



Class 1 integrons in *Acinetobacter baumannii*: a weak expression of gene cassettes to counterbalance the lack of LexA-driven integrase repression

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Résumé en anglais Integrons are able to recruit resistance genes through integrase-driven recombination events that are regulated by the bacterial SOS response and require the repressor LexA. Class 1 integrons genes are expressed from a common promoter, Pc, of which at least 5 predominant variants, classified from weak to strong, have been described. In *Escherichia coli*, there is an intertwined regulation between gene cassette expression and integrase activity: the stronger the promoter is, the weaker the integrase is. Class 1 integrons have been frequently described in *Acinetobacter baumannii*. However, *Acinetobacter* spp. lack the LexA repressor suggesting that the integrase is constitutively expressed. We characterized the integron content of 83 clinical and environmental *A. baumannii* strains. We found a predominance of Pc variants described as strong in *E. coli*. The Pc expression level was 2 to 4-fold lower in *A. baumannii* than in *E. coli*, and the diversity of the gene cassette array was low. In *A. baumannii* integrons with a PcS promoter might have been selected to allow a sufficient resistance level while avoiding the toxicity of a highly active integrase. Furthermore, a transcriptional interference between PcS and *PintI1* (as shown in *E. coli*) may limit the expression of the integrase and thus counterbalance the lack of LexA-driven integrase repression to prevent the cost of the integrase.

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