonies were recovered with frequencies of 10−4 to 10−5 per cell, indicating that the homogenization between plasmid, pRZ526, and the chromosome was efficient. Candidates were screened for the presence of plasmid DNA which was subsequently analyzed with restriction enzymes HindII + III. The tonB mutations in the plasmids appeared to be the same as those in the tonB−trp+ transducing phages from which they were derived (Fig. 2). In the cases of f2#22, f2#23, f2#29 and f2#31, where the 1730 bp HindII fragment 6 was missing from a HindII + III restriction digest and replaced in each case by similar HindII fragments 800 bp larger, the corresponding HindII fragment was seen in each tonB− plasmid. In the cases of f2#17, f2#24 and f2#28, where the 1730 bp HindII fragment 6 was essentially unaltered in size by the tonB mutation, a fragment the size of HindIII fragment 6 was also present in HindIII + III digests of the tonB− plasmid DNAs.

(c) Minicell analysis of proteins encoded by tonB− plasmids

The plasmids carrying tonB mutations were transformed into χ984 and the [35S]methionine-labelled minicell proteins examined on sodium dodecyl sul fate gels. The autoradiogram in Figure 3 shows that none of the tonB− plasmids coded for the 36,000 Mw protein produced by the tonB+ plasmids described above. The other three unique proteins encoded by pRZ526 (compared to pRZ112) are unaltered by the tonB mutations. Six of the seven mutant plasmids (pRZ551 to pRZ556) code for new polypeptides smaller than 36,000, which we assume in each case to be a prematurely terminated tonB− protein. Of these, the four polypeptides produced by the insertion

Fig. 2. HindIII + III restriction patterns of tonB− plasmids compared to the tonB− phage DNAs from which they were derived.

(a) tonB point mutations or small deletions: (1) φX174 molecular weight standards, (2) pRZ112, the parental plasmid, (3) pRZ557, (4) f2#17, (5) pRZ556, (6) f2#24, (7) pRZ555, (8) f2#28, (9) 13 4/6 5, the f2 phage carrying the entire wild-type tonB−trp region. On the right-hand side are indicated the 3 HindII fragments 6, 7 and 8 (1730 bp, 1600 bp, 1570 bp) that comprise the HpaI fragment cloned in pRZ526. They were numbered according to their order in the HindII + III digest of 13 4/6 5 (Jones & Reznikoff, 1977). The size of fragment 6 (tonB+) appears to be unaltered in the tonB− phage and plasmid digests.

(b) tonB insertion mutations: (1) pRZ112, (2) pRZ553, (3) f2#22, (4) pRZ551, (5) f2#23, (6) pRZ554, (7) f2#29, (8) pRZ552, (9) f2#21, (10) 13 4/6 5. These phages and plasmids lack HindII fragment 6 and have instead a new ~2500 bp fragment which is not present in the 13 4/6 5 digest. Numbers on the far left indicate lengths of double-stranded φX174 standards in base-pairs.
FIG. 3. [35S]methionine-labelled proteins produced by tonB⁻ plasmids in minicells. χ984 minicells containing: (a) pRZ526, the plasmid onto which the tonB⁻ mutations were crossed, (b) pRZ551, (c) pRZ552, (d) pRZ554, (e) pRZ553, (f) pRZ555, (g) pRZ556, (h) pRZ557. On the left are labelled protein bands corresponding to the prematurely terminated tonB polypeptides produced by the insertion mutants (pRZ551, pRZ552, pRZ554, pRZ553). This experiment was run on the same gel shown in Fig. 1.
mutations (pRZ551-35.5K; pRZ552-35K; pRZ553-34K; pRZ554-23K) are of special interest. The physical locations of the insertions can be determined and compared with the sizes of the altered polypeptides. The fact that the 36,000 M, protein is the only one encoded by the tonB+ 1730 bp HindIII fragment and that this protein is missing in minicell extracts of all seven tonB mutants analyzed strongly suggests that the 36,000 M, protein is in fact the tonB gene product.

(d) **Mapping of the tonB− insertion mutations**

The sizes (~800 bp) of the insertions in the tonB− plasmids pRZ551 to pRZ554 suggested that these tonB mutations might be due to IS1 insertions. Restriction enzyme analyses showed that the four insertions do share a common structure that is consistent with known restriction sites in IS1 (Schmidt et al., 1976; Grindley, 1977; Ohtsubo & Ohtsubo, 1978): BglII (1 site); PstI (1 site); HaeII (2 sites); HindIII, BgII, HindII and HpaI (no sites). We conclude that these mutations are in all probability IS1 insertions.

The presence of unique BglII and PstI sites in the insertions along with a unique BgII site in the 1730 bp tonB+ HindII fragment itself were exploited to map the insertions. Since the sequence of IS1 is known and the BglII and PstI sites located precisely within it (Ohtsubo & Ohtsubo, 1978), we can map the insertions fairly accurately by restriction enzyme analysis (Fig. 4). Comparisons among the three insertions in the same orientation (pRZ552, pRZ553 and pRZ554) are more reliable than to the one insertion in the opposite orientation (pRZ551) since the three can be directly compared within the same slab gel. The BglII PstI (or BgIIII BgII) band of interest in each mutant was identified as the only unique band present in the double digest and missing in the single digest of that mutant as well as the double digests of the other mutants. Estimates for the BglII−PstI distances and the BglII−BglII distances are shown in Table 2.

The precise locations of the insertions together with the molecular weights of the polypeptides which they apparently terminate suggest a direction for tonB transcription. The boundaries of the insertions in plasmids pRZ551, pRZ552, pRZ553 and pRZ554 are 805 bp, 770 bp, 750 bp, 455 bp, respectively, from the BglII site in the 1730 bp fragment (Fig. 5); these insertions result in tonB− polypeptides of approximately 35,500, 35,000, 34,000 and 23,000 M, respectively (Fig. 3). The plasmid carrying the insertion farthest from the BglII site encodes the largest tonB− polypeptide. The plasmid carrying the insertion closest to the BglII site encodes the smallest tonB polypeptide. Within the series of four insertions, the data are most consistent with a direction of transcription which is clockwise on the circular E. coli genetic map (from attg80 toward the trp operon).

It is worth noting that we do not see any proteins coded by the IS1 sequence in our minicell experiments (Fig. 3); however, small amounts of a protein could be overlooked, or concealed in congested regions of the gel.

(e) **Location of a potential promoter region in the 1730 bp tonB+ HindII fragment**

Indirect evidence concerning the direction of tonB transcription suggests the location of a potential promoter region for the tonB gene. The tonB IS1 insertion in pRZ551 (Fig. 5) encodes a tonB− polypeptide of 35,500 M, which probably termi-
Fig. 5. Map positions of IS1 insertions in the 1730 bp \( tonB^+ \) HindII fragment.

(a) pRZ551, (b) pRZ552, (c) pRZ553, (d) pRZ554. Unique PstI and Ball sites common to IS1 and each insertion mutant are diagrammed. The insertion in pRZ551 is apparently in an orientation opposite to that of the other insertions. pRZ551, pRZ552, pRZ552 and pRZ554 code for prematurely terminated \( tonB^- \) polypeptides of 35,500, 35,000, 34,000 and 23,000 \( M_r \), respectively.

Table 2

Restriction enzyme mapping of IS1 mutations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>( tonB^- ) plasmid</th>
<th>( BglII-PstI ) distance (bp)</th>
<th>( BglII-BalI ) distance (bp)</th>
<th>( BglII ) to boundary of IS1 (bp)</th>
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<tr>
<td>pRZ551</td>
<td>990</td>
<td>1035</td>
<td>805</td>
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<td>750</td>
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<tr>
<td>pRZ554</td>
<td>1045</td>
<td>985</td>
<td>455</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Estimated distances from the unique \( BglII \) site in the 1730 bp HindII fragment to the unique \( PstI \) and \( BalI \) sites in the 4 \( tonB^- \) insertion mutants are shown. The distance from the \( BglII \) site to the boundary of the IS1 element has been calculated from the known positions of the \( PstI \) and \( BalI \) sites within IS1 (Ohtsubo & Ohtsubo, 1978).

Fig. 4. Mapping of the \( tonB \) IS1 insertions.

(a) \( BglII-PstI \) analysis. (1) pRZ526, the \( tonB^+ \) plasmid onto which the insertion mutants were crossed, (2) pRZ551, (3) pRZ552, (4) pRZ553, (5) pRZ554, (6) \( \phiX174 \) molecular weight standards, (7) pRZ526, (8) pRZ551, (9) pRZ552, (10) pRZ553, (11) pRZ554. Lanes 1 to 5 are \( PstI \) digests; lanes 7 to 11 are \( PstI-BglII \) double digests.

(b) \( BglII-BalI \) analysis. (1) pRZ526, (2) pRZ551, (3) pRZ552, (4) pRZ553, (5) pRZ554, (6) \( \phiX174 \) standards, (7) pRZ526, (8) pRZ551, (9) pRZ552, (10) pRZ553, (11) pRZ554. Lanes 1 to 5 are \( BalI \) digests; lanes 7 to 11 are \( BalI-BglII \) double digests.

The \( PstI \) and \( BalI \) digests indicate that only one \( PstI \) and one \( BalI \) site exist in each insertion sequence.
Fig. 6. Inhibition of BglII cleavage by E. coli RNA polymerase.
(a) pRZ546, (b) pRZ546 + E. coli RNA polymerase, (c) pRZ546 + E. coli RNA polymerase + ribonucleoside triphosphates, (d) pRZ546, (e) φX174 molecular weight standards. (a), (b) and (c) are HindIII-EcoRI-BglII triple digests, (d) a HindIII-EcoRI double digest. Labels on the right indicate molecular weights of φX174 standards in bp. The arrow on the left indicates the position of the 3000 bp fusion fragment resulting from RNA polymerase protection of the BglII site in or near tonB.
The plasmid pRZ546 (carrying the 1730 bp tonB<sup>+</sup> HindIII fragment) is cut into two fragments by a HindIII EcoRI double digest (Fig. 6(d)). The larger fragment consists of most of the cloning vector (Fig. 8) while the smaller fragment (~3000 bp) encompasses the cloned 1730 bp tonB<sup>+</sup> fragment. A HindIII EcoRI BglII triple digest cleaves ~335 bp off the end of the larger fragment and divides the smaller fragment into ~440 bp and ~2540 bp. (Fig. 6(a)). Incubation of the plasmid DNA with RNA polymerase before addition of restriction enzymes results in a fusion fragment (Fig. 6(b)) which is the same size as the smaller fragment from the HindIII EcoRI double digest (Fig. 6(d)). Also in Figure 6(b), the relative intensity of the 440 bp and 2540 bp fragments are detectably diminished. Addition of ribonucleoside triphosphates (Fig. 6(c)) after the preincubation with RNA polymerase but before the addition of restriction enzymes results in loss of the fusion fragment, presumably due to initiation and run-off of the RNA polymerase.

These results suggest that a promoter region may be located at or near the BglII site. We have no data that directly implicate this region as the promoter for the tonB, but it is in the correct location for such a regulatory element.

(f) Minicell analysis of other proteins from the tonB region

Plasmid pRZ510 carries the 10,000 bp tonB<sup>+</sup> HindIII fragment which defines most of the tonB region along with 3700 bp of φ80 DNA sequences. Comparison of the proteins encoded by pRZ112 and pRZ510 indicates that the HindIII fragment encodes seven unique polypeptides of molecular weights 43,000, 37,000, 36,000, 23,000, 21,000, 13,000 and 10,000 (Fig. 1). Because this fragment carries φ80 sequences as well as part of the tonB region, it is not possible to assign any proteins to the tonB region alone. Since the 10,000 bp HindIII fragment has been cloned only in one orientation, it is not possible to determine which, if any, of the proteins are fusion proteins resulting from transcription and translation across the boundary of the cloned fragment. However, this fragment provides a set of proteins against which the proteins encoded by smaller tonB<sup>+</sup> fragments may be compared. The cloned 4900 bp HpaI fragment encodes four unique proteins (M<sub>r</sub>: 36,000, 23,000, 21,000 and 10,000) compared to those encoded by the plasmid pRZ112. Since these proteins are also encoded by the 10,000 bp HindIII fragment they are apparently not fusion proteins arising from the plasmid construction. Of these four proteins, only two (36,000 and 21,000), are encoded by the cloned 2760 bp PvuII fragment (pRZ531). And of those two proteins, only one, the tonB gene product, is encoded by the cloned 1730 bp HindIII fragment.

The cloned trpA<sup>+</sup> HindIII fragment carries the rest of the tonB region not covered by the 10,000 bp HindIII fragment. Five new proteins are encoded by the trpA<sup>+</sup> HindIII fragment in pRZ429 when compared to the parental plasmid pRZ112. These have molecular weights of 44,000, 38,000, 22,000, 18,000 and 15,000. For unknown reasons, the trpA protein (28,700 M<sub>r</sub>) was not seen. The above observations are summarized in Figure 7.

These data do not enable us to define the origins of any of these proteins with the exception of the 36,000 tonB gene product. They do, however, suggest that there is greater genetic complexity in the tonB region than has been previously described (Bachmann et al., 1976).
(g) Identification of a protein from the inverted repeat sequences of Tn5

A protein with a molecular weight of 48,000 was observed on sodium dodecyl sulfate/gels in the minicell analysis of several of the tonR+ hybrid plasmids (Fig. 1). This protein is present only in minicell extracts of strains containing plasmids (pRZ112, pRZ531; Fig. 1) where the single Tn5 inverted repeat present in pRZ112 (Fig. 8) is intact. In those cases where the inverted repeat has been interrupted by cloning into the HpaI or HindIII sites within the inverted repeat (Jorgensen, R., personal communication), the protein is not detected (pRZ429, pRZ510, pRZ540, pRZ546).

The simplest explanation for this observation is that the 48,000 Mₐ protein is encoded by the single inverted repeat of Tn5 that is present in pRZ112, since the HpaI site and the HindIII site are 980 bp apart in the inverted repeat (Jorgensen, R., personal communication). Alternatively, the protein is the product of translational readthrough into ColE1 or the central region of Tn5. In either case, sequences within the inverted repeat appear to be essential for the expression of the 48,000 protein.
**tonB GENE PRODUCT**

**Fig. 8.** Partial restriction map of pRZ112.

pRZ112 is a deletion variant of ColEI::Tn5 constructed by R. Jorgensen. In this diagram, the jagged lines represent DNA from the inverted repeat sequences of Tn5. A HindII deletion of the original ColEI::Tn5 plasmid has resulted in almost complete loss of one inverted repeat.

### 4. Conclusions

We had previously localized the *tonB* gene to a 1730 bp HindII fragment (Postle & Reznikoff, 1978). Here we examine the proteins encoded by *tonB* hybrid plasmids described in that study. Our findings suggest that the *tonB* gene product is a protein with an apparent molecular weight of 36,000 on sodium dodecyl sulfate/polyacrylamide gels. (1) Plasmids carrying the 1730 bp HindII fragment encode only one protein, the 36,000 protein, not encoded by the parental plasmid. (2) This protein is produced regardless of the orientation of the 1730 bp fragment in the parental plasmid. (3) This protein is also encoded by *tonB*+ plasmids carrying more extensive portions of the *tonB* region. Synthesis of the 36,000 protein is thus apparently independent of the DNA sequences which flank the 1730 bp fragment. These results suggest that the 36,000 protein is encoded by a sequence that is entirely within this fragment and that it is the *tonB* gene product.

In parallel experiments with plasmids carrying *tonB* mutations, the 36,000 *M*ₚ protein is the only protein absent from the set of proteins encoded by each *tonB*⁻ plasmid. Six of the seven *tonB*⁻ plasmids encode new polypeptides which are smaller than 36,000 and which we presume to be prematurely terminated derivatives of the *tonB* protein. These results confirm our identification of the 36,000 *M*ₚ protein as the *tonB* gene product.

Four of the *tonB* mutations appear to be IS1 insertions into the 1730 bp HindII fragment, which have been precisely mapped relative to the *BglII* site in that fragment. There is a strong correlation between the distance of the insertion from the *BglII* site and the molecular weight of the *tonB*⁻ polypeptide encoded by the mutant plasmid: the greater the distance from the insertion to the *BglII* site, the larger the *tonB*⁻ polypeptide seen on polyacrylamide gels. These data suggest that the direction of *tonB* transcription is clockwise (from *att*₈₅₀ toward *trp*) on the circular *E. coli* genetic map. In order to postulate a direction of transcription for *tonB* which is counterclockwise on the *E. coli* genetic map, there would have to be extensive translational readthrough into the IS1 insertions (>600 bp) in pRZ551, pRZ552 and pRZ553 in order to generate proteins of the observed molecular weights. Although the minicell-producing strain χ984 carries an amber nonsense suppressor (*supE*), IS1
contains multiple non-amber termination codons in all three reading frames close to either end of the element. Thus it is unlikely that such readthrough could occur.

Three of the four IS1 insertions are clustered within a 60 bp region of tonB DNA. This observation, in addition to the fact that the only insertion mutations observed (four out of the 12 tonB mutations described previously, Postle & Reznikoff, 1978) were of the IS1 type, may indicate that there are IS1 insertion “hot spots” in tonB similar to those found in other regions of the E. coli genome (for a review, see Bukhari et al., 1977).

We observed that RNA polymerase inhibits cleavage at the BglII site in the 1730 bp tonB+ HindII fragment. This result suggests that there is a potential promoter region on the 1730 bp tonB+ HindII fragment at or near the BglII site 170 bp from the end of the fragment. This is consistent with the inferred direction of tonB transcription. We are investigating the possibility that this BglII site is within the tonB gene promoter.

The minicell analysis of tonB+ and trpA+ hybrid plasmids indicates the existence of several proteins encoded by different cloned restriction fragments carrying segments of the tonB region. Of these proteins we have been able to localize the coding sequences for only the 36,000 M, tonB gene product. However our experiments imply that the tonB region possesses a greater genetic complexity than has been previously described. This is consistent with our data regarding fusions of ß-galactosidase to proteins within the tonB region (Postle & Reznikoff, 1978). Further analysis of cloned fragments from the tonB region will be necessary before it is possible to localize the other proteins.

Two interesting observations unrelated to tonB have also emerged from these studies. First, the minicell analysis of proteins encoded by the tonB− plasmids carrying IS1 sequences has revealed no obvious protein encoded by that insertion. Such a protein would be ≤33,000 molecular weight (assuming an average amino acid molecular weight of 130) since the IS1 element is 768 bp long (Ohtsubo & Ohtsubo, 1978). IS1 has promoter-like sequences near each end where RNA polymerase might bind (Ohtsubo & Ohtsubo, 1978), but it is doubtful that a functional protein would be expressed by IS1 since there are numerous nonsense codons in all three reading frames.

Secondly, the minicell analysis of proteins encoded by Neo+ tonB+ plasmids has provided suggestive evidence that at least one inverted repeat sequence from transposable element Tn5 is involved in the synthesis of a 48,000 M, protein. The inverted repeat sequences of Tn5 are each approximately 1450 bp (Berg et al., 1975) with a calculated protein coding capacity of 62,800 and thus could encode a protein of 48,000. The simplest and most exciting interpretation of the results is that the 48,000 M, protein is completely encoded by the inverted repeat sequence. The only protein presently known to be encoded by Tn5 is the ~23,000 M, neomycin phosphotransferase II which specifies neomycin resistance (D. I. Smith, Ph. D. Thesis 1978; D. I. Smith, T. White, J. Davies, unpublished results).

Evidence from studies on the transposable Tn4 (ampicillin resistance) element suggests that other proteins may be encoded by such elements. Sequences within the Tn4 element are known to be necessary for transposition; Amp' transposition-defective deletions in the central region of Tn4 are complementable in trans suggesting the existence of a diffusible product necessary for transposition (Heffron et al., 1977). Likewise, internal deletions of the central region and part of one inverted
repeat in Tn5 are known to be transposition-defective, but it is not known whether such deletions are complementable (Davies et al., 1977). We are currently investigating the origin of the 48,000 M, protein and its role in Tn5 transposition.

There are several qualifications which should be considered in analyzing our data. In two cases where restriction fragments were cloned in only one orientation (pRZ510 and pRZ429) it is possible that some of the proteins we observe may result from transcription and translation across the boundaries of the cloned fragments. In addition the molecular weights which we report are only apparent molecular weights, since any or all of the proteins we detect may reside in the cell membrane; in fact there is evidence that the tonB gene product might reside in the inner membrane (Wookey & Rosenberg, 1978). Finally, the use of [35S]methionine to label the proteins will have prevented us from detecting those proteins from the tonB region which contain few or no methionine residues.

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