



THE UNIVERSITY OF
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**A Study into DNA Recombination Proteins and
Novel Plasmid Recombination Sites from
*Acinetobacter baumannii***

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Statement of Originality

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Abstract

The discovery of multiple, inverted, *dif*-like recombination sites (*pdif*) flanking antibiotic resistance genes (*dif* modules), has prompted great interest in the area. Many of these recombination sites are located on plasmids originating from clinical isolates of the serious pathogen *Acinetobacter baumannii*. The study hypothesised inverted *pdif* sites on either side of a gene could function as a novel gene transfer and / or gene shuffling system via Xer site-specific recombination. Xer site-specific recombination is a process where the recombination proteins XerC and XerD bind to *dif* sites to catalyse two rounds of DNA strand cleavage, exchange and ligation. The recombination of *dif* sites on a plasmid can lead to the excision or inversion of the internal DNA, depending on the orientation of the recombination sites. Understanding this process could uncover mechanisms by which antibiotic resistance genes can mobilise and disseminate throughout bacterial populations.

The current study evaluated the binding interaction between two *pdif* sites and the *A. baumannii* recombinases XerC and XerD. A series of electrophoretic mobility shift assays (EMSA) demonstrated XerC and XerD cooperatively bind to the *pdif* sites, a crucial step preceding the catalysis of Xer site-specific recombination.

The study then predicted potential cross-species binding interactions between *A. baumannii* FtsK_Y (FtsK_{Y-AB}) and *E. coli* XerD (XerD_{EC}), an interaction necessary to activate catalysis of Xer site-specific recombination. A combination of predictive structural software, and hydrophobic and electrostatic protein profiles, revealed the

possibility of a cross-species binding interaction. Subsequent *in vivo* recombination assays of the *A. baumannii* chromosome *dif* site, involving FtsK_{Y-AB} and XerD_{EC} resulted in weak levels of recombination, a likely indication FtsK_{Y-AB} and XerD_{EC} do interact to allow recombination to proceed.

Other *in vivo* recombination assays involved the inverted *pdif* sites, which were able to undergo recombination to generate inversion products. The recombination assay was performed within a host *E. coli* cell, which demonstrated the ability of *E. coli* Xer proteins to catalyse recombination events at variant *dif* sites. The ability of non-native Xer recombinases to recognise and catalyse variant *dif* sites could be prevalent in other bacterial species, which could aid the mobilisation of *dif* modules harbouring antibiotic resistance genes.

The study also investigated the *A. baumannii* DNA translocase FtsK (FtsK_{AB}), which could serve as a future therapeutic target. FtsK_{AB} was confirmed to be a strong DNA-dependent ATPase. However, the identification of an FtsK orientating polar sequence (KOPS) on the *A. baumannii* chromosome remains elusive. The study suggested several octomers that could potentially function as the KOPS motif on the *A. baumannii* chromosome. Yet, none of the listed octomers were as highly skewed or over-represented as the well-established KOPS motif GGGNAGGG on the *E. coli* chromosome. Nevertheless, it is likely the KOPS motif on the *A. baumannii* chromosome differs from that on the *E. coli* chromosome. The difference in motif sequence could indicate key FtsK proteins folds responsible for recognising the

substrate DNA differs between the two species, which could be beneficial in developing new antibiotics specifically targeting FtsK within pathogenic strains of *Acinetobacter*.

Overall, the study demonstrated the novel *pdif* sites can be recognised and cooperatively bound by the *A. baumannii* Xer recombinases. Additionally, the *pdif* sites can undergo recombination within *E. coli*, which serves as an early indication that the novel *pdif* sites could function as a gene transfer and / or gene shuffling system, in support of the hypothesis.

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Table of Contents

List of Figures	xv
List of Tables.....	xx
List of Abbreviations.....	xxii
Chapter One – Introduction	1
1.1 Bacterial cell cycle, segregation and cell division.....	2
1.2 FtsK, a double stranded DNA translocase	7
1.2.1 Early characterisation of FtsK	7
1.2.2 Sequence analysis of the <i>ftsK</i> gene.....	9
1.2.3 Protein analysis of the FtsK subdomains	12
1.2.4 Crystal structure of the <i>Escherichia coli</i> and <i>Pseudomonas aeruginosa</i> FtsK C-terminal domain	14
1.2.5 Translocation of double stranded DNA	21
1.2.6 Motif recognition and polarity	36
1.3 Xer site-specific recombination system.....	38
1.4 The emergence and rise of antibiotic resistance	44
1.5 Pathogenesis and various antibiotic resistance mechanism of <i>Acinetobacter baumannii</i>	47
1.6 Chromosomal and plasmid mobility of antibiotic resistance genes in <i>Acinetobacter baumannii</i>	51
1.7 Characterised Xer site-specific recombination on plasmid substrates.....	56
1.8 Project hypothesis and aims	61

<u>Aim 1:</u> Evaluate the binding interaction between novel <i>pdif</i> sites and <i>A. baumannii</i> XerC/D	62
<u>Aim 2:</u> Predict potential cross species binding interactions between <i>A. baumannii</i> FtsK and <i>E. coli</i> XerD during DNA recombination activation	62
<u>Aim 3:</u> Investigate <i>in vivo</i> recombination activity of <i>Acinetobacter dif</i> sites in the model species <i>E. coli</i>	63
<u>Aim 4:</u> Characterise functional aspects of FtsK from <i>A. baumannii</i>	63
<u>Aim 5:</u> Determine the structure of the FtsK C-terminal domain from <i>Thermus thermophilus</i> in complex with dsDNA	64
 Chapter Two – Materials and Methods	65
2.1 Solutions and bacterial growth media	66
2.2 Bacterial strains and plasmids.....	68
2.3 DNA based techniques.....	70
2.3.1 Polymerase Chain Reactions (PCRs)	70
2.3.1.1 Oligonucleotides	70
2.3.1.2 PCR amplifications and conditions	72
2.3.2 DNA annealing.....	75
2.3.3 Genomic DNA extraction	75
2.3.4 Plasmid preparation	75
2.3.5 Restriction digest.....	76
2.3.6 DNA ligation	76
2.3.7 DNA transformation (including preparation of chemically competent cells	77
2.3.8 Agarose gel electrophoresis.....	78
2.3.9 DNA sequencing	79

2.3.10	Whole plasmid sequencing and <i>de novo</i> plasmid assembly	79
2.3.11	Molecular cloning	80
2.4	Protein based techniques	83
2.4.1	Protein overproduction	83
2.4.2	Protein purification	84
2.4.2.1	Cell lysis	84
2.4.2.2	Heat purification	85
2.4.2.3	Ni ²⁺ affinity chromatography	85
2.4.2.4	Dialysis and protein concentration	86
2.4.2.5	Heparin affinity chromatography	86
2.4.2.6	Q column, anion exchange chromatography	87
2.4.2.7	S column, cation exchange chromatography	88
2.4.3	Size exclusion chromatography	88
2.4.4	SDS-PAGE analysis	89
2.5	ATPase assay	90
2.6	Search for potential <i>A. baumannii</i> KOPS motifs	94
2.7	Protein alignments, and interaction predictions	95
2.8	Protein-DNA electrophoretic mobility shift assay (EMSA)	96
2.9	<i>In vivo</i> recombination assays	97
2.10	Protein crystallisation trials	99

Chapter Three – Binding interaction between *Acinetobacter baumannii* dif sites and Xer recombinases

3.1	Introduction	101
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3.2	Comparison between <i>E. coli</i> and <i>A. baumannii</i> Xer recombinases	102
3.3	Comparison between <i>A. baumannii</i> chromosomal <i>dif</i> and <i>pdif</i> sites.....	108
3.4	Overproduction and purification of <i>A. baumannii</i> XerC and XerD	110
3.5	EMSA of <i>A. baumannii</i> <i>dif</i> sites and XerC/D	114
3.6	Discussion	118

Chapter Four – Prediction of Interaction between *Acinetobacter baumannii* FtsK_y and *Escherichia coli* XerD

4.1	Introduction	129
4.2	Comparison between <i>A. baumannii</i> and <i>E. coli</i> FtsK _y and XerD	130
4.3	Electrostatic and hydrophobic profiles of <i>A. baumannii</i> and <i>E. coli</i> FtsK _y and XerD	133
4.4	<i>In silico</i> docking of <i>A. baumannii</i> FtsK _y and XerD	139
4.5	Discussion	142

Chapter Five – Investigation into recombination activity of *Acinetobacter baumannii* *dif* sites

5.1	Introduction	149
5.2	Construction <i>A. baumannii</i> <i>ftsK_y</i> expression vector	151
5.3	<i>In vivo</i> recombination assays of <i>E. coli</i> chromosome <i>dif</i> sites in DS9041 (<i>E. coli</i> Δ FtsK)	153
5.4	<i>In vivo</i> recombination assays of <i>A. baumannii</i> chromosome <i>dif</i> sites in DS9041 (<i>E. coli</i> Δ FtsK).....	156
5.5	<i>In vivo</i> recombination assays of <i>E. coli</i> and <i>A. baumannii</i> chromosome <i>dif</i> sites in DH5 α D- and DH5 α cells.....	158
5.6	pDIF_INV construction with novel <i>A. baumannii</i> <i>pdif</i> sites	160

5.7	<i>In vivo</i> recombination assays of novel <i>A. baumannii</i> <i>pdif</i> sites in DH5 α D- and DH5 α cells	165
5.8	Discussion	169

Chapter Six – Identification of KOPS-like motifs and evaluation of FtsK_C ATPase activity from *Acinetobacter baumannii* 175

6.1	Introduction	176
6.2	Identification of KOPS-like motifs.....	176
6.3	Overproduction and purification of <i>A. baumannii</i> FtsK _C	182
6.4	ATP hydrolysis activity of <i>A. baumannii</i> FtsK _C	185
6.5	Discussion	189

Chapter Seven – Crystallography Trials of *Thermus thermophilus* FtsK Recombinant Variants..... 195

7.1	Introduction	196
7.2	Construction of <i>T. thermophilus</i> FtsK recombinants	196
7.3	Construction of <i>T. thermophilus</i> FtsK recombinants	199
7.3.1	Overproduction of pFtsK _{$\alpha\beta$} _TT and pFtsK _{γ} _TT and cell lysis.....	199
7.3.2	Heat purification of FtsK _{$\alpha\beta$} and FtsK _{γ}	201
7.3.3	Ni ²⁺ affinity chromatography of FtsK _{$\alpha\beta$} and FtsK _{γ}	201
7.3.4	Ion exchange chromatography of FtsK _{$\alpha\beta$} and FtsK _{γ}	203
7.4	Size exclusion chromatography of FtsK _{$\alpha\beta$} under varying conditions	206
7.5	ATP hydrolysis activity of <i>T. thermophilus</i> FtsK _{$\alpha\beta$}	212
7.6	Preliminary Crystallography Trials of FtsK _{$\alpha\beta$} and FtsK _{γ}	213
7.7	Discussion	218

Chapter Eight – General Discussion and Conclusion	225
8.1 The clinical significance of <i>A. baumannii</i> in the current health crisis.....	226
8.2 Identification and activity of novel <i>dif</i> modules on <i>A. baumannii</i> plasmids ...	228
8.3 Utilisation of novel <i>A. baumannii</i> <i>pdif</i> sites as a molecular tool.....	231
8.4 FtsK as a potential drug target in pathogenic <i>A. baumannii</i> strains.....	234
8.5 The future of structural biology in regard to predictive software, X-ray crystallography and cryo-EM.....	237
8.6 Conclusion	241
References.....	243
Appendices.....	265
Appendix I – Commercial crystallisation precipitant solution conditions	266
Appendix II – <i>Acinetobacter baumannii</i> XerC protein parameters.....	271
Appendix III – <i>Acinetobacter baumannii</i> XerD protein parameters.....	272
Appendix IV – ClusPro Model Scores of <i>A. baumannii</i> FtsKy and <i>E. coli</i> XerD	273
Appendix V – ClusPro Predictive Models of <i>E. coli</i> FtsKy and <i>E. coli</i> XerD	274
Appendix VI – ClusPro Predictive Model Scores of <i>E. coli</i> FtsKy and <i>E. coli</i> XerD ..	275
Appendix VII – ClusPro Predictive Models of <i>A. thaliana</i> Rubisco and FtsKy and <i>E. coli</i> XerD	276
Appendix VIII – ClusPro Predictive Model Scores of <i>A. thaliana</i> Rubisco and FtsKy and <i>E. coli</i> XerD	277
Appendix IX – FtsK _Y polypeptide sequence comparison, with contacts to XerD	278
Appendix X – Fast quality control assessment of Illumina sequencing pSI-56 paired end reads	279
Appendix XI – Chromosome <i>dif</i> Site Comparison	283

Appendix XII – <i>Acinetobacter baumannii</i> Chromosome GC Skew Plot	284
Appendix XIII – <i>Acinetobacter baumannii</i> FtsK _C protein parameters	285
Appendix XIV – Global protein sequence alignment between <i>E. coli</i> FtsK _C and <i>T. thermophilus</i> FtsK _C	286
Appendix XV – pFtsK _{αβ} _TT map	287
Appendix XVI – pFtsK _γ _TT map	288
Appendix XVII – <i>Thermus thermophilus</i> FtsK _{αβ} protein parameters	289
Appendix XVIII – <i>Thermus thermophilus</i> FtsK _γ protein parameters	290

List of Figures

Figure 1.1	Chromosomal replication, segregation and cell division, based on the model organism <i>E. coli</i>	3
Figure 1.2	Divisome assembly, based on the model organism <i>E. coli</i>	5
Figure 1.3	Crystal structure of the FtsK C-terminal subdomains, α , β and γ from <i>E. coli</i> and <i>P. aeruginosa</i>	16
Figure 1.4	Selected key motifs and residues that characterize AAA+ (ATPases associated with various cellular activities) protein structures.....	17
Figure 1.5	FtsK _C crystal structures from <i>P. aeruginosa</i> used to develop the rotary-inchworm translocation model.....	22
Figure 1.6	Schematic of DNA translocation by the $\alpha\beta$ motor domain within an FtsK _C monomer	23
Figure 1.7	Rotary inchworm model for DNA translocation, as observed from the base of the hexameric $\alpha\beta$ motor domain.....	25
Figure 1.8	Schematic diagram of FtsK trimers	26
Figure 1.9	Escort model for the translocation of mRNA by Rho.....	29
Figure 1.10	Partial escort model for the translocation of dsDNA by the $\alpha\beta$ motor domain of FtsK _C	30
Figure 1.11	Substrate DNA within the FtsK _C hexamer is required to realign with each subunit during DNA translocation	32
Figure 1.12	Structural models and schematic diagram of the <i>P. aeruginosa</i> FtsK _{$\alpha\beta$} -DNA complex.....	35
Figure 1.13	Overview of the <i>E. coli</i> Xer-site specific recombination system on a chromosome substrate	41

Figure 1.14	Crystal structure of the residues involved in the FtsK _Y -XerD interaction	43
Figure 1.15	Linearised schematic of pS30-1 from <i>A. baumannii</i> clinical isolate (Global Isolate 2, SGH0823)	54
Figure 1.16	Proteins and DNA sequences involved in Xer site-specific recombination on chromosome and plasmid substrates	58
Figure 1.17	Plasmid evolution involving pECL18 and pHS-2	60
Figure 2.1	Construction of recombination assay reporter plasmid, by substituting native <i>dif</i> sites within pSI-56 with novel <i>A. baumannii</i> <i>pdif</i> sites	82
Figure 3.1	Global Protein Sequence Alignment between <i>E. coli</i> (EC) XerC and <i>A. baumannii</i> (AB) XerC	103
Figure 3.2	Global Protein Sequence Alignment between <i>E. coli</i> (EC) XerD and <i>A. baumannii</i> (AB) XerD	103
Figure 3.3	Predicted XerC models from (A) <i>E. coli</i> and (B) <i>A. baumannii</i> ..	105
Figure 3.4	Predicted XerD models from (A) <i>E. coli</i> and (B) <i>A. baumannii</i> ..	105
Figure 3.5	Overproduction of XerC _{AB} (~37 kDa) and XerD _{AB} (~36 kDa) in B834ΔXerD cells	110
Figure 3.6	XerC _{AB} Purification by Ni ²⁺ Affinity Chromatography	112
Figure 3.7	XerD _{AB} Purification by Ni ²⁺ Affinity Chromatography	112
Figure 3.8	XerC _{AB} binding to <i>A. baumannii</i> chromosome <i>dif</i> , pS30-1 <i>dif</i> (L) and pS30-1 <i>dif</i> (R) recombination sites	114
Figure 3.9	XerD _{AB} binding to <i>A. baumannii</i> chromosome <i>dif</i> , pS30-1 <i>dif</i> (L) and pS30-1 <i>dif</i> (R) recombination sites	115

Figure 3.10	XerC _{AB} and XerD _{AB} binding to pS30-1 <i>dif</i> (L) and pS30-1 <i>dif</i> (R) recombination sites 117
Figure 3.11	Schematic of pS30-1 fragment with <i>dif</i> (L) and <i>dif</i> (R) regions . 118
Figure 3.12	Variability of nucleotides between <i>dif</i> sequences from proteobacterial species 124
Figure 4.1	Global protein sequence alignment between <i>E. coli</i> (EC) FtsK _Y and <i>A. baumannii</i> (AB) FtsK _Y 131
Figure 4.2	Global protein sequence alignment between <i>E. coli</i> (EC) XerD and <i>A. baumannii</i> (AB) XerD 132
Figure 4.3	Electrostatic profiles of <i>E. coli</i> FtsK _Y (A1 and A2) and <i>E. coli</i> XerD (B1 and B2) 134
Figure 4.4	Hydrophobic profiles of <i>E. coli</i> FtsK _Y (A1 and A2) and <i>E. coli</i> XerD (B1 and B2) 135
Figure 4.5	Electrostatic profiles of <i>A. baumannii</i> FtsK _Y (A1 and A2) and <i>A. baumannii</i> XerD (B1 and B2)..... 136
Figure 4.6	Hydrophobic profiles of <i>A. baumannii</i> FtsK _Y (A1 and A2) and <i>A. baumannii</i> XerD (B1 and B2)..... 137
Figure 4.7	<i>A. baumannii</i> FtsK _Y and <i>E. coli</i> XerD docked <i>in silico</i> 141
Figure 5.1	Recombination between two <i>dif</i> sites in repeat on a reporter plasmid 150
Figure 5.2	Single and double restriction digests of pFtsK _Y _AB 152
Figure 5.3	<i>In vivo</i> recombination assay of pFX142 in DS9041 cells (Δ FtsK _C) 154

Figure 5.4	<i>In vivo</i> recombination assay of pCDIF_AB in DS9041 cells (Δ FtsK _C) 157
Figure 5.5	<i>In vivo</i> recombination assay of reporter plasmids (A) pFX142 and (B) pCDIF_AB in DH5 α D- (Δ XerD) and DH5 α cells..... 159
Figure 5.6	Plasmid map of pSI-56 and pSI-56 recombination products.... 161
Figure 5.7	Plasmid map of pDIF_INV and pDIF_INV recombination products..... 163
Figure 5.8	Restriction digest of pDIF_INV. when digested with EcoRI 164
Figure 5.9	<i>In vivo</i> recombination assays of reporter plasmids (A) pSI-56, (B) pDIF_INV in DH5 α D- (Δ XerD) and DH5 α cells..... 166
Figure 5.10	EcoRI restriction digest of reporter plasmid (A) pSI-56 (B) pDIF_INV products from an earlier <i>in vivo</i> recombination assay 168
Figure 6.1	Whole genome distribution of KOPS-like motifs found on the <i>A. baumannii</i> chromosome 180
Figure 6.2	Whole genome distribution of KOPS (GGGNAGGG) on the <i>E. coli</i> chromosome..... 181
Figure 6.3 (A)	Overproduction of <i>A. baumannii</i> FtsK _C (~ 55 kDa) in BL21 182
Figure 6.3 (B)	Solubility assessment of <i>A. baumannii</i> FtsK _C 182
Figure 6.4 (A)	FtsK _C Purification by Ni ²⁺ Affinity Chromatography 184
Figure 6.4 (B)	FtsK _C Purification by Heparin Affinity Chromatography 184
Figure 6.5	ATPase assay of <i>A. baumannii</i> FtsK _C , with and without substrate DNA 185
Figure 6.6	ATPase assay of <i>A. baumannii</i> FtsK _C , with increasing DNA concentration (0 – 50 μ g /ml)..... 187

Figure 6.7	ATPase assay of <i>A. baumannii</i> FtsK _C , from 0 - 15 min.....	188
Figure 7.1	Single and double restriction digests of recombinant plasmids (A) pFtsK _{αβ} _TT and (B) pFtsK _γ _TT.....	197
Figure 7.2	Overproduction of <i>T. thermophilus</i> FtsK recombinants (A) FtsK _{αβ} in B834ΔXerD cells, (B) FtsK _γ in BL21 cells.	199
Figure 7.3	Solubility and heat purification assessment of <i>T. thermophilus</i> FtsK recombinants (A) FtsK _{αβ} (B) FtsK _γ	200
Figure 7.4	Ni ²⁺ Affinity Chromatography of <i>T. thermophilus</i> FtsK recombinants (A) FtsK _{αβ} (B) FtsK _γ	202
Figure 7.5	Ion Exchange Chromatography of <i>T. thermophilus</i> FtsK recombinants (A) anion exchange for FtsK _{αβ} (B) cation exchange for FtsK _γ	205
Figure 7.6	Size Exclusion Chromatography (SEC) of <i>T. thermophilus</i> FtsK _{αβ} under differing conditions.....	208
Figure 7.7	Selected Size Exclusion Chromatography (SEC) traces of <i>T. thermophilus</i> FtsK _{αβ} with, or without DNA and ATP	209
Figure 7.8	ATPase assay of <i>T. thermophilus</i> FtsK _{αβ}	212
Figure 7.9	Preliminary crystallography trials of FtsK _{αβ} and FtsK _γ using the commercial precipitant screens LMB, JCSG, PACT, STRUCTURE and MORPHEUS (Molecular Horizons).....	214
Figure 7.10	Crystallisation growth curve of protein in solution as a function of protein concentration and protein solubility	222

List of Tables

Table 2.1	List of solutions used in the study, alongside components required to produce solutions66
Table 2.2	Antibiotic working concentrations used selective bacterial growth.....67
Table 2.3	Bacterial strains from <i>E. coli</i> and <i>T. thermophilus</i> involved in the current study.....68
Table 2.4	Plasmids, and the associated gene/ function, antibiotic resistance, and source69
Table 2.5	Nucleotide sequence and key features of oligonucleotide primers71
Table 2.6 (A)	PCR component concentrations for the amplification of <i>A. baumannii</i> FtsK _γ73
Table 2.6 (B)	PCR thermocycling conditions for the amplification of <i>A. baumannii</i> FtsK _γ73
Table 2.7 (A)	PCR component concentrations for the screening of pSI-5673
Table 2.7 (B)	PCR thermocycling conditions for the screening of pSI-5673
Table 2.8 (A)	PCR component concentrations for the amplification of <i>T. thermophilus</i> FtsK _{αβ} and FtsK _γ74
Table 2.8(B)	PCR thermocycling conditions for the amplification of <i>T. thermophilus</i> FtsK _{αβ} and FtsK _γ74
Table 2.9	Overproduction conditions for <i>A. baumannii</i> and <i>T. thermophilus</i> recombinants84
Table 2.10	ATPase assay conditions for the positive (+ ve) and negative (-ve) controls90

Table 2.11	ATPase assay conditions with constant concentration of FtsK and XerD 91
Table 2.12	ATPase assay conditions with an increasing concentration of FtsK and XerD..... 91
Table 2.13	ATPase assay conditions with a increasing concentration of FtsK, and no DNA..... 91
Table 2.14	ATPase assay conditions with a constant concentration of FtsK and XerD, and increasing DNA 92
Table 2.15	EMSA conditions between <i>A. baumannii</i> XerC and XerD, and fluorophore tagged <i>dif</i> site oligonucleotides..... 96
Table 2.16	<i>In vivo</i> recombination assay conditions of plasmid(s) and strains used 98
Table 3.1	Summary of position and placement of key residues identified within XerC _{AB} and XerD _{AB} 107
Table 3.2	DNA sequence alignment of <i>A. baumannii</i> chromosome <i>dif</i> , pS30-1 <i>dif</i> (L), and pS30-1 <i>dif</i> (R) recombination sites..... 109
Table 6.1	KOPS-like octamers identified within a ± 50 kB region of <i>A. baumannii</i> chromosome <i>dif</i> , listed in descending order according to the calculated skew ratio towards <i>dif</i> 177
Table 7.1	Specific precipitant screen conditions and outcomes from the preliminary crystallography trials of FtsK _{$\alpha\beta$} and FtsK _{γ} 216

List of Abbreviations

DNA	deoxyribonucleic acid
AA	amino acid
AAA+	ATPases associated with various cellular activities
ADP	adenosine diphosphate
ADPnP	ATP analog 6'-adenylyl-/3,y-imidodiphosphate
AMR	antimicrobial resistance
ATP	adenosine triphosphate
ATPyS	adenosine 5'-O-(3-thio)triphosphate
BLAST	Basic Local Alignment Search Tool
CRAb	Carbapenem resistant <i>Acinetobacter baumannii</i>
Cryo-EM	cryogenic electron microscopy
<i>dif</i>	deletion induced filamentation region
dsDNA	double stranded DNA
EcFtsK_C	<i>E. coli</i> FtsK C-terminal domain
EM	electron microscopy
EMSA	electrophoretic mobility shift assay
FtsK	filamenting temperature sensitive (protein) K
FtsK_{50C}	<i>E. coli</i> FtsK C-terminal domain, with 50 amino acid linker region
FtsK_C	FtsK C-terminal domain
FtsK_γ	FtsK gamma subdomain
FtsK_N	N – terminal domain of FtsK
FtsK_{αβ}	alpha – beta (motor) subdomain of FtsK
GFP	green fluorescent protein

HJ	Holliday junction
HR	homologous recombination
IS	insertion sequence
KOPS	FtsK orienting polar sequence
MCS	Multiple cloning site
MW	Molecular weight
<i>oriC</i>	origin of chromosome replication
PaFtsK_C	<i>P. aeruginosa</i> FtsK C-terminal domain
PaFtsK_{CΔγ}	<i>P. aeruginosa</i> FtsK C-termina domain, without gamma subdomain
PaFtsK_{αβ}	<i>P. aerugnisa</i> FtsK C-terminal domain, with alpha and beta subdomains
PCR	polymerase chain reaction
Pi	inorganic phosphate
RI	resistance island
RNA	ribonucleic acid
RS	restriction site
SEC	size exclusion chromatography
ssRNA	single stranded ribonucleic acid
<i>ter</i>	terminus region
Xer	chromosomal encoded recombinase
Xer_{CAB}	<i>A. baumannii</i> XerC
Xer_{CEC}	<i>E. coli</i> XerC
Xer_{DAB}	<i>A. baumannii</i> XerD
Xer_{DEC}	<i>E. coli</i> XerD

