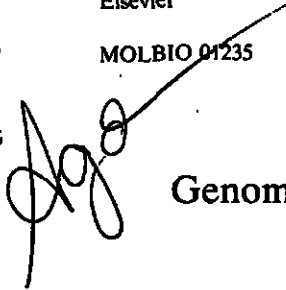


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## Genomic organisation of nuclear tRNA<sup>Gly</sup> and tRNA<sup>Leu</sup> genes in *Trypanosoma brucei*

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We have isolated a 0.3-kb *Hae*III restriction fragment from *Trypanosoma brucei* which contains two tRNA genes. Secondary structure models predict that the two genes identified encode tRNA molecules which specify glycine (anticodon UCC) and leucine (anticodon CAG). The two genes are separated by 86 nucleotides, transcribed in the same direction and contain features of conventional RNA polymerase III transcription units. Southern blot analysis indicates the presence of multicopy tRNA gene families in *T. brucei*.

**Key words:** Transfer RNA gene; *Trypanosoma brucei*; RNA polymerase III promoter

### Introduction

Cytoplasmic tRNA molecules possess a number of invariant and semi-invariant features (for a review, see ref. 1). A combination of these conserved features allows tRNA sequences to be inferred from primary DNA sequence data. For example, cytoplasmic tRNA molecules are folded, by Watson-Crick intramolecular base pairing, into 'cloverleaf' secondary structures possessing four stems and three loops. The 5' and 3' ends of the tRNA form a 7-bp stem, which may determine amino acid specificity. Additionally, the nucleotides in the D-loop and dihydrouridine-loop are subject to constraints since they contain elements of the RNA polymerase III promoter. While the

predicted secondary structure of tRNAs is well defined, the tertiary structure of a tRNA has been experimentally determined in only a few cases [2,3].

The primary transcript from an eukaryotic nuclear tRNA gene is processed by the removal of 5'-leader sequences by RNase P followed by 3' processing [4], the 3'-terminal addition of a non-template-encoded, aminoacyl-accepting CCA. Subsequently specific nucleotides are modified and the tRNA is transported to the cytoplasm where it is amino-acylated.

An unusual feature of the trypanosome mitochondrial genome is the apparent absence of identifiable tRNA coding regions. Although the partial RNA sequence of the *Crithidia oncopelti* mitochondrial valine tRNA has been reported [5], no bona fide tRNA genes have been described in the trypanosomatid protozoa. The putative tRNA sequence found in the *Trypanosoma brucei* mitochondrial maxicircle [6] does not conform to a generalised tRNA structure. To address the question of tRNA structure in the nucleus and mitochondrion of *T. brucei*, we have identified the genes encoding the nuclear tRNA<sup>Gly</sup> and tRNA<sup>Leu</sup> species.

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**Note:** Nucleotide sequence data reported in this paper have been submitted to the EMBL database under the accession number X13750.

**Abbreviations:** DHU, dihydrouridine; pCp, cytidine 3',5'-bisphosphate; SDS, sodium dodecyl sulphate; SSC, saline sodium citrate; TψC, thymidine pseudouridine cytidine.

## Materials and Methods

**DNA manipulation.** Bloodstream form *T. brucei* (strain 427) was purified away from blood elements by DEAE chromatography [7]. *T. brucei* high-molecular-weight DNA was obtained as described [8]. The cosmid library was constructed in the vector c2XB [9] and propagated in *Escherichia coli* strain 490A. Approximately 5000 cosmid-containing colonies were immobilised on Whatman 541 paper [10] and hybridised with size-fractionated, pCp-labelled [11] tRNA. Subclones were made from cosmid DNA by ligation into the *Sma*I site of pBluescriptKS+ (Stratagene). Southern blots [12] were hybridised in Blotto [13] at 65°C. Washes were performed in 0.1 × SSC at 55°C.

DNA sequencing was performed by the dideoxy chain-termination method [14] (Sequenase™; US Biochemicals) on collapsed-supercoil plasmid DNA [15]. DNA sequence analysis was performed on the DSAS package (J. Neigel, University of Southwestern Louisiana). Predicted secondary structures were derived either by eye or by the computer package of Staden [16].

**RNA manipulation.** RNA was obtained from purified bloodstream form *T. brucei* by hot phenol extraction [17].

After electrophoresis of total *T. brucei* RNA on high-resolution, denaturing, 10% acrylamide gels (the first dimension gel of ref. 18), the low-molecular-weight region was transferred to Nytran membranes by electroblotting. After immobilisation of the RNA by UV irradiation, blots were hybridised in buffer containing 5 × SSC, 0.2% SDS, 1 × Denhardt's solution and 50% formamide at 37°C. Washes were performed in 1% SDS, 0.1 × SSC at 37°C.

## Results

**Isolation of *T. brucei* glycine and leucine tRNA genes.** Screening of the *T. brucei* cosmid library with pCp-labelled *T. brucei* tRNA yielded five strongly hybridising colonies which were purified by a second round of colony hybridisation. These putative tRNA-gene containing cosmids were isolated and subjected to restriction analysis,

which showed four of them to possess similar restriction patterns. The four overlapping cosmid clones were subsequently found to contain the tandemly repeated ribosomal RNA genes, which had been selected due to the presence, in the tRNA fraction, of the small ribosomal RNA 6 [19,20]. A Southern blot of the unique cosmid clone (cTtRNA2) probed with pCp-labelled tRNA revealed hybridisation to *Hae*III fragments of 0.8, 0.5 and 0.3 kb and *Alu*I fragments of 1.9, 1.2 and 0.45 kb. The 0.3-kb tRNA-containing *Hae*III fragment was subcloned into pKS+ (pTtRNA1.1).

**Sequence of *T. brucei* glycine and leucine tRNA genes.** Sanger sequencing of both strands of pTtRNA1.1 showed the insert to be 335 nucleotides long (Fig. 1A) and to contain two tRNA genes, which are encoded on the same strand of the DNA and are separated by 86 nucleotides. The inferred tRNA secondary structures (Fig. 1B) show all the invariant and semi-invariant features expected of a tRNA molecule. The glycine tRNA (anticodon UCC) is 72 bases in length and shows sequence identity with the heterologous glycine tRNAs (Fig. 2A) from both eukaryotes (e.g., rat; 72 bases, 72.2%) and prokaryotes (e.g. *E. coli*; 72 bases, 63.9%). The leucine tRNA (anticodon CAG) is 82 bases in length, while all other heterologous leucine tRNAs are larger due to additional bases in the extra-arm (Fig. 2B). The exception is *Xenopus*, to which the highest base identity (78.8%) with *T. brucei* was found.

As with all other eukaryotic tRNA genes, the *T. brucei* glycine and leucine tRNA genes do not encode the 3'-CCA found on the mature tRNA. The primary sequence also demonstrates the presence of Box A (TGGCnnAGTGG) and Box B (GTTTCRAnnCC) RNA polymerase III promoter elements [21] (see Fig. 1A), which are typical of eukaryote tRNA genes. Additionally, a run of at least five T residues is found at the 3'-terminus of both tRNA genes. The poly-T signal is associated with the termination of RNA polymerase III transcription in eukaryotes and also transcription termination in prokaryotes [22].

Confirmation that the glycine and leucine tRNA genes identified do indeed encode tRNA molecules is provided by Northern blot analysis of the

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HaeIII      [(tRNAGly)---->
1  GGOGCAGCG gcaatogtgg tccacoggtt aagatttcog ccttccaagc gggagaccog
           Box A
61  ggttccgactc coggogattg caCATTTTTT OGMTTTTATC ATTOGGCATT ATGTTATGCT
           Box B
           HindIII(AbaI)                               HaeIII      [(tRNALeu)-->
211 CTTGAAAAGC TTIGACACAA CATIGCAAAG TTAACTCAGG TGGOGGTGTg gcaagatggt
181 cgagtggctct aagacgtcac gttcaggtcg tcatctctcc ggaggcgtgg gttcaaaccc
           Box A                               Sau3A                               Box B
241 cactcttgtc aATATTTTTTG TOCGATCATA TOGGAICTAG OGMTTTCAAG TGIGGTCTCA
           HaeIII
301 ACOGTGCGCG AAGTGTCAAT AGGOGOGAAA ACAAGGCC 339

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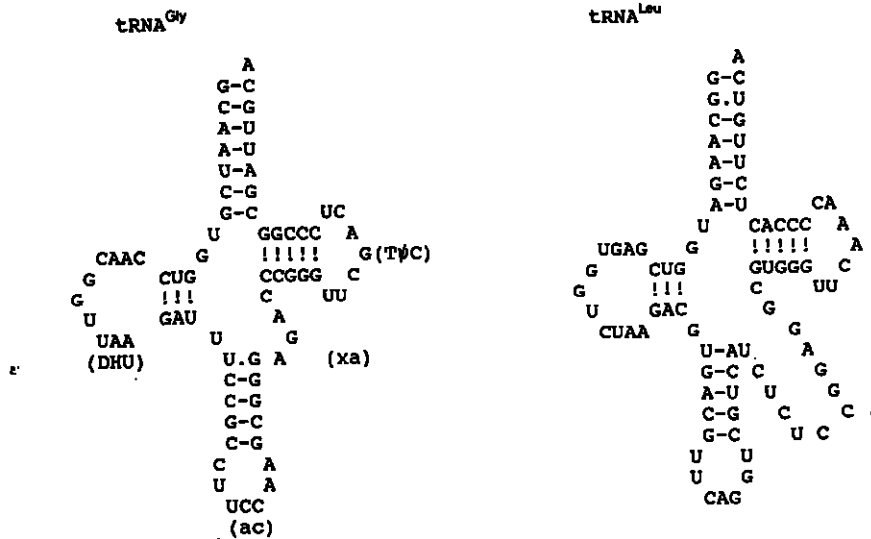


Fig. 1. (A) DNA sequence of pTtRNA1.1 (EMBL database accession No. X13750). DNA sequence was obtained on both strands. Inferred tRNA sequences are indicated by lower case lettering. Consensus RNA polymerase III Box A and Box B promoter elements are indicated by underlining. The glycine and leucine tRNA-specific probes used in blotting experiments comprise nucleotides 1-129 and 130-339, respectively. (B) Predicted secondary structure models of *T. brucei* glycine and leucine tRNAs. The dihydrouridine (DHU), anticodon (ac), variable (xa) and TψC (TψC) loops are indicated next to the glycine tRNA.

tRNA fraction of *T. brucei* RNA (Fig. 3). In the absence of external size markers, we can conclude that each probe detects a transcript in the tRNA fraction, and that the larger size of the leucine tRNA is consistent with the primary sequence data. Interestingly, the glycine tRNA probe also detects a minor transcript of smaller size which is still within the tRNA region.

**Genomic organisation of glycine and leucine tRNA genes.** Hybridisation of tRNA-specific probes to Southern blots of *T. brucei* genomic DNA indicates that both tRNA genes are members of multi-gene families (Fig. 4). A glycine-tRNA-specific probe reveals two major bands of hybridisation and at least two minor bands (lanes 1-4). A leu-

cine-tRNA-specific probe reveals three bands of approximately equivalent hybridisation with one stronger and one weaker band suggesting the possibility of six different genes (lanes 5-8). Furthermore, both probes hybridise to DNA from *Crithidia fasciculata* and *Leishmania tarentolae* (data not shown) indicating that both genes are highly conserved across kinetoplastid species.

## Discussion

By analysing two nuclear tRNA genes, we show that *T. brucei* possesses conventional tRNA genes whose transcripts may form typical cloverleaf structures. Both tRNA<sup>Gly</sup> and tRNA<sup>Leu</sup> genes appear to be transcribed and possess the signals re-

A. tRNA<sup>gly</sup> (TCC)

	aas	ds	dl	ds	acs	acl	acs	xa	tws	twl	tws	aas	#nt	%Identity				
Tb	GCA	AUC	GGT	CCA	CGG	TAA	GATT	TCC	GC	CTT	CCA	AGCGGG	GAGAC	CCGGGT	TCGACT	CCCGGCGATTGCA	72	-
Ec	**GGG	*A	*C**AT	**T**C**TT	*CC**A*****	T*AT	*TG*****	T*****	CT*CCC	**T				72	63.9			
Hv	**CCG	*****	T**T***	****CA	*TG*****	CAAT	T**T*****	T*****	A**CGG	****				71	69.9			
SM	AT	GATA	AAGTT	TT	G**AC	GGAT	T*****	A*ATTGA	TG**A*****	T**T**	CTATC	*AT		72	45.8			
Bm	**GT	*G****	GT**T**	C*GC	*AG	T*****	A*TT	T*****	T*****	C*AC	***			72	72.2			
Rt	**GT	*G****	AT*GT**	G*GC	*AG	T*****	A*TT	T*****	T*****	C*AC	***			72	72.2			

B. tRNA<sup>leu</sup> (CAG)

	aas	ds	dl	ds	acs	acl	acs	xa	tws	twl	tws	aas	#nt	%Identity				
Tb	GGCA	AGAT	GGT	CGAGT	GGT	CTA	AGAC	GTTC	CAGG	TCG	TCT	TCTCC	GGAG	G	CGTGGGT	CAAACCCCACTCTTGCA	82	-
Ec	*CG**G	***CG**A	*T***	.AG*CG**	CT*GC*****	GT*AG	*G**CTTAC	*GAC*	T*G*****	GT***	C*C*CG**			84	56.6			
An	*CGC	*AC**CG**A	*T***	.AG*CG**	CTAGA*****	TC*AG	*GGT*T*AC	GACTG	TCC*****	GT***	GGGT	*CCG**		84	47.0			
Xl	*T**G	*****	C***C	*****	G*CTG*****	CAG***	C**T***	*	*****	G**T*****	TC**A**			83	78.8			
Rt	*T**G	*****	C***C	*****	GCGCTG*****	CAG***	C**TA***	A*G*****	G**T*****	C**A**				85	75.5			

Fig. 2. Comparison of *T. brucei* glycine tRNA (A) and leucine tRNA (B) sequences with homologous tRNAs from other eukaryotes and prokaryotes. Tb, *Trypanosoma brucei*; Ec, *Escherichia coli*; Hv, *Halobacterium volcani*; SM, *Saccharomyces mitochondrion*; Bm, *Bombyx mori*; Rt, Rat; An, *Anacystis nidulans*; Xl, *Xenopus laevis*; # nt, number of nucleotides; \*, bases matching the Tb sequence; •, nucleotide absent; aas, amino acyl stem; ds, DHU stem; dl, DHU loop; acs, anticodon stem; acl, anticodon loop; xa, extra arm; tws, T $\Psi$ C stem; twl, T $\Psi$ C loop. % Identity is expressed as [number of matching nt/(number of species 1 (Tb RNA) + number of nt of species 2)/2]  $\times$  100. Heterologous tRNA sequences were extracted from the compilation of Sprinzl et al. [34].



Fig. 3. Northern blot analysis of *T. brucei* tRNAs. Total *T. brucei* RNA resolved on a 10% denaturing acrylamide gel was transferred to a nylon membrane and hybridised with a glycine tRNA-specific probe (lane 1) or a leucine tRNA-specific probe (lane 2). Lane 3 shows the ethidium bromide staining pattern of the RNA before transfer.

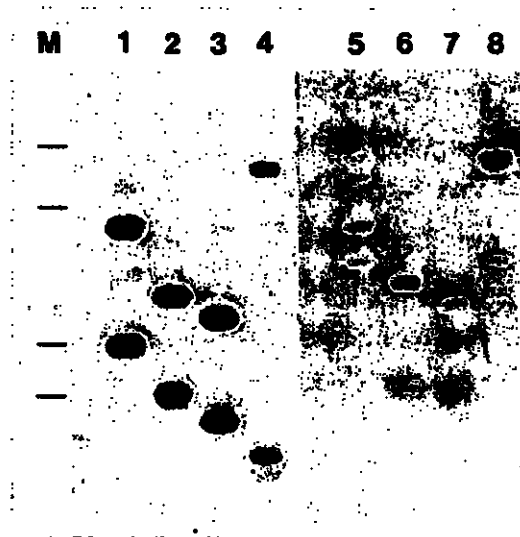


Fig. 4. Genomic organisation of the *T. brucei* glycine and leucine tRNA genes. *T. brucei* genomic DNA digested with *AluI* (lanes 1 and 5), *HaeIII* (lanes 2 and 6), *HinfI* (lanes 3 and 7) and *RsaI* (lanes 4 and 8) probed with glycine tRNA-specific probe (lanes 1-4) or leucine tRNA-specific probe (lanes 5-8). The size markers (lane M; phage  $\lambda$  DNA digested with *PstI*) are in descending order: 1.7 kb, 1.1 kb, 0.5 kb and 0.3 kb.

quired for transcription by a conventional RNA polymerase III. Thus with the identification of a gene encoding the largest subunit of RNA polymerase III in *T. brucei* [23,24] and the presence of Box A and Box C [25] promoter elements in the *T. brucei* 5S RNA gene [26,27] and an intermediate level of  $\alpha$ -amanitin resistance for 5S transcription [28], it appears that trypanosomes possess both conventional RNA polymerase III enzyme and templates.

The presence of multiple bands on genomic Southern blots is indicative of a family of closely related genes for each isoacceptor tRNA class. Since all six leucine codons are used in *T. brucei* [29], all the leucine tRNA genes may be accounted for by the bands of hybridisation in Fig. 4. The lack of hybridisation of the leucine-tRNA probe to a band at 1.9 kb in the *AluI* digest of genomic DNA may be explained by an *AluI* site in the genomic DNA, which is not accessible in the cloned DNA (see Fig. 1A).

The differential hybridisation seen with the glycine-tRNA-specific probe may be explained by either of two possibilities given that all four glycine codons are used in *T. brucei* [29]. Firstly the strong and weak bands of hybridisation may represent two distantly related families encoding glycine tRNA. Secondly, the presence of two tRNA<sup>Gly</sup> genes closely linked on the same restriction fragments would result in the same pattern, in which case a second glycine tRNA gene should be encoded on cTtRNA2. The weaker signals on the Southern blot may thus represent tRNA genes with lower sequence identity and possibly a different amino acid specificity. Although the tRNA<sup>Gly</sup> and tRNA<sup>Lcu</sup> genes are closely linked on clone pTtRNA1.1, the lack of hybridisation to other common bands in the genomic Southern blot (Fig. 4) suggests that other tRNA<sup>Gly</sup> genes are not closely linked to other tRNA<sup>Lcu</sup> genes.

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The faint smaller band seen on the Northern blot with the glycine tRNA-specific probe is apparently a very small tRNA and may represent a transcript from these distantly related genes. A precedent for the existence of a very small tRNA has been set. The mammalian mitochondrial tRNA<sup>Ser</sup> lacks the dihydrouridine loop and arm [30]. Furthermore, it has been inferred that all nematode mitochondrial tRNAs are missing the T $\psi$ C arm and loop structure, with the exception of tRNA<sup>Ser</sup> which, instead, lacks the DHU stem and loop [31].

Our results show that the *T. brucei* nuclear genome contains two tRNA genes which are conventional by all the criteria that we have applied to them. Since the *T. brucei* nuclear tRNA<sup>Lcu</sup> probe hybridizes to a mitochondrial tRNA fraction from *Leishmania tarentolae* [32], the clone described here may be used to address the origin of mitochondrial tRNAs in kinetoplastid protozoa. Alternative hypotheses for the origin of kinetoplastid mitochondrial tRNAs include: import of nuclear tRNAs (as has been described for *Tetrahymena* [18] and *Phaseolus* [33]), transcription from the minicircle component of the kinetoplast DNA network, or that primary mitochondrial transcripts are edited by extensive uridine addition or deletion.

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