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CHICKEN HISTONE H1 GENES

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by

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CONTENTS

	<u>page</u>
SUMMARY	i
STATEMENT	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
CHAPTER 1. LITERATURE REVIEW	
1.1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.2 CORE HISTONE PROTEINS	1
1.2.1 Role in Chromatin Structure	1
1.2.2 Heterogeneity	2
1.2.3 Expression of Variants	2
1.2.4 Functional Significance of Variants	6
(a) Distribution of variants	6
(b) Function in active chromatin	8
1.3 H1 HISTONE PROTEINS	10
1.3.1 Role in Chromatin Structure	10
1.3.2 Heterogeneity	12
1.3.3 Expression of H1 Variants	12
(a) Developmental switches	12
(b) Vertebrate H1 variant ratios and cell cycle regulation	13
(c) Tissue-specific H1 variants	17
1.3.4 Functional Significance of H1 Variants	19
(a) Properties of H1 variants	19
(b) Distribution: role in gene expression	20
(c) H1 modifications	23
1.4 HISTONE GENES	23
1.5 HISTONE GENE ORGANIZATION	24
1.5.1 Lower Eukaryotes	24
(a) Yeast	24
(b) Other organisms	24
1.5.2 Invertebrate Animals	25
(a) Sea Urchin	25
(b) <u>Drosophila</u>	27
1.5.3 Vertebrates	28
(a) Newt	28
(b) <u>Xenopus</u>	28
(c) Trout	29
(d) Chicken	29
(e) Mammals	32
1.5.4 Plants	32
1.5.5 Summary	33
1.6 HISTONE GENE EXPRESSION	34
1.6.1 Requirements for Transcription	34
(a) Sequences	34

(b)	Transcription factors.	36
1.6.2	RNA Processing	37
(a)	Non-polyadenylated mRNA	37
(b)	Polyadenylated mRNA	39
(c)	Introns	39
1.6.3	Cell Cycle Regulation	40
(a)	Regulation of replication-dependent histone synthesis	40
(b)	Regulation of replication-independent histone synthesis	43
1.6.4	Developmental Regulation	43
1.7	CHICKEN H1 GENES	44
CHAPTER 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS		
2.1	ABBREVIATIONS	46
2.2	MATERIALS	46
2.2.1	General Reagents and Materials	46
2.2.2	Enzymes	47
2.2.3	Isotopically Labelled Compounds	48
2.2.4	Nucleic Acids	48
2.2.5	Bacterial Strains and Media	48
(a)	Strains	48
(b)	Media	49
2.3	METHODS	49
2.3.1	Restriction Enzyme Digestion and Analysis of DNA	49
(a)	Restriction enzyme digestion	49
(b)	Agarose gel electrophoresis	50
(c)	Polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis	51
(d)	Transfer of DNA to nitrocellulose and hybridization with a labelled probe	51
2.3.2	Construction of a cDNA Library	52
(a)	Size fractionation of RNA	52
(b)	Poly(A) addition to 3' termini of RNA	53
(c)	Synthesis of double-stranded cDNA	53
(d)	dC-tailing of double-stranded cDNA	54
(e)	Preparation of vector and annealing to ds cDNA	54
(f)	Transformation of <u>E.coli</u>	55
2.3.3	Detection and Examination of Recombinant Plasmid Clones	56
(a)	Colony screening	56
(b)	Miniscreen examination of plasmid recombinants	56
2.3.4	Subcloning into Plasmid Vectors	57
(a)	Blunt-ending	57
(b)	Vector preparation and ligation	57
2.3.5	Large-Scale Preparation of Plasmid DNA	58
2.3.6	Isolation of Clones from a λ -Recombinant Genomic Library	58
(a)	Plating and screening	58
(b)	Preparation of 'phage DNA	59
2.3.7	Preparation of <u>In Vitro</u> Labelled DNA	61
(a)	Nick-translation	61

(b)	End-fill labelling	61
(c)	M13 probes	61
(d)	5' end-labelling with polynucleotide kinase	62
2.3.8	Subcloning into M13 Vectors	62
(a)	Preparation of double-stranded M13 replicative form	62
(b)	BAL-31 treatment of DNA	63
(c)	Ligation and transformation	63
(d)	Preparation of single-stranded M13 recombinant DNA	64
2.3.9	Screening M13 Recombinants	64
(a)	Complementarity testing	64
(b)	Hybridization analysis	65
2.3.10	Di-Deoxy Sequence Analysis of M13 Clones	66
(a)	Hybridization	66
(b)	Polymerization	66
(c)	Sequencing gels	67
2.3.11	Analysis of RNA	67
(a)	Electrophoresis and transfer to nitrocellulose	67
(b)	S1 nuclease analysis of RNA	68
2.3.12	Containment Facilities	69

CHAPTER 3. ISOLATION AND CHARACTERIZATION OF HISTONE cDNA SEQUENCES

3.1	INTRODUCTION	70
3.2	RESULTS	70
3.2.1	Preparation, Fractionation and Polyadenylation of Embryo RNA	70
3.2.2	Construction of cDNA Recombinants	71
(a)	Synthesis and dC-tailing of double-stranded (ds) cDNA	71
(b)	Preparation of vector, annealing to ds cDNA and transformation	72
3.2.3	Detection of cDNA Recombinants Containing Histone Sequences	73
(a)	Probe preparation	74
(b)	Screening cDNA recombinants	76
3.2.4	Analysis of Core Histone cDNA Clones	76
(a)	Miniscreen and hybridization analysis	76
(b)	Sequence analysis	78
3.2.5	Analysis of an H1 cDNA Clone	80
(a)	Preparation of M13 recombinants	81
(b)	Sequence of the cH1.1 insert	82
3.2.6	Discussion	82

CHAPTER 4. ISOLATION AND CHARACTERIZATION OF H1 GENE-CONTAINING GENOMAL CLONES

4.1	INTRODUCTION	84
4.2	RESULTS	84
4.2.1	Screening the Chicken Genomal Library for H1 Sequences	84

4.2.2	Analysis of Genomal Clones Containing H1 Sequences	85
(a)	Digestion and hybridization analysis	85
(b)	Relationship of λ H1 clones to other genomal clones	86
4.2.3	Characterization of Clones Overlapping λ CH02	89
(a)	Characterization of λ H1.4	89
(b)	Characterization of λ H1.1	91
(c)	Analysis of pCH4.7E	92
4.2.4	Alignment of λ CH02, λ H1.1 and λ H1.4	93
4.2.5	Characterization of λ H1.9 and λ H1.10	95
(a)	Restriction enzyme and hybridization analysis	95
(b)	Sequence analysis	96
(c)	Summary of λ H1.9/ λ H1.10 data and the total H1 gene number	99
4.2.6	Southern Analysis of Chicken Genomal DNA	100
4.2.7	Discussion	102

CHAPTER 5. ANALYSIS OF THE CHICKEN H1 GENES

5.1	INTRODUCTION	103
5.2	RESULTS	103
5.2.1	Characterization of the λ CH01 H1 Gene	104
(a)	Sequence analysis	105
(b)	Mapping mRNA termini	107
5.2.2	Sequence analysis of the λ H1.9/ λ H1.10 H1 Gene	109
(a)	Gene orientation	109
(b)	Complete sequence determination	110
5.2.3	Sequence Analysis of the pCH11.5E H1 Genes	111
(a)	Subcloning pCH11.5E right-hand and left-hand H1 genes	112
(b)	Sequence analysis of the left-hand H1 gene of pCH11.5E	112
(c)	Sequence analysis of the right-hand H1 gene from pCH11.5E	114
5.2.4	The λ CH03 H1 Gene	115
5.2.5	The λ CH02 H1 Gene	115
5.2.6	Northern Analysis of Chicken H1 mRNA	116
5.2.7	Discussion	118

CHAPTER 6. FINAL DISCUSSION

6.1	H1 GENE NUMBER AND ORGANIZATION	120
6.2	EACH H1 GENE CODES FOR A UNIQUE H1 VARIANT	121
6.3	H1 GENE 5' NON-CODING REGIONS	126
6.3.1	Comparison of Chicken H1 Genes	126
6.3.2	Identification of an H1 Gene-Specific Sequence and a G-Rich Promoter Element	128

6.4	REGULATION OF H1 GENE EXPRESSION	131
6.4.1	Cell Cycle Regulation	131
6.4.2	Differential H1 Gene Expression	135
6.5	H1 GENE 3' NON-CODING REGIONS	137
6.6	A REMNANT DYAD SYMMETRY ELEMENT IN THE CHICKEN H5 GENE	141
6.7	FINAL SUMMARY	143
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	147
	APPENDIX	

SUMMARY

This thesis describes the isolation and analysis of the family of genes coding for H1 histone variants in the chicken.

The first part of this thesis describes the construction of a 5-day chicken embryo cDNA library, and the isolation, from this library, of a recombinant containing H1 coding sequences. The nature of the recombinant was determined by DNA sequencing.

cDNA recombinants containing core histone sequences were also isolated. One of these, contained sequences coding for an extremely variant H2A protein which probably represents the replication-independent variant H2A.Z.

The insert of the H1 cDNA recombinant was used to screen a chicken genomic library. H1 positive isolates containing previously uncharacterized DNA were identified and further characterized by restriction enzyme mapping and hybridization analysis. From this work and that performed by other members of this laboratory a total of six H1 genes were located. All H1 genes were found to be clustered with core histone genes.

Subsequent Southern analysis of chicken genomic DNA suggested that the six located H1 genes represented the full complement of H1 genes, homologous to the H1 cDNA probe, in the chicken genome.

Sequence analysis of the chicken H1 genes revealed that each gene coded for a different H1 protein. This is consistent with estimates of H1 variant numbers in chicken tissues. The coded proteins are quite distinct in primary sequence from the H1-related chicken H5 protein.

The chicken H1 genes, as for most histone genes analyzed, contain conserved histone gene-specific 3' sequence elements and have no introns.

Analysis of the chicken H1 mRNAs also revealed features common to other histone genes, *viz.*, H1 mRNAs were found, by Northern analysis, to be non-polyadenylated and mRNA 3' termini were found, by S1 analysis, to map to a predicted conserved sequence. The H1 genes identified here appeared to be expressed in both embryo and adult tissue.

The chicken H1 gene sequences were analyzed in order to identify sequence elements that could potentially be involved in the various aspects of expression of these genes.

Comparison of the chicken H1 genes to H1 genes from other species resulted in the identification of conserved motifs in both 5' and 3' non-coding regions. Of particular note, a 7 base-pair sequence, 5' AAACACA 3', specific to H1 genes, was located in 5' non-coding regions. This is the first report of an H1 gene-specific sequence element. A role for this sequence in the cell cycle regulation of H1 gene expression is proposed. A G-rich promoter element, found to be required for efficient transcription, was also located. This element is also found in other histone and non-histone genes.

In addition, differences in non-coding regions between the chicken H1 genes are pointed out. Such differences could play a role in differential H1 gene expression.

Finally, H1 genes were compared to the tissue-specifically expressed chicken H5 gene. The H5 gene, in particular, was found to lack the H1 gene-specific 5' element discussed above, but, it does retain the remnants of certain conserved 3' elements. The consequences of these findings with regard to expression and evolution of the H5 gene are discussed.