Complete DNA sequences of the mitochondrial genomes of the pathogenic yeasts *Candida orthopsilosis* and *Candida metapsilosis*: insight into the evolution of linear DNA genomes from mitochondrial telomere mutants

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**ABSTRACT**

We determined complete mitochondrial DNA sequences of the two yeast species, *Candida orthopsilosis* and *Candida metapsilosis*, and compared them with the linear mitochondrial genome of their close relative, *C.parapsilosis*. Mitochondria of all the three species harbor compact genomes encoding the same set of genes arranged in the identical order. Differences in the length of these genomes result mainly from the presence/absence of introns. Multiple alterations were identified also in the sequences of the ribosomal and transfer RNAs, and proteins. However, the most striking feature of *C.orthopsilosis* and *C.metapsilosis* is the existence of strains differing in the molecular form of the mitochondrial genome (circular-mapping versus linear). Their analysis opens a unique window for understanding the role of mitochondrial telomeres in the stability and evolution of molecular architecture of the genome. Our results indicate that the circular-mapping mitochondrial genome derived from the linear form by intramolecular end-to-end fusions. Moreover, we suggest that the linear mitochondrial genome evolved from a circular-mapping form present in a common ancestor of the three species and, at the same time, the emergence of mitochondrial telomeres enabled the formation of linear monomeric DNA forms. In addition, comparison of isogenic *C.metapsilosis* strains differing in the form of the organellar genome suggests a possibility that, under some circumstances, the linearity and/or the presence of telomeres provide a competitive advantage over a circular-mapping mitochondrial genome.

**INTRODUCTION**

Mitochondrial genomes vary in size, gene content as well as their molecular form. The latter is represented by a number of structures such as monogenomic circular molecules typical for animals (1), concatenated networks of circles seen in kinetoplastids (2), concatemeric linear molecules heterogeneous in size displaying circular physical maps detected in most of fungal and plant species (3,4) and linear molecules with defined terminal structures observed in a range of phylogenetically diverse taxa (5). Interestingly, the form of mitochondrial genome may differ in closely related organisms or even within the same species (6). However, the biological significance of different molecular forms of the organellar genome remains obscure.

Recently, we determined the complete mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) sequence of the pathogenic yeast *Candida parapsilosis* (7). This mitochondrial genome is represented by 30.9 kb linear double-stranded DNA molecules terminating with arrays of tandem repeats of a 738 bp unit termed mitochondrial telomeres. The very end of the molecule terminates with a single stranded 5’ overhang of ~110 nt (8,9). Our previous studies indicated that the ends of *C.parapsilosis* linear mtDNA molecules are protected by mitochondrial telomere-binding protein (mtTBP) (8-10) and telomeric loop (t-loop) structures (11). In addition to linear DNA molecules, two-dimensional gel electrophoresis and electron microscopy
demonstrated that \textit{C.parapsilosis} mitochondria harbor series of double-stranded circular DNA molecules derived from the sequence of the mitochondrial telomere thus forming integral multimers of the 738 bp unit that we named telomeric circles (t-circles) (12,13). The t-circles were shown to replicate independently of the linear mtDNA via a rolling-circle strategy thus generating arrays of telomeric repeats that may recombine with the ends of the linear mtDNA molecules to extend their termini. As mitochondria of \textit{C.parapsilosis} represent a natural telomerase deficient system, the t-circles seem to provide a telomerase-independent mean of the telomere maintenance (14). Importantly, the t-circles were recently identified also in human cells maintaining their chromosomal termini via alternative telomere lengthening (ALT) mode pointing to their involvement in a roll-and-spread mechanism of nuclear telomere elongation (15). This indicates that exploration of the mitochondrial system may lead to results of a general significance. Importantly, the evolutionary emergence of the linear genomes in yeast mitochondria was recently proposed as a paradigm for the origin of linear chromosomes in nuclei of eukaryotes in the pre-telomerase era (16). Studies of the molecular architecture of the mtDNA and mitochondrial telomere dynamics thus may have implications for understanding the nature and evolution of alternative, telomerase-independent, pathway(s) of telomere maintenance of eukaryotic chromosomes.

With the aim of understanding how a mitochondrial genome with such a unique molecular architecture emerged in evolution we studied two yeasts, \textit{Candida orthopsilosis} and \textit{Candida metapsilosis}, closely related to \textit{C.parapsilosis}. These taxa, originally classified as groups II and III of \textit{C.parapsilosis}, were recently proposed as a paradigm for the origin of linear chromosomes in nuclei of eukaryotes in the pre-telomerase era (16). Studies of the molecular architecture of the mtDNA and mitochondrial telomere dynamics thus may have implications for understanding the nature and evolution of alternative, telomerase-independent, pathway(s) of telomere maintenance of eukaryotic chromosomes. 

\section*{MATERIALS AND METHODS}

\subsection*{Yeast strains}

Strains of \textit{C.orthopsilosis} (MCO456, MCO457, MCO462, MCO471, PL452) and \textit{C.metapsilosis} (MCO448, PL448) were kindly provided by P. F. Lehmann (Medical College of Ohio, Toledo, USA) and S. A. Meyer (Georgia State University, Atlanta, USA). The \textit{C.parapsilosis} strain SR23/CBS7157 is from the collection of the Department of Biochemistry (Comenius University, Bratislava). Strains designated as CBS were from Centraalbureau voor Schimmelcultures (Utrecht, The Netherlands). Yeasts were grown at 28°C in YPD medium [1% (w/v) yeast extract (Difco), 1% (w/v) Bacto Peptone (Difco), 2% (w/v) glucose, pH was adjusted to 6.3 with 50 mM potassium phosphate buffer].

\subsection*{Isolation and analysis of mtDNA}

DNA was isolated from mitochondria of both species and purified by CsCl/bisbenzimide gradient centrifugation (21). Random libraries of mtDNA fragments were prepared by nebulization essentially as described by (22). The DNA sequence was determined by dideoxy-chain termination method on double-stranded plasmid templates by AGOWA (Berlin, Germany). The sequence assembly and analysis was done using the Vector NTI Advance v. 8.0 software package (Informax, Inc.). Secondary structures of ribosomal RNAs (rRNA) were inferred from models elaborated for their equivalents from \textit{Escherichia coli} and mitochondria of \textit{Saccharomyces cerevisiae}, using BioEdit (23) and RnaViz (24) programs. Cumulative GC skew analyses were performed using the Genome Skew software v. 1.0 (Technical University of Munich, Germany). Telomere junctions of the strains with circularized mtDNA were either cloned as HindIII restriction fragments or amplified by PCR using the primers 5'-TTAGCTGTGTTGCTATTACT-3' and 5'-ATTTGTGCTTTTTGTTTTGA-3'. Separation of mtDNA by pulsed-field gel electrophoresis (PFGE) was performed as described previously (20).

\subsection*{Phylogenetic analysis}

Phylogenetical relationships among yeast species were analyzed by both the neighbor-joining (NJ) and maximum-likelihood (ML) methods. Concatenated amino acid sequences of proteins encoded by mtDNAs (i.e. \textit{atp6-atp8-atp9-cob-cox1-cox2-cox3}) were aligned using ClustalW 1.81 (25) and the alignment was manually edited to remove gap regions, and 1689 aligned positions were used in the analysis. ML and NJ analyses were performed by PHYML (26) and MEGA 3.1 package (27), respectively. We used the Jones–Taylor–Thornton matrix for amino acid substitution and Gamma distribution model of site variation automatically estimated by maximizing the likelihood of the phylogeny. The trees were tested by 500 bootstrap replicates. The mtDNAs of following species were involved in the analysis: \textit{Ashbya gossypii} (AE016821), \textit{Candida albicans} (AF285261), \textit{C.parapsilosis} (X74411), \textit{C.orthopsilosis} (AY962590), \textit{C.metapsilosis} (AY962591), \textit{Candida glabrata} (AJ511533), \textit{Hanseniaspora uvarum} (DQ058142), \textit{Kluyveromyces lactis} (AY654900), \textit{Kluyveromyces thermostolerans} (AJ634268), \textit{Pichia canadensis} (D31785), \textit{Saccharomyces castellii} (AF437291), \textit{S.cerevisiae} (AJ011856), \textit{Saccharomyces servazzii} (AJ430679), \textit{Schizosaccharomyces pombe} (X54421), \textit{Schizosaccharomyces octosporus} (AF275271), \textit{Schizosaccharomyces japonicus} (AF547983) and \textit{Yarrowia lipolytica} (AJ307410). The sequence of \textit{Candida tropicalis} mtDNA was downloaded from \textit{C.tropicalis} Sequencing Project (Broad Institute of Harvard and MIT; http://www.broad.mit.edu).

\subsection*{Miscellaneous}

Enzymatic manipulations with DNA, cloning procedures, Southern and northern blot analyses were performed essentially as described by Sambrook and Russell (28). Following
oligonucleotides were labeled with [γ-32P]ATP and T4 polynucleotide kinase and used for the northern hybridizations: 5'-CTATCATAAAATGAGAAGGACGACAG-3' (nad1); 5'-ATAGAAGAATCCACCGGTACAAGAATAAAG-3' (nad2); 5'-GATTGTTGAAAGAGATGGAAAAACACACA-3' (nad3); 5'-CCGGCTAATGATAATATCCTATTAAAGG-3' (nad4); 5'-ATAGATAGACCWACCTTTCTCTATAATTCTC-3' (nad4L); 5'-GCACAAAACCATTAGACGACGAT-3' (nad5); 5'-CAATAGCCCTTATACAGAAGAATTTAAA A-3' (nad6); 5'-TAATCAACATACCAATAAAGAAAACAACAT-3' (cob); 5'-CCATAGCCTAACATACACATACATACGATA-3' (cox1); 5'-CTAAATGCTCAAGTGTGGCCACG-3' (cox2); 5'-GTATGATCTCCAATATGTACCTTTCCAGC-3' (cox3); 5'-AAAAACAGCACAATTTAGAGCACAAAATTATA-3' (atp6); 5'-GCTAAAATACCATAGTGAGCATG-3' (atp9); 5'-CTAACAAATACCCACGTAAAT-3'.

Sequences of the D1/D2 domain of cytosolic ribosomal RNA were determined on PCR products amplified from total genomic DNA using NL-1 (5'-TAAATTCATAAAG-3') and NL-4 (5'-GGGTAATCACTAATACCA-3') primers (29). Open reading frames (ORFs) encoding the mitochondrial telomere-binding protein (mtTBP) homologs were amplified from genomic DNA using the oligonucleotide primers 5'-ATGTGGCAGCATTACAGTACA-3' and 5'-TTCTGTAGCTTGACCACCTAATCTCCATCCTCA-3'.

Nucleotide sequence accession numbers

The DNA sequences described in this article were deposited in the GenBank data library under the accession numbers:AY962590 (the mtDNA of C.orthopsilosis MCO456), AY962591 (the mtDNA of C.metapsilosis MCO448), AY986471 (right telomeric fragment of C.orthopsilosis MCO471), DQ026513 and DQ376495 (cox1 region of MCO471 and CLIB214, respectively), AY986472, AY986473, AY986474, AY391853 (telomere fusion fragments between the genes atp6 and nad3 of C.orthopsilosis MCO457, MCO462, PL452 and M.metapsilosis PL448, respectively), DQ213055–DQ213057 (sequences of the D1/D2 domain of cytosolic 26S rRNA of C.parapsilosis SR23/CBS7157, C.orthopsilosis MCO456 and C.metapsilosis MCO448 strains).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Genetic organization of the mitochondrial genomes of C.orthopsilosis and C.metapsilosis

We determined the complete mtDNA sequences of C.orthopsilosis MCO456 and C.metapsilosis MCO448. Their analyses confirm that, similar to the C.parapsilosis mtDNA (7), these genomes are highly compact and encode the same set of genes arranged in the identical order, which is conserved even at the level of individual transfer RNA (tRNA) genes (Figure 1 and Table 1). Analysis of protein coding sequences revealed that only the sequence of nad4L is invariant. In other cases, we identified minor changes mostly representing substitutions without any significant change in the length of the ORFs. In contrast, the nad4 reading frame varies in length at its 3' end.

Mitochondrial rRNA sequences of the three yeast species display a number of differences. In the case of the small subunit (SSU) rRNA, the most significant alteration affects helix 46 [numbering from E.coli SSU rRNA; (30)]. In the large subunit (LSU) rRNA, multiple short insertions within the sequences were found. Importantly, comparison of LSU rRNA revealed two short (266 and 265 nt) group I intron sequences within the C.parapsilosis gene for mitochondrial LSU rRNA that are absent in its counterparts from C.orthopsilosis and C.metapsilosis.

Each of the three mitochondrial genomes contains the same set of 24 tRNA genes. In most cases their sequences are identical in all three species, or differ only by a single nucleotide in one species. In one case, trnS1, the sequence differs in a single position among all three species. However, trnN is exceptional because there are multiple alterations within the dihydrouridine loop and the anticodon stem of the C.parapsilosis tRNA, which differs from both C.orthopsilosis and C.metapsilosis by nine substitutions and a single insertion of uridine.

The size of the mitochondrial genome in both C.orthopsilosis and C.metapsilosis represents about two-thirds of the C.parapsilosis mtDNA. To a large extent, the variation in the mtDNA length is caused by differences in intron content. C.parapsilosis mtDNA contains seven introns whose total length corresponds to almost one-third of the genome: two introns in cob, three in cox1 (7) and two in rrnL gene. In contrast, the shorter mitochondrial genomes of C.metapsilosis strain MCO448 and C.orthopsilosis strain MCO456 have only one and two introns, respectively, representing in both cases only ~6% of the genome size. Interestingly, the C.metapsilosis mtDNA contains an
intronless allele of coxl that is rather exceptional among fungi (31). In most cases, the introns contain reading frames encoding putative RNA maturases, reverse transcriptases or DNA endonucleases.

### Processing of mitochondrial transcripts involves excision of tRNA and the 3' end signal

The coding sequences of the three mitochondrial genomes are arranged into two transcriptional units **rrnL-nad3** and **cox1-atp6**, both transcribed from a region corresponding to a putative origin of replication (ori) predicted using cumulative GC skew analysis between the genes **rrnL** and **cox1** (Figure 1 and Supplementary Figure 1). Results of northern blot analysis indicate that sizes of mRNA in mitochondria of all three species correspond to mono- and bi-cistronic products presumably processed from large polycistronic primary transcripts. The distribution of **trn** sequences in the mtDNAs suggests that tRNA punctuation mode of transcript processing [reviewed in (32)] may operate in the three yeast species. The occurrence of bi-cistronic mRNAs in the cases of **nad4L-nad5**, **nad6-nad1**, **nad2-nad3** and **atp8-atp6**, where the protein coding sequences are not separated by tRNAs, is compatible with this possibility. The only exceptions are the genes **cox2** and **cob** which are not separated by a tRNA gene but whose corresponding mRNAs have different sizes. In *silico* analysis of the mtDNA of all three yeast species revealed a conserved motif 5'-UAW-WUAUUCYUUW-3' related to the *S.cerevisiae* dodecanucleotide consensus 5'-AAUAYAUUCUU-3' implicated in the 3' end processing of mitochondrial transcripts (33,34). The motif occurs downstream of the protein coding genes **cob**, **cox1**, **cox2**, **cox3**, **atp6**, **atp9**, **nad1** and **nad3**. This indicates that maturation of mitochondrial transcripts may require excision of tRNA sequences and/or the presence of the 3' end processing signal (Figure 2 and Supplementary Figure 2).

### Mitochondrial telomeres of the three species have conserved architecture

In spite of similar genetic organization, the molecular forms of the three sequenced mitochondrial genomes are different. While mitochondria of both *C.parapsilosis* SR23 and *C.metapsilosis* MCO448 harbor linear DNA genomes, *C.orthopsilosis* MCO456 possesses a circular-mapping mtDNA. Importantly, another *C.orthopsilosis* strain MCO471, contains a linear mitochondrial genome. In order to compare mitochondrial telomeres from all three yeast species, we cloned and sequenced the telomeric region of the right arm of MCO471. Comparison of mitochondrial telomeres of all three yeast species revealed that they consist of terminal inverted repeats themselves consisting of a subterminal repeat and an array of tandem repeat units (Figure 3). The sequence corresponding to the 5' single-stranded overhang at the termini of the *C.parapsilosis* mtDNA is conserved in both *C.orthopsilosis* MCO471 and *C.metapsilosis* MCO448 suggesting that mitochondrial telomeres in all three species have essentially the same organization. In addition, the subterminal repeat of the *C.parapsilosis* mtDNA contains a characteristic motif rich in guanine and cytosine residues named GC-box. This sequence is conserved in the subtelomeric regions of linear mtDNAs of *C.orthopsilosis* MCO471 and *C.metapsilosis* MCO448, downstream of the genes **atp6** (right arm) and **nad3** (left arm). It was also identified in the region between **atp6** and **nad3** in the circular-mapping mtDNAs of *C.orthopsilosis* MCO456. Although the biological role of this element is not known, it may play a role in transcription termination and/or be implicated in recombination-dependent mode of mitochondrial telomere maintenance (7).

### Circular-mapping genomes in mitochondria of *C.orthopsilosis* and *C.metapsilosis*

To investigate differences between linear and circular-mapping genomes, we systematically investigated the mtDNA...
form among strains of *C. parapsilosis*, *C. orthopsilosis* and *C. metapsilosis*. The PFGE analysis revealed a discrete band migrating at ~49 kb in all strains harboring linear mtDNA (Figure 4A). It is not clear why the size of linear molecules deduced from their electrophoretic mobility is larger than expected from its DNA sequence. However, a similar observation was made by Maleszka (35) in the *C. parapsilosis* strain SR23/CBS7157. In any case, all strains previously shown to have circular mtDNA restriction enzyme maps (20) contain, instead of the discrete band (form I), mtDNA molecules heterogeneous in size (Figure 4A and B). This electrophoretic profile of mtDNA molecules is similar to the pattern reported in baker's yeast mitochondria and termed polydisperse mtDNA (4,36). Two additional faint bands (forms II and III) (Figure 4A, lanes with MCO456 and PL448) were detected in strains containing circular-mapping mtDNAs. Since these bands were not present in all preparations from the same strain they may correspond to transient mtDNA replication intermediates of the circular-mapping genome.

Comparison of the circular-mapping mtDNA of *C. metapsilosis* PL448 with the linear genome found in mitochondria of the strain MCO448 suggests that the former lacks telomeric arrays and contains a restriction fragment corresponding to the fusion of the left and right telomere (Figure 4C). Essentially the same results were obtained by comparison of the *C. orthopsilosis* strains MCO456 (circular-mapping) and MCO471 (linear). This raises a possibility that emergence of the circular-mapping mtDNA in both species may be due to a defect in the mitochondrial telomere maintenance accompanied by the fusion of mtDNA termini.

As circular-mapping mtDNAs were identified in several isolates, we analyzed presumed telomeric junctions in the strains of *C. orthopsilosis* MCO457, MCO462 and PL452 and *C. metapsilosis* PL448 (Table 1). The corresponding region was either amplified by PCR using primers derived from the sequence of the left (*nad3*) and the right (*atp6*) sub-terminal gene and/or cloned as a HindIII restriction fragment. Although the junction sites differ among strains, DNA sequence analysis revealed in all cases stretches of telomeric sequence confirming that this region originated from telomere–telomere fusions accompanied by deletion of a significant portion of the telomeric sequence (Figure 5). In strains MCO456, MCO457, MCO462 and PL448, the fusion of the left and right arms of the mtDNA occurred at short identical A+T-rich stretches of sequence suggesting that the circularization may have been mediated by homologous recombination between short repetitive motifs present within the telomeric sequence. In one circular-mapping genome, *C. orthopsilosis* PL452, no repeat was apparent and instead two extra bases (TT) are present at the junction site.
Formation of circular derivatives of the linear mitochondrial genome might result from a defect in key telomere function(s) such as telomere capping or telomere replication. We hypothesize that a defect in the processing of the ends of the mtDNA molecules might have prevented formation of t-loops and the resulting structure may have been recognized as a double-stranded break repaired by end-to-end fusion resulting in circularization of the genome. Alternatively, alterations in mtTBP or another, yet unknown, telomere-binding factor might be responsible for changes in the molecular form of the mtDNA. To test the latter possibility we analyzed the coding sequences of mtTBP homologs from *C.orthopsilosis* (MCO456, MCO471), *C.metapsilosis* (MCO448, PL448) and *C.parapsilosis* (SR23, CBS604). We identified only minor sequence variations between the species. Importantly, strains of the same species differing in the forms of the mitochondrial genome do not differ in the sequence of this protein (Supplementary Figure 3) suggesting that the mtTBP-mediated capping function is not impaired.

Figure 4. Comparison of strains harboring linear and circular-mapping mtDNA. (A) Electrophoretic profiles of DNA isolated from strains containing linear (*C.parapsilosis* SR23, *C.orthopsilosis* MCO471, *C.metapsilosis* MCO448) and circular-mapping (*C.orthopsilosis* MCO456, *C.metapsilosis* PL448) mtDNA. Arrows indicate different DNA forms: I, linear mtDNA; II and III, presumed replication intermediates present in the strains harboring circular-mapping mtDNA; IV, chromosomal DNA. (B) Southern blot hybridization analysis of PFGE separated mtDNA from *C.metapsilosis* strains MCO448 and PL448. Blots were probed with radioactively labeled mtDNA from the strain MCO448. (C) Profiles of EcoRV digested mtDNA from *C.metapsilosis* strains MCO448 and PL448.
Previously we demonstrated that strains with circular-mapping mtDNA lack t-circles (20). At present we cannot formally rule out the possibility that their absence results from end-to-end fusion accompanied by deletion of tandem repeats (i.e., the generation of t-circles may be dependent on intramolecular recombination between repeat units within the terminal tandem arrays). On the other hand, the absence of t-circles may cause the genome circularization. For example, their elimination from the organelle might have an effect on the telomere maintenance pathway and result in the formation of circularized form of the genome via end-to-end fusions. A support for the scenario of DNA circularization in the absence of functional telomere maintenance comes from example described in nuclei of fission yeasts (37,38). In this case, most of cells surviving a defect in the telomerase-dependent pathway escape the problem of telomere synthesis and genome stability by circularization of all three nuclear chromosomes. Since the t-circles were proposed as important players in the telomerase-independent mode of telomere maintenance in both, mitochondrial and nuclear, systems (13), our results may be relevant for understanding the alternative telomere replication mechanisms in eukaryotic nuclei.

**Phylogenetic relationships among C.orthopsilosis, C.metapsilosis and C.parapsilosis**

In previous studies, Diezmann *et al.* (39) and Tavanti *et al.* (19) employing different sets of sequences (variable as well as conserved) for analysis placed *C.parapsilosis* as an outgroup to the *C.orthopsilosis–C.metapsilosis* clade. However, large datasets derived from complete mitochondrial genome sequences may produce more reliable phylogenies. Therefore, we employed the concatenated amino acid sequences of mtDNA encoded proteins to analyze the relationships between the three *Candida* species. We constructed phylogenetic trees by both the NJ and ML methods (Figure 5). Our analyses clearly place the three species as a sister branch of the clade containing *C.albicans* and *C.tropicalis*. In both trees, the branching of these species exhibits the same order and indicates with high confidence (bootstrap values are 99–100%) that *C.metapsilosis* separated from a common ancestor prior the split of *C.orthopsilosis* and *C.parapsilosis*. The phylogeny based on the sequences of the D1/D2 domain of the 26S rRNA indicates the same tree topology, although in this case the statistical support is considerably lower (data not shown).

**Evolution of the genome structure**

Most of fungal and plant species contain circular-mapping mitochondrial genome which is represented in vivo mostly
by linear DNA concatemers and a minor fraction of circular DNA species (3,36). Recent studies on *S. cerevisiae* mitochondria revealed an asymmetry in segregation of mtDNA molecules during cell division. While daughter cells receive a linear monomer of the genome that circularizes and amplifies via rolling-circle mechanism, mother cells retain mostly concatemeric and branched mtDNA forms (40,41). We propose that mitochondrial telomeres may facilitate the resolution of monomeric genomes thus providing an advantage in the process of asymmetric segregation. The incorporation of mitochondrial telomeres into the replication strategy of an ancestral circular-mapping mtDNA might have caused the resolution of linear monomeric genome terminating with the telomeric arrays from a population of concatemeric mtDNA molecules. This is in agreement with the hypothesis that linear and circular-mapping mitochondrial genomes may interconvert via a relatively simple molecular mechanism (42). It also implies that the linear mitochondrial genome of *C.parapsilosis*, *C.orthopsilosis* and *C.metapsilosis*, and probably also *Candida salmanticensis*, *Pichia philodendri* (21) and *Hanseniaspora uvarum* (43), which possess the linear form of mtDNA terminating with structurally similar telomeres, might have evolved relatively recently from circular-mapping ancestors.

The phylogenetic analysis suggests that the common ancestor of *C.orthopsilosis*, *C.metapsilosis* and *C.parapsilosis* had a linear genome, and that the circular maps observed in some strains of *C.orthopsilosis* and *C.metapsilosis* are the result of recent strain-specific telomere mutations that circularized them. However, the linear structure of the genome of the common ancestor of these species can itself be inferred to be a relatively recent innovation, because the mtDNAs of their closest relative *Lodderomyces elongisporus*, as well as other species from this phylogenetic branch (i.e. *C.tropicalis*, *Candida maltosa*, *Candida viswanathii*, *Candida lodderae* and *C.albicans*) have circular-mapping mtDNA (P. Kosa, M. Valach, L. Tomaska, K. H. Wolfe and J. Nosek, unpublished data). This suggests that the linear form of the genome and its specific terminal structures evolved de novo after separation of the branch leading to the three *Candida* species.

**Does the linearity of mitochondrial genome provide a selective advantage?**

The strain PL448 of *C.metapsilosis* originates from the clinical isolate MCO448 and both are considered to be isogenic (S. A. Meyer, personal communication). Our results described above demonstrate they differ in the mtDNA form (Figure 4) suggesting that circular-mapping mtDNA in PL448 is a mutant derivative of the linear genome found in the strain MCO448.

The availability of these strains opens a possibility to investigate whether linearity and/or the presence of telomeric structures at the ends of mtDNA molecules offers a selective advantage over strains harboring a circular-mapping mtDNA. First, we compared the growth of *C.metapsilosis* strains MCO448 (linear) and PL448 (circular-mapping) in YPD medium. Our results indicate that cells MCO448 outgrows PL448 during exponential phase in batch cultures suggesting that the linear form of the mitochondrial genome may provide an advantage during cellular proliferation (Supplementary Figure 4). Moreover, we observed that, probably due to a difference in the growth rate, the strain MCO448 forms colonies with sizes of ~1–2 mm significantly earlier than PL448.

To demonstrate that MCO448 is able to out-compete PL448 in a mixed culture, we combined the cells from late exponential phase (~5 x 10^8 cells/ml) of both strains in three different ratios (i.e. 9:1, 5:5 and 1:9) and cultivated them in the YPD medium. The cultures were then diluted and plated onto solid YPD medium and the number of MCO448 and PL448 subclones was counted. To discriminate between both strains we used the PCR approach described previously (20) as well as the difference in the colony size (mentioned in the text). Results are based on the three independent experiments. Note that after three passages of the mixed 9:1, 5:5 and 1:9 cultures, the number of PL448 cells was 0.3, 1.2 and 1.9 %, respectively.

**SUPPLEMENTARY DATA**

Supplementary data are available at *NAR* Online.
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