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The complete genomes of *Lactobacillus plantarum* and *Lactobacillus johnsonii* reveal extensive differences in chromosome organization and gene content

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The first comprehensive comparative analysis of lactobacilli was done by comparing the genomes of *Lactobacillus plantarum* (3-3 Mb) and *Lactobacillus johnsonii* (2-0 Mb). *L. johnsonii* is predominantly found in the gastrointestinal tract, while *L. plantarum* is also found on plants and plant-derived material, and is used in a variety of industrial fermentations. The *L. plantarum* and *L. johnsonii* chromosomes have only 28 regions with conservation of gene order, totalling about 0-75 Mb; these regions are not co-linear, indicating major chromosomal rearrangements. Metabolic reconstruction indicates many differences between *L. johnsonii* and *L. plantarum*: numerous enzymes involved in sugar metabolism and in biosynthesis of amino acids, nucleotides, fatty acids and cofactors are lacking in *L. johnsonii*. Major differences were seen in the number and types of putative extracellular proteins, which are of interest because of their possible role in host–microbe interactions. The differences between *L. plantarum* and *L. johnsonii*, both in genome organization and gene content, are exceptionally large for two bacteria of the same genus, emphasizing the difficulty in taxonomic classification of lactobacilli.

INTRODUCTION

Lactobacilli belong to the lactic acid bacteria (LAB) and are members of the low-GC content Gram-positive bacteria.

Abbreviations: BDI, base deviation index; CDS, coding sequence; COG, Clusters of Orthologous Group; KEGG, Kyoto Encyclopedia of Genes and Genomes; LAB, lactic acid bacteria; PTS, phosphotransferase system.

Details of the size and location of conserved gene clusters in *L. plantarum* and *L. johnsonii* may be found in Supplementary Table S1; the number of proteins of *L. plantarum* and *L. johnsonii* for all COG classes in Supplementary Table S2; a KEGG comparison of major differences between *L. plantarum* and *L. johnsonii* in Supplementary Table S3; *L. johnsonii* and *L. plantarum* API 50 test results in Supplementary Table S4; the redundancy of enzymes involved in pyruvate metabolism in Supplementary Table S5; gene clusters encoding functionally related proteins present in *L. plantarum* but not in *L. johnsonii* and vice versa in Supplementary Table S6; lists of proteins unique to either *L. plantarum* or *L. johnsonii* in Supplementary Tables S7-S12; lists of proteins involved in the biosynthesis of polysaccharides, bacteriocins and prophages in Supplementary Table S13 with the online version of this paper at http://mic.sgmjournals.org.

Many are used in starter cultures for food and feed fermentations, and several species are frequently encountered in the human gastrointestinal tract (Vaughan et al., 2002). Some strains of LAB are marketed as probiotics, which are claimed to positively affect human and/or animal health (Braun-Fahrlander et al., 2002; Link-Amster et al., 1994). However, not much is known about the mechanisms by which these LAB affect the host.

Recently, the genomes of two members of the genus *Lactobacillus* have been completely sequenced: *Lactobacillus plantarum* WCFS1 (Kleerebezem et al., 2003) and *Lactobacillus johnsonii* NCC533 (Pridmore et al., 2004). *L. johnsonii* NCC533, isolated from human faeces, has been extensively studied for its probiotic activities, including immunomodulation (Haller et al., 2000a, 2000b) and interaction with the human host (Ibnou-Zekri et al., 2003). *L. plantarum* WCFS1 was isolated from human saliva. *L. plantarum* is a versatile bacterium that is found in a variety of ecological niches, ranging from vegetable and plant fermentations to the human gastrointestinal tract.
This flexibility of _L. plantarum_ is reflected by its relatively large genome size, a large number of proteins involved in regulation and transport functions, and a high metabolic potential (Kleerebezem et al., 2003).

In order to expand our understanding of the molecular evolution, diversity, function and adaptation of lactobacilli to specific environments, we have performed a whole-genome comparison of _L. plantarum_ and _L. johnsonii_. In addition, we compared the proteins of these two organisms to the draft sequences of other LAB genomes (Klaenhammer et al., 2002). We provide a first comprehensive view of differences on the genome level in lactobacilli, and evidence for large genetic diversity in this genus. We identify features underlying the large difference in genome size and gene content in lactobacilli, and provide a first insight into the set of genes and functions which could be specific for lactic acid bacteria. This knowledge provides numerous leads for targeted experimental verification of unique or common physiological properties.

**METHODS**

**Genome sequences.** Complete genome sequences of _L. plantarum_ WCSS1 (Kleerebezem et al., 2003) accession number AL935263, _L. johnsonii_ NCC533 (Pridmore et al., 2004) accession number AE017198, Bacillus subtilis 128, Enterococcus faecalis V583, Listeria monocytogenes EGDe and Lactococcus lactis IL1403 were obtained from GenBank Entrez Genomes (http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/genomes/MICROBES/Complete.html). The gene ID numbers used in the text to refer to specific _L. plantarum_ and _L. johnsonii_ genes are the same as those used in the original papers (Kleerebezem et al., 2003; Pridmore et al., 2004). Genome comparison with unfinished LAB genomes utilized sequence data of Lactobacillus brevis ATCC367, Lactobacillus casei ATCC334, Lactobacillus delbrueckii ATCCBAA-365, Lactobacillus gasseri ATCC-33323, Leuconostoc mesenteroides ATCC-8293, Oenococcus oeni PSU-1 and Pediococcus pentosaceus from the ERGO database (http://ergo.integratedgenomics.com/ERGO/), originally produced by the US Department of Energy Joint Genome Institute (http://www.jgi.doe.gov). For comparative purposes, all species of the genus _Lactobacillus_, _Lactococcus_ and _Leuconostoc_, as well as the bacteria _Streptococcus thermophilus_, _Oenococcus oeni_, _Bifidobacterium longum_ and _Pediococcus pentosaceus_, are considered to be LAB (Klaenhammer et al., 2002). Fig. 1 shows the 16S rRNA tree of the relevant organisms.

The coding sequences (CDSs) of the _L. johnsonii_ genome have been identified using FrameD (Schiez et al., 2003), while the CDSs of the _L. plantarum_ genome have been identified using Glimmer (Delcher et al., 1999), which could lead to some erroneous comparison of the CDSs. However, for both organisms the positions of CDSs on the genome have been manually adjusted based on the presence of a plausible ribosome-binding site and on BLAST alignments with homologues (Kleerebezem et al., 2003; Pridmore et al., 2004), reducing the impact of this difference in CDS identification. Moreover, for both organisms the minimal size of a CDS was set at 30 codons.

**Genome comparisons.** Orthologous relationships were detected by a previously described method (Snel et al., 2002) using the Smith & Waterman sequence comparison algorithm (Smith & Waterman, 1981) against the NCBI Clusters of Orthologous Group (COG) database (Tatusov et al., 2001). The functional classification provided by the COG database was used for the functional comparison of _L. plantarum_ and _L. johnsonii_ on a genome-wide scale.

Homology relationships were established using BLASTP (Altschul et al., 1990) and Smith & Waterman sequence comparison. Homologues were detected with a threshold of 1E-10; a gene was considered organism specific when it had no Smith & Waterman hits at all, or only hits with an e-score higher than 1E-10 to proteins of other organisms in the non-redundant proteins databases (SWISS-PROT, TrEMBL and TrEMBL updates) (Boeckmann et al., 2003) or the LAB genomes taken from the ERGO database. Proteins were considered LAB-specific when they did not have a Smith & Waterman hit with an e-score lower than 1E-10 in a search against SWISS-PROT, TrEMBL, TrEMBL updates and the LAB sequences taken from the ERGO database.

Whole genomes were compared at the nucleotide level using the Dotter software (Sonnhammer & Durbin, 1995) with default values. A bidirectional best-hit approach was used to identify genome synteny at the protein level. The results of this analysis were visualized using the Artemis Comparison Tool (http://www.sanger.ac.uk/Software/ACT/).

Transporter classification was performed according to the TC-DB scheme (Busch & Saier, 2002). All proteins were searched against the TC-DB Database Release 1.5.1 using BLASTP with a threshold of 1E-4, followed by manual curation: false positive hits were removed manually when clear evidence suggested that they were not related to transport function.

Signal peptides were predicted using SignalP (Nielsen et al., 1997).

Base deviation analysis of genes was performed by calculating a chi-squared index based on the expected and observed frequency for each nucleotide (Tettelin et al., 2001).

**Synchronizing annotation.** The two genomes compared in this study were initially analysed using different ontologies and annotations (Kleerebezem et al., 2003; Pridmore et al., 2004). To facilitate functional comparison of _L. plantarum_ and _L. johnsonii_, the annotation of proteins found to be homologous, but having different annotations in the two genomes, was manually verified and corrected where necessary. This resulted in an improved annotation of both genomes, in particular for the functional class ‘regulation’ and for the assignment of EC numbers, and made automated detection of functional differences possible.

![Fig. 1. 16S rRNA-based phylogenetic tree (unrooted). Sequences were extracted from the European rRNA database (Wuys et al., 2004) and aligned using CLUSTAL W (Thompson et al., 1994). The tree was visualized using TreeView (Page, 1996).](image)
The main features of the genomes of *L. plantarum* WCFS1 and *L. johnsonii* NCC533 are shown in Table 1. *L. plantarum* WCFS1 has a genome of over 3·3 Mb, which is exceptionally large for a *Lactobacillus* species, since the genome size of lactobacilli is generally between 1·8 and 2·5 Mb (Klaenhammer et al., 2002). At the DNA level, *L. johnsonii* and *L. plantarum* are very divergent. A DNA dot plot comparison of the two genomes (data not shown) shows a low overall sequence similarity. Much closer DNA homology has been observed between *L. johnsonii* and other members of the *Lactobacillus acidophilus* family (Pridmore et al., 2004).

### Table 1. Genome features of *L. plantarum* WCFS1 and *L. johnsonii* NCC533

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Genome feature</th>
<th>Strain</th>
<th><em>L. plantarum</em> WCFS1</th>
<th><em>L. johnsonii</em> NCC533</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Length (bp)</td>
<td></td>
<td>3 308 274</td>
<td>1 992 676</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coding density (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>84·1</td>
<td>89·3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G+C content (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>45·6</td>
<td>34·9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predicted CDSs</td>
<td></td>
<td>3 009</td>
<td>1 821</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tRNAs</td>
<td></td>
<td>62</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rRNA operons</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phage genes</td>
<td></td>
<td>159 (2 prophages, 2 remnant)</td>
<td>54 (2 prophages, 1 remnant)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IS elements</td>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reconstruction of metabolic pathways. EC numbers were extracted from the genome annotations and manually curated. They were then automatically mapped onto the Kyoto Encyclopedia of Genes and Genomes (KEGG) metabolic pathways (Kanehisa et al., 2002) for visualization and identification of differences in metabolism between *L. plantarum* and *L. johnsonii*. In cases of predicted missing key enzymes in one of the two organisms, a further effort was made to identify homologous candidate enzymes by extensive manual searches with BLASTp and HHMERS (Eddy, 1996; Sonnhammer et al., 1998).

Sugar utilization. API 50 analysis of sugar utilization was performed using the supplier’s protocol (BioMérieux Benelux). Additional sugar fermentation profiles were obtained from the literature (Fujisawa et al., 1992; Kleerebezem et al., 2003).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### General genome features

The main features of the genomes of *L. plantarum* WCFS1 and *L. johnsonii* NCC533 are shown in Table 1. *L. plantarum* WCFS1 has a genome of over 3·3 Mb, which is exceptionally large for a *Lactobacillus* species, since the genome size of lactobacilli is generally between 1·8 and 2·5 Mb (Klaenhammer et al., 2002). At the DNA level, *L. johnsonii* and *L. plantarum* are very divergent. A DNA dot plot comparison of the two genomes (data not shown) shows a low overall sequence similarity. Much closer DNA homology has been observed between *L. johnsonii* and other members of the *Lactobacillus acidophilus* family (Pridmore et al., 2004).

### Homologous proteins

Evolutionary distances can be measured by the comparison of gene repertoires (Tamames, 2001). Closely related species share a large proportion of genes; in contrast, distantly related species should have lost a significant fraction of the genes inherited from their last common ancestor, resulting in a low proportion of shared genes. An overview of the percentage of homologues shared between the various genomes is given in Table 2. Of all the proteins encoded by the *L. johnsonii* genome, 83·% have a homologue in *L. gasseri*, 70·% have a homologue in *L. plantarum*, 62·% have a homologue in *E. faecalis* and 58·% have a homologue in *L. monocytogenes*. In contrast, when the *L. plantarum* genome is used as query, the large difference in genome size between *L. plantarum* and *L. johnsonii* leads to *L. plantarum* sharing more homologues with the larger genomes of *E. faecalis* (58·%), *L. monocytogenes* (57·%) and *B. subtilis* (52·%), than with *L. johnsonii* (51·%).

### Genome synteny

On an evolutionary time scale, protein sequences are more conserved than DNA sequences. It is possible to detect gene clusters encoding homologous proteins in related organisms even where low-level DNA conservation makes sequence alignment very difficult. These syntenic regions can provide insight into functions of the proteins comprising them: for example, genes already described in one organism might be annotated correctly in a second organism based on synteny. This principle has been used in the prediction of gene function by several methods, such as Rosetta Stone (Marcotte et al., 1999) and the conserved gene neighbours method (Dandekar et al., 1998; Overbeek et al., 1999). The selective advantage of physical proximity of genes for co-regulation makes some gene clusters less prone to breakup than others, thus extending the range of evolutionary distance over which sequence conservation is detectable.

A dot plot comparison at the protein level of the genomes of *L. plantarum* and *L. johnsonii* (Fig. 2) shows no large-scale conservation of gene order, but only conservation of genes in clusters, confirming the relatively large phylogenetic distance between *L. plantarum* and *L. johnsonii*. The lack of large-scale gene order conservation between *L. plantarum* and *L. johnsonii* is in strong contrast to the whole chromosome alignment of *L. johnsonii* and *L. gasseri*,
which shows a high degree of conservation and synteny over the whole genome (Pridmore et al., 2004). L. johnsonii and L. plantarum share only 28 large regions of conserved gene order, ranging in size from 7 (arbitrarily defined as minimum) to 75 genes, and encoding nearly 550 conserved proteins. Details of the size and location of these clusters may be found in Supplementary Table S1 with the online version of this paper at http://mic.sgmjournals.org.

Although the order of the orthologous genes in these clusters is conserved, some of the clusters contain insertions in one of the two bacterial chromosome sequences. Fig. 3 shows an example of such a cluster in which some of the genes unique for L. plantarum are found inserted in a conserved cluster. In ten of the conserved clusters, most genes in the cluster are functionally related (Supplementary Table S1), while the residual clusters contain genes that encode proteins involved in different cellular functions. The former clusters encompass the well-documented Nus-A/Inf-B cluster (Shazand et al., 1993) and the macromolecular synthesis cluster (Metzger et al., 1994). Most of the 28 clusters correspond to regions of protein sequence conservation across genus borders in Gram-positive bacteria, as many clusters are also found in the B. subtilis, E. faecalis and L. monocytogenes genomes (data not shown). This low degree of synteny between L. plantarum and L. johnsonii suggests that they are only marginally more related to each other than to the other Gram-positive bacteria.

Clusters of orthologous genes conserved between L. plantarum and L. johnsonii are located near the diagonals between the origin and terminus of replication showing a weak X-alignment pattern between the chromosomes (see Fig. 2). This observation indicates multiple chromosomal inversions pivoted on the terminus and origin of replication, causing major rearrangements. It has been suggested that this phenomenon is mostly caused by recombination occurring between, or close to, replication forks (Tillier & Collins, 2000). The degree of synteny can be related to the phylogenetic distance of the organisms: closer genomes have a more distinct X-alignment than more distant genomes (Suyama & Bork, 2001).

A similar synteny analysis for L. johnsonii NCC533 or L. plantarum WCFS1 with E. faecalis showed lower conservation, but many of the same clusters could be identified (data not shown). The number of conserved clusters, as well as the number of syntenic genes in the clusters, is smaller than in the johnsonii/plantarum comparison, but the degree of overall conservation corroborated well the fact that the genus Enterococcus is closely related to but distinct from Lactobacillus (Klein, 2003). Very limited

![Fig. 2. Whole-genome protein comparison of L. johnsonii NCC533 and L. plantarum WCFS1 using BLASTP. Dots represent homologous proteins. The position of a dot represents the position of the homologous proteins on the L. johnsonii and L. plantarum chromosomes. Base numbering starts at the origin of replication. The hits were limited to those of >50% protein alignment length.](image-url)
synteny could be detected with L. lactis or streptococci (data not shown).

Phylogenetic trees based on 16S RNA (Fig. 1) or highly conserved genes support the relatively large phylogenetic distance between L. plantarum and L. johnsonii suggested by the protein dot plot. An unrooted tree based on the atpD gene (part of the highly conserved ATP synthase cluster) shows L. johnsonii to be closely related to L. gasseri, but also shows a relatively large distance between L. johnsonii and L. plantarum (Siezen et al., 2004), in agreement with Fig. 1. The phylogenetic distance between L. plantarum and L. johnsonii is in fact similar to the distance between L. plantarum and E. faecalis. These findings re-emphasize the difficulties in establishing the taxonomy of lactobacilli, and show that the current classification of the Lactobacillus genus, based on morphology and lactic acid production, is not always supported by phylogenetic relationships based on sequence homology and genome synteny.

Functional comparison of proteomes

The percentage of the total number of proteins of L. plantarum and L. johnsonii belonging to selected COG functional classes is shown in Fig. 4. Only classes displaying large differences between the two organisms are shown; Supplementary Table S2 shows the number of proteins of L. plantarum and L. johnsonii for all COG classes. This overview gives an indication of the differences in focus on metabolism and other cellular functions of these bacteria. Compared to L. johnsonii, L. plantarum has a relatively high number of proteins for carbohydrate, amino acid and lipid metabolism. Due to its smaller genome size, L. johnsonii has a higher percentage of genes involved in 'core functions' such as replication and translation.

Metabolic pathways

Metabolic reconstruction can provide insights into the differences and similarities in the metabolic potential of L. plantarum and L. johnsonii, which can be helpful in both explaining observed physiological differences between the two species and in the design of experimental studies to investigate genotype–phenotype relationships.

The mapping of enzymic functions on the metabolic pathways provided by the KEGG database resulted in the identification of a set of enzymes required for known biochemical pathways. The main differences between L. johnsonii and L. plantarum are listed in Supplementary Table S3. The classes and metabolic pathways that display striking differences between the two organisms will be described in some detail below.

The L. plantarum genome encodes 268 proteins predicted to be involved in the metabolism and transport of amino acids, while the L. johnsonii genomes encodes only 125. L. plantarum encodes the enzymes required for the biosynthesis of all amino acids, with the exception of leucine, isoleucine and valine. In contrast, L. johnsonii is predicted to be incapable of synthesizing most, if not all, of the 20 standard amino acids. This reflects the environmental niches in which the bacteria live. L. johnsonii typically is found only in the gut, although recent reports (Guan le et al., 2003; Meroth et al., 2003) suggest that L. johnsonii might also occur in other nutrient-rich environments, where it can take up amino acids and peptides from its environment. To this end, L. johnsonii has an extracellular, cell-bound protease to liberate these peptides from proteinaceous substrates, and more intracellular peptidases for degradation of imported peptides than L. plantarum (Kleerebezem et al., 2003; Pridmore et al., 2004). In contrast,
*L. plantarum* is also found in other environments, such as on plants and plant-derived materials, where amino acids and peptides are not as readily available, and hence has retained more amino acid biosynthetic capability.

While the *L. plantarum* genome encodes 90 proteins predicted to be involved in the transport and metabolism of vitamins and cofactors, the *L. johnsonii* genome encodes only 30. For instance, all the enzymes necessary for the biosynthesis of folate are present in *L. plantarum*. In contrast, *L. johnsonii* has only a few enzymes that could have a function in this pathway, but all of these enzymes could also have functions in other processes. This suggests that *L. plantarum* is capable of synthesizing its own folate, while *L. johnsonii* is not, which has recently been confirmed experimentally (Sybesma et al., 2003).

Both *L. johnsonii* and *L. plantarum* have the capacity to synthesize pyrimidines *de novo*. However, only the *L. plantarum* genome encodes the proteins essential for *de novo* synthesis of purines from phosphoribosyl pyrophosphate; *L. johnsonii* needs inosine, which can be converted to IMP in a single enzymic step. This is consistent with the observation that *L. johnsonii* needs to obtain purines or their precursors from its environment (Elli et al., 2000).

The *L. plantarum* genome encodes 13 proteins predicted to be involved in the biosynthesis of fatty acids, while the *L. johnsonii* genome encodes only one. However, the route by which *L. johnsonii* acquires fatty acids is still unknown.

*L. plantarum* can utilize a much wider variety of sugars than *L. johnsonii* (Supplementary Table S4). This corroborates the observation that many more proteins involved in the uptake, interconversion and degradation of sugars are encoded by the *L. plantarum* genome than by the *L. johnsonii* genome: the *L. plantarum* genome encodes 342 proteins of the COG class ‘carbohydrate transport and metabolism’, while the *L. johnsonii* genome encodes only 196.

*L. plantarum* has a more versatile pyruvate metabolism than *L. johnsonii* (Fig. 5). Both *L. plantarum* and *L. johnsonii* can convert pyruvate to L- and D-lactate, but *L. johnsonii* lacks the pyruvate dehydrogenase complex and other enzymes required for the conversion of pyruvate to acetate, acetaldehyde and acetyl-coenzyme A. Moreover, *L. plantarum* has a much higher redundancy of enzymes involved in pyruvate metabolism (Supplementary Table S5). *L. plantarum* is a facultative heterofermentative organism, capable of mixed-acid fermentation forming lactate, formate and/or acetate depending on environmental conditions, while *L. johnsonii* is an obligate homofermentative organism, capable of homolactic fermentation only. The lack of the pyruvate dehydrogenase complex in *L. johnsonii* is consistent with the anaerobic environment in the gastrointestinal tract.

**Cellular transport**

Transporters enable uptake of essential nutrients, ions and metabolites, as well as the expulsion of toxic compounds,
cell-envelope macromolecules and the end products of cellular metabolism. Putative transporters have been identified in \textit{L. johnsonii} and \textit{L. plantarum} by comparison with the Transport Classification DataBase (TC-DB; Busch & Saier, 2002) (Table 3). \textit{L. johnsonii} contains 286 genes associated with various transport systems, accounting for more than 15% of its total CDSs, which is proportionally slightly more than \textit{L. plantarum} (473 proteins, 13%). Both numbers compare well with other organisms of similar genome size living in nutrient-rich environments, such as the cheese starter \textit{Lactococcus lactis} (11% transporters; Bolotin et al., 2001) and the oral pathogen \textit{Streptococcus mutans} (15%; Ajdić et al., 2002).

The increased transport potential of \textit{L. plantarum} is primarily due to an increased redundancy of transport

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3. Summary of transporters encoded in the genomes of \textit{L. plantarum} and \textit{L. johnsonii}</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transporter class</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Channel proteins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electrochemical potential-driven transporters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary active transporters*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sugar-transporting phosphotransferase systems (PTS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transmembrane electron carriers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessory factors involved in transport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incompletely characterized transport systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Includes 147 and 105 ABC transporter proteins, respectively.
proteins. For instance, \textit{L. plantarum} encodes six glycerol-uptake facilitator proteins, compared to a single protein in \textit{L. johnsonii}. This observation suggests the importance of glycerol uptake in \textit{L. plantarum}.

The most notable electrochemical potential-driven transporters in \textit{L. johnsonii} are two conjugated bile salt–proton symporters (LJ0057 and LJ0058), which have been found to be unique proteins of the \textit{Lactobacillus acidophilus} group of organisms (Pridmore \textit{et al.}, 2004). Striking differences are found in the number of multidrug/oligosaccharidyl-lipid/polysaccharide flippase superfamily, the auxin-efflux carrier family and the drug/metabolite transporter superfamily of transporters in \textit{L. plantarum}. The \textit{L. plantarum} genome encodes 5, 4 and 11 proteins belonging to these families, respectively, whereas the \textit{L. johnsonii} genome encodes only one protein of each family. Primary active transporters (mainly ABC transporters: 147 and 105 proteins in \textit{L. plantarum} and \textit{L. johnsonii}, respectively) represent the largest group of transporters in both lactobacilli. In \textit{L. johnsonii} and \textit{L. plantarum}, 16 and 25 complete PEP-dependent, phosphoryl transfer-driven group translocators (phosphotransferase system, PTS) systems were identified, respectively, including multiple systems for the uptake of glucose, mannose, fructose, and β-glucosides, and single systems for celllobiose, sucrose, and galactitol.

### Extracellular proteins

Extracellular proteins are considered to be important for interaction of bacteria with their environment, for example in adhesion and communication. This makes them of special interest in the case of lactobacilli, because they may be involved in host–microbe and microbe–microbe interactions, such as in the gastrointestinal tract or on plant materials. Putative extracellular proteins of \textit{L. plantarum} and \textit{L. johnsonii} were identified by the presence of a Sec-pathway-dependent signal peptide. Both proteins that are secreted into the environment and proteins that become attached to the cell surface fall into this category. The latter were identified by searching for cell-anchoring domains, such as the N-terminal lipoprotein motif for anchoring to the cell membrane (Sutcliffe \& Russell, 1995) and the C-terminal LPxTG motif for anchoring to peptidoglycan (Navarre \& Schneewind, 1999). The \textit{L. plantarum} and \textit{L. johnsonii} genomes are predicted to encode 211 (Kleerebezem \textit{et al.}, 2003) and 117 putative extracellular proteins, respectively. Nearly 90% of these proteins in both species are predicted to contain at least one type of cell-wall anchoring domain.

A comparison of the putative extracellular proteins encoded in both genomes is summarized in Table 4. The set of extracellular proteins of known function is very similar in

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Functional Class</th>
<th>Number in:</th>
<th>\textit{L. plantarum}</th>
<th>\textit{L. johnsonii}</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABC transporters, substrate-binding domain</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regulators*</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enzymes, known functions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proteases</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transpeptidases</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cell-wall hydrolases</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous, known functions</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown function, present in both genomes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homologues, singles</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homologues, families†</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSH1 family</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSH2 family</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WY-domain family</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown function, present in single genome</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>117</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Membrane-anchored proteins with extracellular transcriptional attenuator domain (Pfam PF03816).
†CSH1, cell-surface hydrolase family 1: contains active site triad Ser, Asp and His residues and consensus GxSHG typical of hydrolases (e.g. lipase, esterase). CSH2, cell-surface hydrolase family 2: contains active site triad Ser, Asp and His residues and consensus GxSMG typical of hydrolases (e.g. lipase, esterase). WY, C-terminal cell-surface binding domain (Jankovic \textit{et al.}, 2003).
both lactobacilli, although *L. plantarum* has more paralogues for several of these known functions. However, the majority (55–65%) of putative extracellular proteins are of unknown function (Table 4). Some of these are present in both lactobacilli, either as single copies of orthologues, or as multiple copies (paralogues) belonging to different families. Two families of putative cell-surface hydrolases (CSP-1 and CSP-2) are detected which have sequence characteristics of lipases or esterases (Anthonisen et al., 1995; Wong & Schotz, 2002). It is striking to note that the majority of extracellular proteins with unknown function are not shared by *L. plantarum* and *L. johnsonii*, but only occur in one of the two bacteria.

The C-terminal LPxTG motif for covalent binding to peptidoglycan is present in 25 and 14 extracellular proteins of *L. plantarum* and *L. johnsonii*, respectively. Generally, these are large, multi-domain, repeat-containing proteins (Kleerebezem et al., 2003; Pridmore et al., 2004). Again, there is very little homology between the LPxTG proteins of *L. plantarum* and those of *L. johnsonii*, other than in the peptidoglycan attachment motif.

### Regulators

Regulatory proteins play an important role in the adaptation of an organism to different environments. The *L. plantarum* genome is predicted to encode 264 regulators (9.4% of all proteins), while the *L. johnsonii* genome has only 114 putative regulators (6%), as summarized in Supplementary Table S6. This agrees with the general observation that large genomes have a relatively high number of proteins involved in transcription and regulation (Konstantinidis & Tiedje, 2004; van Nimwegen, 2003). Besides the difference in genome size, the different lifestyles of *L. plantarum* and *L. johnsonii* also contribute to this difference. The number of proteins predicted to be involved in the regulation of sugar and energy metabolism is especially high in *L. plantarum*. This is in agreement with the differences found in sugar metabolism in the two organisms: *L. plantarum* can utilize a much wider variety of sugars than *L. johnsonii* (Supplementary Table S4). *L. plantarum* with its free-living lifestyle needs to be capable of dealing with many different environmental circumstances (Boneca et al., 2003), and apparently has both the metabolic capacity and the regulatory machinery to deal with adaptation to different niches, while *L. johnsonii* does not need a complex regulatory apparatus because of the relatively stable environment in the gastrointestinal tract.

### LAB-specific and unique genes

A Smith & Waterman homology search was used to identify proteins unique to either *L. plantarum* or *L. johnsonii*, and proteins unique to LAB (Table 5). The table lists the number of proteins that are present in either *L. plantarum* or *L. johnsonii* and at least one other LAB, but without homologues in organisms not considered as LAB. It also lists the number of proteins found to be unique to either *L. plantarum* or *L. johnsonii*. The individual proteins for these categories can be found in Supplementary Tables S7–S12. The result of this analysis depends of course on the number of genomes available at the time of comparison, and is only preliminary, since many of the LAB genomes in the ERGO database were less than 100% complete at the time of this analysis.

We identified 181 and 243 genes in the *L. plantarum* and *L. johnsonii* genomes, respectively, that encode proteins with homologues only in other LAB. Of those, only about 40 proteins are shared between *L. plantarum* and *L. johnsonii* (Table 5). In contrast, the *L. plantarum* genome encodes 143 proteins with homologues only in other LAB, but without a homologue in *L. johnsonii*. This number is much

### Table 5. Unique and LAB-specific proteins in *L. plantarum* and *L. johnsonii*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proteins</th>
<th>Number in:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>L. plantarum</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of proteins</td>
<td>3009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proteins with homologues in non-LAB</td>
<td>2407</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homologues in both <em>L. plantarum</em> and <em>L. johnsonii</em></td>
<td>1549</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homologues in <em>L. plantarum</em>, but not in <em>L. johnsonii</em></td>
<td>858</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homologues in <em>L. johnsonii</em>, but not in <em>L. plantarum</em></td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proteins with homologues only in other LAB<em>a</em></td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homologues in both <em>L. plantarum</em> and <em>L. johnsonii</em></td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homologues in <em>L. plantarum</em>, but not in <em>L. johnsonii</em></td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homologues in <em>L. johnsonii</em>, but not in <em>L. plantarum</em></td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genome-specific proteins†</td>
<td>421</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*a*See Supplementary Tables S7, S8, S10 and S11 for details.

†See Supplementary Tables S9 and S12 for details.
lower than the 196 LAB-specific proteins encoded by *L. johnsonii* without homologues in *L. plantarum*, especially considering the relatively large size of the *L. plantarum* genome compared to the *L. johnsonii* genome. This difference is caused by the close relatedness of the *L. johnsonii* and *L. gasseri* genomes; these two organisms share the same niche and have a very similar genetic make-up and genome organization (Pridmore *et al.*, 2004). Moreover, this also explains the relatively low number of unique genes in *L. johnsonii*.

Many of the proteins present in *L. plantarum* but absent in *L. johnsonii*, or vice versa, are grouped in clusters on the genome. A large number of these clustered unique genes encode functionally related proteins, such as those involved in the biosynthesis of polysaccharides, bacteriocins and prophages (Supplementary Table S13). In *L. plantarum*, such clusters frequently have a high base-deviation index (BDI), suggesting horizontal transfer (Kleerebezem *et al.*, 2003). In *L. johnsonii* however, only the polysaccharide biosynthesis cluster (LJ1027–1047) has a high BDI.

Most of the proteins predicted to be LAB specific are of unknown function (Supplementary Tables S7–S12). The identification of structural features, such as signal peptides, transmembrane helices and cell-wall anchors, and conserved domains/motifs in these proteins, such as those involved in the binding of ATP, DNA and carbohydrates, could be used to predict their function and to identify potentially interesting targets for future research. In this way, the preliminary analysis of LAB-specific genes described here can serve as a starting point for a more comprehensive study of LAB-specific proteins and gene clusters, once the complete genome sequences of many LAB species become available (Klaenhammer *et al.*, 2002).

**Concluding remarks**

The ability of *L. plantarum* to survive in many different environments is reflected by the much more elaborate metabolic, regulatory and transport machinery compared to that of *L. johnsonii*. The differences between *L. plantarum* and *L. johnsonii*, both in genome organization and in gene content, are exceptionally large for two bacteria of the same genus (Suyama & Bork, 2001). Similar differences have been reported only in streptococci (Tettelin *et al.*, 2002). This low degree of synteny between *L. plantarum* and *L. johnsonii* suggests that they are only marginally more related to each other than to other Gram-positive bacteria. These findings emphasize the difficulty in taxonomic classification of lactobacilli.

Overall, the genome-wide comparison of two complete *Lactobacillus* genomes has provided unique information on the relatedness and differences between the two species. This has led to insight into the genomic adaptation to ecological niches of *L. plantarum* and *L. johnsonii*, and provides leads for targeted experimental studies.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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**REFERENCES**


