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The *Salmonella* Pathogenicity Island 2-Encoded Type III Secretion System Is Essential for the Survival of *Salmonella enterica* Serovar Typhimurium in Free-Living Amoebae*

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Free-living amoebae represent a potential reservoir and predator of *Salmonella enterica*. Through the use of type III secretion system (T3SS) mutants and analysis of transcription of selected T3SS genes, we demonstrated that the *Salmonella* pathogenicity island 2 is highly induced during *S. enterica* serovar Typhimurium infection of *Acanthamoeba polyphaga* and is essential for survival within amoebae.

The importance of free-living protozoa, such as amoebae, as environmental reservoirs of food-borne pathogens is becoming increasingly recognized (1, 6, 9, 18). Such interactions may also have highly significant physiological implications, as amoebic passage of *Legionella pneumophila* enhanced bacterial virulence (3) and could resuscitate viable but nonculturable cells (20). *Salmonella enterica* serovars Typhimurium and Dublin have been shown to survive within *Acanthamoeba polyphaga* and *Acanthamoeba rhysodes* (5, 22), and induction of *fis* transcription, indicative of bacterial proliferation within contractile vacuoles, has been reported (3). The role of the *Salmonella* pathogenicity island 1 (SPI-1)-encoded type III secretion system (T3SS-1), which mediates forced bacterial uptake via subversion of actin dynamics, is unclear; however, an *S. enterica* serovar Dublin *Δhia* mutant lacking a key transcriptional activator of SPI-1 entered and survived within *A. rhysodes* at a level similar to that of the parent strain (22). A second type III secretion system encoded by SPI-2 (T3SS-2) and the PhoPQ two-component regulatory system are known to play key roles in the intracellular survival of *Salmonella* in mammalian cells, but their roles in interactions with protozoa have not been reported. In this study we investigated the roles of T3SS-1, T3SS-2, and PhoP in entry and survival of *S. enterica* serovar Typhimurium in *A. polyphaga* using defined mutant strains. Additionally, we quantified transcription of the *S. enterica* serovar Typhimurium SPI-1 gene *sipC* and the SPI-2 gene *sseC* (which encode components of the type III secretion translocon) within *A. polyphaga*.

A gentamicin protection assay modified from that used to quantify *Salmonella* invasion of avian cells was used to assess uptake and intracellular survival in *Acanthamoeba polyphaga*. Linc-1 grown in axenic culture in peptone-yeast extract-glucose medium (PYG) (1, 2). Amoebae were grown to 5 × 10⁶ cells per ml initially in flasks and then in 24-well plates. *S. enterica* serovar Typhimurium strain F98 and previously described variants with mutations in the SPI-1 gene *spaS* and in the SPI-2 gene *ssaU* (genes well characterized for changes in their phenotype for virulence, cell invasion, and survival within macrophages [10, 11, 23]) and in *phoP* (13) were grown at 37°C inuria-Bertani (LB) broth with shaking at 150 rpm to late logarithmic phase and added to amoebae at a multiplicity of infection (MOI) of 10. After 1 h of incubation at 37°C, the plates were centrifuged at 50 × g for 5 min. The medium was removed from the plates and replaced with PYG containing gentamicin sulfate at 100 µg ml⁻¹. The plates were incubated at 37°C for 30 min and then centrifuged again before the medium was replaced with PYG containing 20 µg ml⁻¹ gentamicin to inhibit growth of any *Salmonella* released from lysed amoebae. After 1, 4, 24, or 48 h of incubation, the medium was removed and amoebae were lysed by the addition of distilled water, and then serial dilutions of the lysates were plated onto nutrient agar to enumerate *Salmonella* bacteria after 24 h of incubation at 37°C. Following challenge, between 10⁴ and 10⁶ CFU of *S. enterica* serovar Typhimurium F98 per ml of cultured amoebae were recovered from amoebic cells (Fig. 1). Both the parent and *ΔspaS* mutant were recovered at similar levels from 1 h postinfection to 48 h postinfection. In contrast, recoveries of the *ΔssaU* mutant and *ΔphoP* mutant were significantly lower than recovery of the parent strain (*P < 0.01*) at each time point. There was also a decline in the number of viable bacteria recovered over time. The viability of amoebic cultures was slightly reduced following *Salmonella* infection, which may contribute to the gradual decline in bacterial numbers recovered over time. Counts of viable amoebae by microscopy and measurement of cytotoxicity by use of a commercial assay (Cytotox96; Promega, Southampton, Hampshire, United Kingdom) showed between 47 and 57% cell death in *Salmonella*-infected cells at 48 h postinfection, whereas uninfected controls showed 36% cell death. Differences in amoebic death between mutant strains were minimal and would not account for the differences in bacterial survival.

To determine intra-amoebic transcription of the T3SS genes *sseC* and *sipC* and the housekeeping gene *yejA* as an internal standard, invasion assays were performed in 20-ml flasks as...
cells further supports the theory that survival within amoebae and survival within macrophages are largely analogous, as the PhoPQ two-component regulatory system, although associated with regulation of many genes, is key to activation of the SPI-2-encoded T3SS within phagocytes (7, 15). In contrast, mutation of spaS had a minor effect on Salmonella survival within amoebae, consistent with findings using a ΔhilA mutant (17). Nevertheless, transcription of the SPI-1 gene sipC was induced within amoebae, in contrast to findings with S. enterica serovar Typhimurium in J774A.1 murine macrophage-like cells, where sipC transcription was downregulated 50-fold compared to growth in culture medium (4). Recently, however, SPI-1 genes were found to be induced after infection of epithelial cells, indicating that the intracellular program of bacterial gene expression is sensitive to cell type (8).

Survival within protozoa may represent an important environmental reservoir of Salmonella and confer resistance to predation in the gastrointestinal tracts of ruminants. In addition, such interactions may have exerted an evolutionary pressure leading to bacterial divergence, including variation in the lipopolysaccharide O-side chain of Salmonella and the development of virulence factors (16, 24, 25). Recent studies have indicated that Shiga toxin (Stx) of the food-borne pathogen enterohemorrhagic Escherichia coli (EHEC) aids resistance to grazing protozoa and may account for the very high Stx carriage rates in EHEC isolated from ruminants (19). Furthermore, the type II and IV protein secretion systems of L. pneumophila aid survival in both waterborne amoebae and alveolar macrophages during human infection (17, 21). Taken together with
our finding that *S. enterica* serovar Typhimurium SPI-2 is induced and required for survival in *A. polyphaga*, such data suggest that traits we primarily consider virulence factors for bacterial pathogenesis in animals and humans may have originally evolved to play other roles in microbial ecology.

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