

Cloning of a human galactokinase gene (*GK2*) on chromosome 15 by complementation in yeast

(cataracts/eye disease/galactosemia)

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ABSTRACT A human cDNA encoding a galactokinase (EC 2.7.1.6) was isolated by complementation of a galactokinase-deficient (*gall*⁻) strain of *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*. This cDNA encodes a predicted protein of 458 amino acids with 29% identity to galactokinase of *Saccharomyces carlsbergensis*. Previous studies have mapped a human galactokinase gene (*GK1*) to chromosome 17q23-25, closely linked to thymidine kinase. The galactokinase gene that we have isolated (*GK2*) is located on chromosome 15. The relationship between the disease locus for galactokinase deficiency galactosemia, which is responsible for cataracts in newborns and possibly presenile cataracts in adults, and the two galactokinase loci is unknown.

Galactokinase deficiency [one of three known forms of the disease galactosemia (1)] is inherited as an autosomal recessive trait with a heterozygote frequency estimated to be 0.2% in the general population (2). The major clinical manifestation of galactokinase deficiency is neonatal cataract formation (1), apparently due to galactitol accumulation (3). Presenile cataracts might also result from galactokinase deficiency (4).

The gene responsible for galactokinase deficiency galactosemia has not been determined, and thus the precise molecular alterations responsible for this disease are uncharacterized. A human galactokinase gene, *GK1*, has been previously mapped to human chromosome 17 by assaying galactokinase activity in cell extracts from mouse-human hybrid cell lines (5–8). It is not known if *GK1* is altered in patients with galactokinase deficiency.

Galactokinase (EC 2.7.1.6) serves the same function in yeast as in bacteria and humans, phosphorylation of galactose in the pathway for use of this sugar as a carbon source (9). We have therefore sought to clone a human galactokinase gene by its ability to substitute for the yeast enzyme. Several mammalian cDNAs have recently been identified by complementation or other functional activity in yeast (see refs. 10–12). We report here the cloning of a cDNA that encodes human galactokinase[§] by complementation of a galactokinase-deficient (*gall*⁻) strain of *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*. We have made the unexpected finding that this gene, *GK2*, does not map to chromosome 17. It is thus not clear whether the locus responsible for galactokinase deficiency disease affects *GK1* or *GK2*.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Yeast Strains, Media, and Transformation. The recipient yeast strain used in transformations was *S. cerevisiae* YM20 (*MATa ura3-1 ura3-2 trp1-289 his3-532 ade2-1(ochre) gall-dell111 GAL2⁺ CRY1^s*) kindly provided by Mark Johnston (Washington University, St. Louis, MO). A human hepatoma

cell line (HepG2) cDNA library was constructed in yeast expression vector pAB23BXN by Anthony Brake (Chiron) (12); cDNA inserts are flanked by *Bgl* II sites. This vector contains a yeast origin of replication, *URA3* gene, and glyceraldehyde-3-phosphate dehydrogenase (*GAP*) promoter for expression of the human cDNA in yeast. pBM48 (kindly provided by Mark Johnston) contains the yeast *GAL1* gene (in DNA segment Sc4918; ref. 13) in the *URA3* vector YCp19; YCp50 is a yeast low-copy vector carrying *URA3*.

Screening. A modification of the lithium acetate method was used for yeast transformation (14). Most transformants were selected on standard yeast synthetic medium lacking uracil and containing galactose as the sole carbon source (15).

Subcloning and DNA Sequencing. Plasmid pJGK was recovered from the Gal⁺ yeast transformant by transforming *Escherichia coli* strain DH5 α with total yeast DNA using electroporation, with selection for ampicillin resistance. pJGK contained a 1.5-kilobase (kb) cDNA insert, which was cleaved into 1.0-kb and 0.5-kb fragments by *Bgl* II digestion. Each fragment was subcloned into M13mp19 (16) and propagated in JM107. DNA sequencing was carried out by the dideoxy chain-termination method (17). Four oligonucleotide primers were designed from the determined sequence to complete the sequencing on both strands. The sequence across the *Bgl* II site used for subcloning was also determined.

DNA and Protein Sequence Analysis. A FASTA program for searching amino acid sequence data bases (18) was carried out using the EUGENE sequence analysis program (Baylor University, Houston). GenBank (release 68.0, June 1991), Protein Identification Resource (PIR)-Protein (release 28.0, March 1991), PIR-Nucleic (release 36.0, March 1990), and European Molecular Biology Laboratory (release 27.0, May 1991) gene and protein sequence data bases were searched for homology to the *GK2* gene sequence (19). A phylogenetic tree was constructed by the progressive alignment method as described in ref. 20.

Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) Technique. PCR amplification was carried out with an Ericomp (San Diego) thermal cycler using a modification of the standard protocol provided with the Perkin-Elmer/Cetus GeneAmp DNA kit (21). The cDNA insert in pJGK was amplified with primers hG5'-25 (5'-GCGGACAAGCTGCCAGCTTTCTAG-3'), corresponding to positions 1260–1284, and hG3'-26 (5'-GTGGCAGAAAGTCTGCCAATTCC-3'), corresponding to positions 1464–1439. After 10 min at 94°C to denature genomic DNA, reactions were carried out for 35 cycles of 1 min at 94°C, 1 min at 60°C, and 2 min at 72°C. Reaction mixtures for Fig. 4 A and B contained 67 mM Tris (pH 8.8), 6.7 mM MgCl₂, 16.6 mM (NH₄)₂SO₄, 10 mM 2-mercaptoethanol, 50 pM of each primer, 0.1 μ g of uncut genomic DNA or 1 ng of pJGK,

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§The sequence reported in this paper has been deposited in the GenBank data base (accession no. M84443).

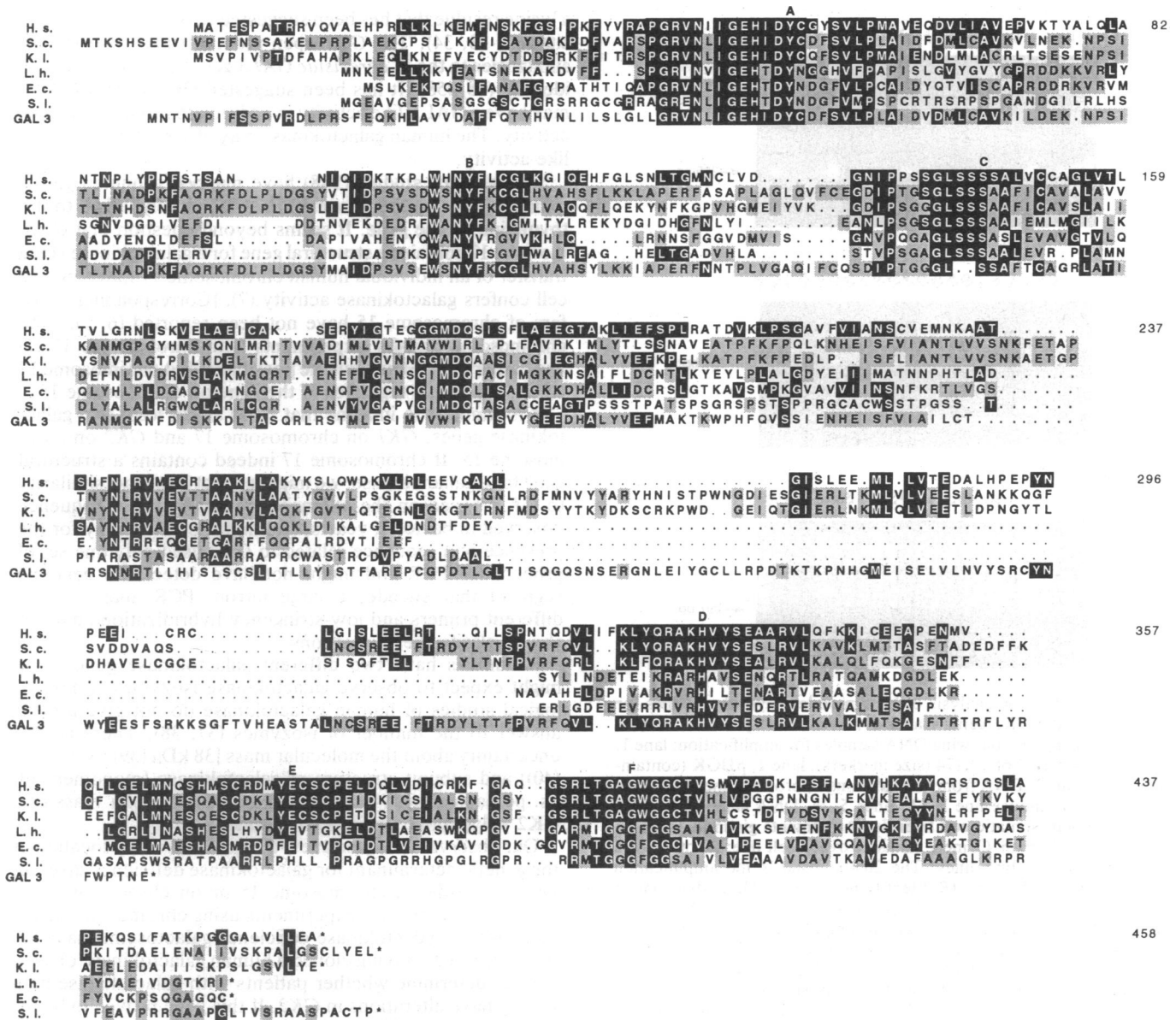


FIG. 2. Alignment of deduced amino acid sequences for human (H.s., 458 amino acid residues), *S. carlsbergensis* (S.c., 528 residues), *K. lactis* (K.l., 503 residues), *E. coli* (E.c., 382 residues), *L. helveticus* (L.h., 388 residues), and *S. lividans* (S.l., 395 residues) galactokinases and *S. cerevisiae* GAL3. Numbers indicate positions in the *GK2* open reading frame. Six regions of similarity (A–F) are indicated. Gaps (dashes) were introduced for optimal alignment. *, Translation termination codon.

from total human genomic DNA (Fig. 4A). The PCR products from pJGK and from human genomic DNA were cleaved into identical fragments by *Stu* I (R.T.L., unpublished observations). Genomic DNA from a panel of well-characterized human–rodent somatic cell hybrids (Table 1) retaining

subsets of human chromosomes was used as a template for PCR (8, 22–26). The presence of an amplified PCR fragment was perfectly correlated with the presence of human chromosome 15 in the hybrid lines but not with chromosome 17, on which the *GK1* gene resides (5–8). Of seven hybrids that lack chromosome 15 but contain chromosome 17, none yielded an amplified fragment. In contrast, the one line with chromosome 15 but not chromosome 17 (A59-3Aaz10a; Fig. 4A, lane 23) yielded an amplified fragment. The only common chromosome in lines NA 09940 and A59-3Aaz10a is chromosome 15. These observations argue that the *GK2* gene resides on chromosome 15.

To verify the chromosome composition of our somatic cell hybrid panel, we carried out a similar PCR analysis using primers (27) for genes known to reside on either chromosome 15 or 17, β_2 -microglobulin (*B2M*) and gastrin (*GAS*) genes, respectively. PCR primers for *B2M* amplified a 357-bp fragment only from DNA of cell lines reported to contain chromosome 15 (Table 1 and Fig. 4B). Amplification data for

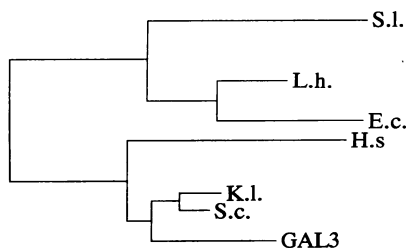


FIG. 3. Phylogenetic tree for galactokinase and galactokinase-related proteins of human, yeast, and bacteria. Symbols are as in Fig. 2. The tree was constructed by the progressive alignment method (20). The lengths of horizontal lines are a measure of divergence.

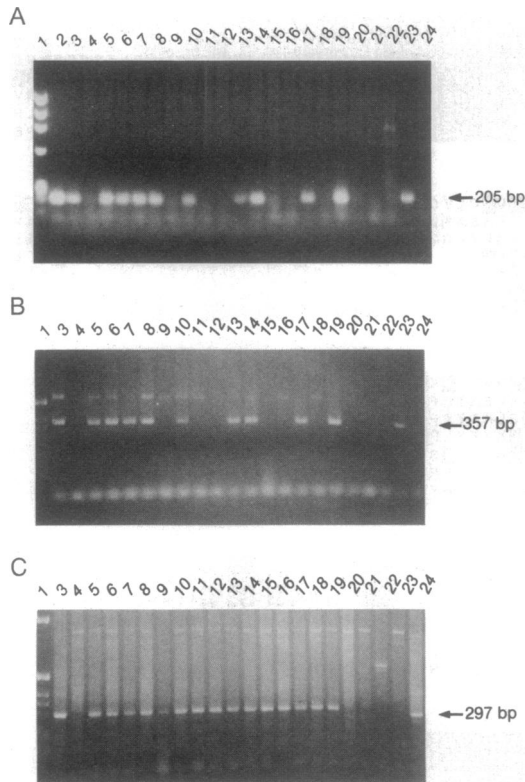


FIG. 4. (A) PCR analysis of human-rodent hybrid cell lines for presence of the *GK2* gene. Lanes 1–24 contained products of PCR reactions using the following DNA samples for amplification: lane 1, *Hae* III fragments of ϕ X174 (size markers); lane 2, pJJK (containing *GK2*); lane 3, DNA from normal human fibroblast line Hs27; lane 4, DNA from mouse line B-82; lanes 5–24, DNA samples from 20 human-rodent somatic cell hybrids (assignments given in Table 1). Lane 22 is a human-Chinese hamster ovary cell line; all others are human-mouse hybrid lines. The 205-bp band is the amplification product of the *GK2* gene. (B) Identifying hybrid cell lines that contain human chromosome 15. PCR primers (see text) for the human β_2 -microglobulin gene were used to amplify a 357-bp fragment as indicated. Lane assignments are the same as in Table 1 and are identical to those in A except for lane 1, which contains a 1-kb DNA ladder for size markers; pJJK (lane 2 in A) was not analyzed. (C) Identifying hybrid cell lines that contain human chromosome 17. PCR primers for the human gastrin gene amplified a 297-bp fragment as indicated. Assignments are the same as in B.

B2M were identical to those for *GK2*. PCR primers for *GAS* amplified a 297-bp fragment only from DNA of cell lines reported to contain chromosome 17 (Table 1 and Fig. 4C). These results confirm the chromosome composition of our hybrid cell panel with respect to chromosomes 15 and 17.

DISCUSSION

Two lines of evidence indicate that we have cloned a human cDNA encoding a human galactokinase. (i) The human cDNA complements a yeast strain with galactokinase deficiency and allows utilization of galactose. (ii) The amino acid sequence of the cloned cDNA has extensive similarity with galactokinases from two yeasts and three bacteria. The fact that we have isolated a functional cDNA from a hepatoma cell line indicates that the corresponding gene is not a pseudogene and is expressed at least in liver cells.

Alignment of galactokinase sequences reveals six distinct regions with identities (A–F; Fig. 2), as has been previously noted (31, 32). The greatest sequence and length variability occurs between regions C and D, making it unlikely that this region contains the catalytic site or site for binding ATP. Region F contains a G-rich sequence (GXGXXG) preceding

a lysine residue that has been suggested to be an ATP-binding site (31, 33, 34). The *GK2* open reading frame also shows similarities to the *S. cerevisiae* *GAL3* gene (35)—19% overall identity (88/458). It has been suggested (30, 36) that *GAL1* may have a *GAL3*-like activity in addition to its galactokinase activity. The human galactokinase may also have this *GAL3*-like activity.

Several prior studies (5–8) have mapped a human galactokinase gene to chromosome 17q23–25, closely linked to the thymidine kinase gene. It seems beyond question that chromosome 17 contains a structural gene for a galactokinase since transfer of an individual human chromosome 17 into a mouse cell confers galactokinase activity (7). [Corresponding transfers of chromosome 15 have not been reported (6, 7).] The chromosome transfer experiments with chromosome 17 (7) and earlier data (6) rule out the possibility that chromosome 17 carries a positive regulator of the gene on chromosome 15.

It is simplest to imagine that there are at least two galactokinase genes, *GK1* on chromosome 17 and *GK2* on chromosome 15. If chromosome 17 indeed contains a structural gene for a galactokinase, we might expect it to have similarity to *GK2*, based on the extensive conservation of sequence observed in bacteria, yeasts, and humans. Our assay for the presence of a sequence related to *GK2* used only one set of primers for PCR and might not have detected a genomic segment that encodes a large intron. PCR analysis with different primers and low-stringency hybridization analyses should clarify these questions.

If humans have two different galactokinase genes, one might expect to observe galactokinase isozymes. Enzymological studies of human galactokinase do not give a clear answer to the number of isozymes (37, 38). There is also uncertainty about the molecular mass [38 kDa (39) vs. 55 kDa (40)] and subunit structure of galactokinase [monomer (39) vs. perhaps dimer (40)]. The predicted molecular mass of a *GK2* polypeptide chain is 50.4 kDa.

Our observations raise anew the question of the location of the genetic determinant for galactokinase deficiency disease: Does it reside on chromosome 15 or on chromosome 17? Chromosome transfer experiments using chromosomes from humans with galactokinase-deficiency galactosemia have not been reported. Having cloned a human galactokinase cDNA, we can determine whether patients with galactokinase deficiency have alterations in *GK2*. If this gene proves to be the locus for galactokinase deficiency galactosemia, it can be used to determine definitively the basis for presenile cataracts, in particular, whether this disease results from heterozygosity or other genetic alterations at this locus. The strategy used here to clone a human galactokinase gene could be used to clone various human disease genes affecting intermediary metabolism (41) for which yeast mutants are known (42).

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