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## *ASI1*, a Gene Encoding a Novel Leucine Zipper Protein, Is Induced during Development of the Macronucleus in *Tetrahymena*

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# ASI1, a gene encoding a novel leucine zipper protein, is induced during development of the macronucleus in *Tetrahymena*

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**Abstract**: Sexual reproduction in the ciliate Tetrahymena follows a complex developmental program involving the sequential regulation of dozens of genes. Genes that are up-regulated during post-zygotic development in Tetrahymena were isolated by subtractive hybridization. Anlagen stage induced gene 1 (ASI1) encodes a 2.8 kb transcript that contains a single intron and is induced during macronuclear development. ASI1 is a single copy gene in both the micronucleus and the macronucleus. It encodes a 95 kDa conceptual protein with a leucine zipper near the amino terminus.

#### 1. Results and discussion

The ciliated protozoan *Tetrahymena* is a unicellular eukaryote that contains two nuclei, a germ line micronucleus and a somatic macronucleus. The sexual phase of the *Tetrahymena* life cycle follows a complex developmental program that occurs over a period of ~24 h. At about 12 h after mixing of two complementary mating types, the macronucleus is degraded and a new one develops from a mitotic product of the zygotic micronucleus. Macronuclear development involves massive genome reorganization including elimination, amplification, and/or methylation of specific DNA sequences (reviewed in Karrer et al., 1999).

A subtracted cDNA library was constructed to clone genes that are up-regulated during development of the new macronucleus (macronuclear anlagen). The method complements the successful approach of isolating genes based on the abundance of the protein products (Madireddi et al., 1996; Nikiforov et al., 2000; Nikiforov et al., 1999). The products of genes that produce less abundant messages are likely to encode a different class of proteins with qualitatively different roles in development.

Since *Tetrahymena* are starved to induce mating, a cDNA library from mating cells at 12 h post-mixing was subtracted with mRNA from starved cells. After several rounds of screening, 14 partial cDNA clones were isolated that were up regulated during macronuclear anlagen development. One of these clones, anlagen stage induced, gene 1 (*ASI1*) hybridized to a transcript of ~2.8 kb, whose abundance was dramatically increased in RNA from mating cells.

Genomic clones of the *Hin*dIII and *Cla*I fragments that cover the *ASI1* gene (Fig. 1A) were obtained in two inverse PCR experiments using primers P1 and P2 to amplify the *Hin*dIII fragment 1 Udani & Kerrer

and primers P2 and P3 to amplify the *Cla*l fragment. Southern analysis (Fig. 1B) indicated that *ASI1* is a single copy gene in both the micronucleus and the macronucleus. Since there are no differences in the sizes of fragments from the two nuclei, the data suggest there are no elements that undergo developmentally regulated deletions within ~1.2 kb 5' and ~2.5 kb 3' of *ASI1*.

Open reading frame analysis of the genomic DNA (Accession #AF435076) suggested that *ASI1* contained at least one intron. A reverse transcriptase-polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) experiment was performed using mRNA from mating cells at 12 h post-mixing as template and primer P4 (Fig. 1A, Table 1) for the synthesis of the first strand cDNA. Double stranded cDNA was obtained using the first strand cDNA as template and primers P5 and P6 (Table 1) for the PCR. A RT-PCR product of ~1.3 kb was obtained (Fig. 1A). The product was ~300 bp smaller than the PCR product obtained in a control experiment using macronuclear DNA as the template, suggesting that an intron of ~300 bp was removed from the primary transcript. The ~1.3 kb cDNA was cloned and sequenced in both directions. Comparison of the cDNA sequence to that of the genomic clone indicated there was an intron of 337 bp with the consensus nucleotides AG and GA at the 5' and 3' splice sites. The intron had a low GC content (17%), as expected for non-coding regions of *Tetrahymena* genome (Wuitschick and Karrer, 1999). In order to determine whether there were any additional introns in *ASI1*, RT-PCR was performed using primers P7 and P8 (Fig. 1A, Table 1) to obtain a 1.6 kb cDNA covering the 5' end of the *ASI1 gene*. The presence of the intron was confirmed. No additional introns were found.

The open reading frame (ORF) of the spliced *ASI1* message is 2.53 kb. The size is in good agreement with the size of the ~2.8 kb transcript observed on Northern blots. Three additional lines of evidence supported the assignment of the proposed ORF. First, the transcription start of *ASI1* was determined, by an RNase protection experiment, to be ~160 bp upstream of the first ATG (data not shown). Second, there is an in frame TGA stop codon at position -21 from the putative initiator ATG. Third, the putative 5' NTS is only 18% GC, as expected for non-coding DNA in *Tetrahymena*. The poly(A) addition site at the 3' end of the mRNA is known from the structure of the original cDNA clone.

Northern blot analysis demonstrated that *ASI1* is developmentally induced (Fig. 1C). Aliquots were removed from a population of mating cells at 6, 9, and 12 h post-mixing of the two complementary mating types for isolation of  $poly(A)^+$  RNA. RNA was also isolated from starved and vegetatively growing cells. Northern blots of the RNAs hybridized with a probe for *ASI1* hybridized to a single transcript of ~2.8 kb in lanes with mRNA from 6, 9, and 12 h post-mating cells. The strongest hybridization was observed with mRNA from cells at 9 and 12 h post-mixing.

The result was repeatable: *ASI1* RNA also showed maximal abundance at 9 and 12 h after pairing in cells from a different mating (data not shown). Thus *ASI1* transcripts were up-regulated in mating cells, and the RNA abundance is highest early in the development of the macronuclear anlagen.

The integrity of the mRNA in each lane was demonstrated by hybridization with control probes (Fig. 1C). The 1.4 kb transcript of the cysteine protease gene *CYP1* was detected predominantly in RNA from starved cells. Histone *H4* gene transcripts of 0.9 and 0.6 kb were found in cells engaged in DNA replication.

*ASI1* encodes a novel deduced polypeptide of 95 kDa (Fig. 2). The putative gene product of 805 amino acids, Asi1p, contains a leucine zipper motif (aa 243–265). Leucine zippers are known to function in protein–protein interactions (Hurst, 1995). Thus it is likely that the Asi1p functions as a homodimer or a heterodimer during anlagen development. Many, but not all, leucine zipper proteins are transcription factors.

Asi1p does not have significant homology to any known proteins. Blast P analysis showed a low degree of homology (6e<sup>-04</sup>) between Asi1p and a motif of unknown function in prokaryotic methyl-accepting chemotaxis proteins (Hanlon and Ordal, 1994).

Upregulation of the *ASI1* message coincides with macronuclear anlagen development involving chromosome fragmentation, DNA elimination, telomere synthesis and DNA amplification (Blackburn, 1991; Yao et al., 2002). It is reasonable to expect that Asi1p may have an enzymatic or regulatory role in one or more of these processes.

#### 2. Materials and methods

*Tetrahymena thermophila* strains CU428 and CU427 were obtained from Dr Peter Bruns, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York. The strains were mated as described previously (Hamilton and Orias, 1999).

For developmental Northern blot analysis,  $poly(A)^+$  RNA was isolated from aliquots of cells removed from a mass mating at various time points after mixing of the two complementary mating types. The amount of RNA loaded in the various lanes was determined by measuring the A<sub>260</sub> of each sample, and checked by running an aliquot of the sample on a separate gel stained with ethidium bromide.

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#### Notes

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Appendix Table 1 ASI1 PCR prime	rs <sup>a</sup>
Primer	Seque

Primer	Sequence	Location
P1	TATTGTTCGATGTGGTTCATGAAC	2883R
P2	CTTCCCAATTTCTAAATGCCC	2885F
P3	ATCCATAATCTACCAGCTGTTC	2666R
P4	ACAAACCCTTTAAATATGTCTC	2928R
P5	TGCTCTCAGAGGGAAAGACAAG	1344F
P6	GGGCATTTAGAAATTGGGAAG	2905R
P7	TCTCTTGAATCCAGGATTAAAGG	203F
P8	AGCAGAACCAGCAACTTTAAAT	2170R

<sup>a</sup> F, forward primers; R, reverse primers.





(A) Genomic restriction map of the ASI1 gene. Angled arrowhead depicts the orientation of the ASI1 transcript. Open boxes represent the open reading frames separated by a 337 bp intron. The line extending from the inverted triangle represents the site of joining of the two exons. Small arrowheads indicate the location of the primers P1-P8 employed for inverse PCR and RT-PCR. Filled boxes A and B denote hybridization probes for the Southern blot in B. The asterisk represents the site of poly(A) tail addition to the ASI1 mRNA. C, Clal; B, BglII; H, HindIII; S, Sacl. (B) Southern analysis of micronuclear and macronuclear DNA. The arrow indicates a small Clal-Sacl fragment whose hybridization signal is more intense in longer exposures. C, Clal; B, Bg/II: S. Sacl. Mi and Ma indicate lanes containing micronuclear and macronuclear DNA. respectively. (C) Northern analysis of ASI1 transcripts. The upper panel shows hybridization of the 1.6 kb PCR product (Fig. 1A) to a developmentally regulated transcript of ~2.8 kb. The source of the poly(A)+ RNA in each lane was: S, starved cells; 6, 9 and 12, mating cells at the corresponding number of hours after mixing of two complementary mating types: V. vegetatively growing cells. The lower panel shows control Northern blots. The cysteine protease gene CYP1 probe hybridized to a message of ~1.4 kb that is induced in starved cells. The hybridization in lanes containing mRNA from mating cells is likely to be due to the presence of starved non-maters in the mating population. There was no hybridization of this probe to mRNA from vegetatively growing cells. A histone H4 probe hybridized to transcripts of the H4I and H4II genes at ~0.9 and 0.6 kb. Histone H4 messages are present only in cells undergoing DNA replication. Thus there was no hybridization in lanes containing mRNA from starved cells. The blots were exposed for 24 h at -80 °C with one intensifying screen.

#### Figure 2 The genomic sequence of *ASI1*

TAGCAAATTTTAATTATTGTTACAAGATTTTTACTATTTAATCTTAAAAAATTAATAGATAG	90 180	Th
* MQDTLDAK		po
AACAGCTATCTTAATTTTACTTTCTGAATCCAGGATTAAAGGAATTTCAAATATAAAAAAGCTAATCGCTTAAAAAATAATAATTAAGCT N S Y L N F T F S E S R I K G I S N I K N A N L L K N N Q A	270	the
ACAAGTATTATGGAATTAGAATCAAAGCATTCCATAAAGCGTCACATGGTAATTTGGAAATAATCAAGAATGCTGAAATA T S I M E L D Q T L Q A F H K A S H G N L K N I I K N A E I	360	Th
TGCGCATTAGATCAATATAGTATCCAAAACAGATAATAAAATTTTGAAACTATAAACATTAAAAAAACAAATCTTAAAGTAGAGTTAGC C A L D Q Y S I Q N R Q Q N F E T I T L N K N K S Q S R V S	450	po
AAAACTGAAATTAGGAGTCTAAATCCACTTTCATGCAATGAATCGAGAAAACAAAGTACTTTGAAAATGAATAGGATAATTTATGTAAT K T E I R S L N P L S C N E S E K T K Y F E N E Q D N L C N	540	in f
TTAGAAGATGAATATGAAAATGAGAGTAATTATCATAAAAATAATTTAGAGTCATAGTAAAGTAGCACAACAGCTATTTGCAAATATTAGG L E D E Y E N E S N Y H K N N L E S Q Q S S T Q L F A N I R	630	pu Th
CAAACTAAGATATTTTAATAAATGAGAGACTATGTACGAACTCTAAAGAAGAATAAAATTTTCTAAAAAATTTTGGTTTTGTTAAATAAA	720	mc
AGCAGATGGACTCGATAAAAGTAGCTTAATGTTCATTCAT	810	gra
CTTTTATTCTTTATGTATCGTATTTTGATGACACTTACTATCCAAATTACTCGAAAGGGAAAAAAATTAACTAATTTATACCTTATCC L L F F M Y R I F D D T Y Y P N Y S E S E K N Q L I Y T L S	900	res
TCTTTACAAGAATCATTAGTTAGTCTCTTAAGAAGAACTGACCATCTCCACCAAGTCGCCATTAGCATTAATCACAATAAAAGGT	990	un
	1080	ca: the
CANTTAATGATACTTTTAGCTTTTTAAAATGTTGATACTCCAATGATTTTTTTT	1170	ast
Q F N D I D G F I F Q N V D I F I I D F F Q N A I F I D Q AGAAATTACACTCATATTACACCAGAATCTTAGAAGAATTCTTGATGATCTTGGTTATTGTTATTATAAAAAAATTAATT	1260	the
K N I T H I T P E 5 Q K I L D D F D I L 5 I F I K N L I A N GCAMAATTTTCATCTTCTTATCTTATTATTGTGGAATTGGAACAGAATTGGTGGATTAGTCAACTACCAGCTGGTTTATAAAAGGCCTCC	1350	do
A K F S S S Y S Y Y C G F E T $\underline{D}$ E $\underline{L}$ V V Y Y P A G $\underline{L}$ Q N A $\underline{L}$ AGAGGGAAAGACAAGGTACCTGATTTTAGTTTTCACCCAAATTAGGAGGGATTGGTACTCCTAAATAATTAAAAATAACCTATAGTATACA	1440	nu
<u>R G K D K V P D F S F H P N Q R D W Y S Q I I K N N L Q Y T</u> AATCAAACTTACTTTACTCTCCCCTATAAAGATTAAATAACTTAGCAATATAATGACCATGTCGTCGTCGTCGTGGTATAGgtaaaa	1530	ind
<u>N Q T Y F T L P Y K D Q I T Q Q Y I M T M S V A L R D Q</u> gatctatttaatatttttttttttttttttttttttttt	1620	ро
tcctgcagaaacaataaatttaattaattaaattctaaattctgaattgatttttctatcaatca	1710 1800	se
ataaaaaacaaaatattettaagetttteeettaagacaattattatttaattta	1890	aci
TGACTATTACTTAGATAAATTTGACAAATATATAAATTCAATAGGCATAAATGAGTATTCTATTATGGCTCTGATAGATGCCAGTAACGA DYYLDKFDKYINSIGINEYSIMALIDASND ASND	1980	reg
TAATAGTATTATTCTAACATAAAAACAGTAGTATTATTAACTTTACCCTCATAACAGTTCTTACAATTTTCTCCCCTCTTAAAGGACAGATAT N S I I L T Q N S S I I N F T P Q Q F L Q F S P S Q W T D M	2070	ιο me
GAAATAGCAAATACTTTAAACATTTAACAATAATACTAACAGCTTAAATTCTTATAGCTATTTTTAAGACATTTAAGGATTTAAAGGTTGC L K Q Q Q T F N N N T I N S L N S Y S Y F Q D I Q G F K V A	2160	ch
TGGTTCTGCTTTTAAATCCAAAATTCAAATGATCAAACCTTTATTTA	2250	
TACAATAATTTAAAGAGTTTAAGATAAATATATTAAACCGAATATTAACTTTAAATCGCATTTCTAGTGATAAGCTTTGCTCACATTAT T I I Q R V Q D K Y I K P N I N F I I A F L V I S F A H I I	2340	
TTATTGCTTAATAATGAGTTATTAGTTACTCAACCTTATAGAAAAATAAAGTAGATATCTAACTAA	2430	
ARATTARATAGGATCACTTGATTCATACTCTAGACACTTTAGATTTAAAAGTGATAGAAATTTATATATTCTAGTCAAGTCTGCAAAAAA N Q I G S L D S Y L N T L D F K S D R N L Y I L V K S A K K	2520	
AATGGTTTTAAAAATAGCCAGTACTAAGAAAATAATCGAAAATTAAAAATATTATCATGCTTATCATTATGAGTAAAATGAGTA M V L K I Q K A S T K K I I E N Q K Y Y H A Y H Y E Q N E Y	2610	
TTTTGATAGTCAAATGGAGTGGAGAGAGATGAAAATGAAAAAGATGAGATATGGATTATGAAAAAA	2700	
AGAATTCTTCAACGATTGTGAATCAAAAATCACTGAGCTCAGAGATAACTCTCCCTTTGCTATTGTCAACAATAAATA	2790	
AATTAAATAAAAAATACTATCTGAAGATTCATTTTGCAAATCTGTCTCTGTTCCATACATTGACTAAAAGTTCATGAACCACATCGAACA I K Q K I L S E D S F C K S V S V P Y I D Q K F M N H I E Q	2880	
atatcttcccaatttctaaatgccctcagacatatttaaagggtttgtaaataaa	2970	
TAATTAAATTAATCAAACAAGCACTAATTAATATATAGAATCTTTAAAAAATATGTATATTATGTTA <u>AATTAAA</u> AATTTTTATAATTTATG AAAGGCAAAATAA	3060	

90 The nucleotide at

position +1 represents the approximate start

- of the *ASI1* transcript. The asterisk at
- 450 position +137
- indicates a stop codon
- <sup>540</sup> in frame with the
- <sup>630</sup> putative initiator ATG. The leucine zipper
- <sup>720</sup> motif is highlighted in <sup>810</sup> gray with each

<sup>900</sup> seventh leucine residue double

- <sup>990</sup> underlined. Lower
- case letters represent
- the 337 bp intron. The
- asterisk at the end of
- the sequence denotes the stop codon. The
- double underlined 37
- nucleotides near the end of the sequences
- 1530 indicates a consensus
- poly(A) addition
- <sup>620</sup><sub>710</sub> sequence. The
- underlined amino
- acids represent the region of Asi1p similar to the
- methyl-accepting
- 60 chemotaxis proteins.