

doi: 10.1093/femsec/fiaa107 Advance Access Publication Date: 30 May 2020 Research Article

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Online searching platform for the antibiotic resistome in bacterial tree of life and global habitats

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One sentence summary: Online searching platform for antibiotic resistome in bacterial tree of life and global habitats by big data mining into 54 718 bacterial genomes, 15 738 bacterial plasmids, 3000 bacterial integrons and 854 environmental metagenomes. Editor: Kornelia Smalla

ABSTRACT

Metagenomic analysis reveals that antibiotic-resistance genes (ARGs) are widely distributed in both human-associated and non-human-associated habitats. However, it is difficult to equally compare ARGs between samples without a standard method. Here, we constructed a comprehensive profile of the distribution of potential ARGs in bacterial tree of life and global habitats by investigating ARGs in 55 000 bacterial genomes, 16 000 bacterial plasmid sequences, 3000 bacterial integron sequences and 850 metagenomes using a standard pipeline. We found that >80% of all known ARGs are not carried by any plasmid or integron sequences. Among potential mobile ARGs, tetracycline and beta-lactam resistance genes (such as *tetA*, *tetM* and class A beta-lactamase gene) distribute in multiple pathogens across bacterial phyla, indicating their clinical relevance and importance. We showed that class 1 integrases (intI1) display a poor linear relationship with total ARGs in both non-human-associated and human-associated environments. Furthermore, both total ARGs and *intI1* genes show little correlation with the degree of anthropogenicity. These observations highlight the need to differentiate ARGs of high clinical relevance. This profile is published on an online platform (ARGs-OSP, http://args-osp.herokuapp.com/) as a valuable resource for the most challenging topics in this field, i.e. the risk, evolution and emergence of ARGs.

Keywords: genomic analysis; metagenomic analysis; environmental selection; global antibiotic resistome; anthropogenicity

INTRODUCTION

Due to the intensive use of antibiotics, antibiotic resistance genes (ARGs) are emerging in almost all environments, becoming one of the top global concerns. Through high-throughput sequencing and metagenomic analysis, ARG-related studies have been conducted in various habitats. They are found widely distributed across both human-associated habitats (Tadesse *et al.* 2012; Martinez, Coque and Baquero 2015) and natural and polluted non-human-associated environments (Alonso, Sanchez and Martinez 2001), such as sediment (Gonzalez-Plaza et al. 2017; Chu et al. 2018: 201), soil (Nesme et al. 2014; Lau et al. 2017), surface water (Rodriguez-Mozaz et al. 2015; Tang et al. 2016), marine water (Nesme et al. 2014: 20) and permafrost (D'Costa et al. 2011; Rascovan et al. 2016). The identification of ARGs in drinking water (Ma et al. 2017b) and human food (Bengtsson-Palme 2017) further reveals the potential for their direct exposure to the human microbiome. All these

Received: 8 May 2019; Accepted: 27 May 2020

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metagenomes are valuable sources for the construction of a global profile of the antibiotic resistome, including the phylogenetic and ecological distribution, diversity, abundances, host pathogenicity and potential gene mobility.

However, lacking a standard method to identify and annotate ARGs makes it difficult to conduct an equal comparison across samples (Gupta, Tiwari and Cytryn 2020). Currently, different studies use various searching methods, searching criteria, ARG databases and quantitative units. For example, the abundances of ARGs were found to have a 5-20-fold difference (Yin et al. 2018) when comparing the domain-based searching method of the Hidden Markov Model (HMM) (Eddy 1998) and the similaritybased searching methods of BLAST (Camacho et al. 2009), USE-ARCH (Edgar 2010) or DIAMOND (Buchfink, Xie and Huson 2015). In addition, advanced bioinformatics tools have been developed to annotate ARGs in metagenomes, such as using gene-capture platforms (Lanza et al. 2018) and a structure-based model (Ruppé et al. 2019). Another obstacle for direct comparison is the different ARG reference databases used because different databases suit different analytical scenarios (Gupta, Tiwari and Cytryn 2020). Even the two most-cited ARG databases, the Comprehensive Antibiotic Resistance Database (CARD; http://arpcard. mcmaster.ca) (Jia et al. 2016) and the Antibiotic Resistance Genes Database (ARDB) (Liu and Pop 2008), share only 10-25% of reference sequences (Yang et al. 2016). This highlighted the need to re-analyse the metagenomes from diverse habitats using a standard pipeline to depict the ecological distribution of ARGs.

Still, metagenomic analysis alone could hardly answer the frontier scientific questions in this field, such as the evolution, emergence and risk of ARGs. These knowledge gaps could be partially filled by bacterial genome sequences (Pal *et al.* 2015; Li, Xia and Zhang 2017), including the phylogenetic distribution, gene mobility and gene arrangement of ARGs. The integration of whole genome analysis and metagenome analysis is a promising attempt to construct a comprehensive profile of the antibiotic resistome.

However, processing big datasets is time- and resourceconsuming and is unnecessarily repeated by individual researchers all over the world. Many researchers publish their processed results on online platforms for convenient usage by other researchers, such as IMG/VR (https://img.jgi.doe.gov/vr/) (Paez-Espino et al. 2016). Thus, in this study, we constructed an updated and comprehensive profile of the distribution of potential ARGs on an ARGs online searching platform (ARGs-OSP, http://args-osp.herokuapp.com/), to serve as a valuable resource to guide diverse research topics and inspire new research interests in this area.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Collecting various bacterial datasets

We collected 54 718 quality-filtered bacterial genome sequences with >50% completeness and <10% contamination (Parks et al. 2017) (Table S1, see online supplementary material, and Fig. 1A) from NCBI Genome (Sayers et al. 2012), 15 738 bacterial plasmids from NCBI Genome (Sayers et al. 2012) and 2977 bacterial integrons (Zhang et al. 2018) as Whole Genome Dataset (WGD). All sequences in WGD were curated by Plasfow (Krawczyk, Lipinski and Dziembowski 2018) and a well-curated plasmid database (Brooks, Kaze and Sistrom 2019) into plasmids and non-plasmids. The taxonomy of bacterial genomes was downloaded from NCBI Genome to predict potential pathogenicity by mapping the taxonomy to a list of potential human bacterial pathogens (Woolhouse and Gowtage-Sequeria 2005). In summary, the genomes in WGD covered in total 3654 bacterial species from 32 phyla. We collected 854 metagenomic datasets from NCBI SRA (Sayers et al. 2012) and MG-RAST (Wilke et al. 2015) (Fig. 1B) as the Metagenome Dataset (MGD). The metadata were obtained from the original publications of all metagenomes and were manually categorized by the guidelines from previous studies, such as the abundance of clinical class 1 integrases (intI1) (Gillings 2018) and habitat information (Pal et al. 2016; Li, Xia and Zhang 2017; Thompson et al. 2017). Briefly, all metagenomes were classified into 25 habitat-subtypes of seven habitat-types, including animal feces (chicken, cow and pig); human feces (American, Asian and European); activated sludge, reactor biofilm, digested sludge, effluent and influent from wastewater treatment plants (WWTPs); permafrost soil; sediment (river sediment, fishpond sediment, gulf sediment and marine sediment); soil (Amazon soil, Antarctica soil, city soil including grasslands and parks, prairie soil and rural soil); water (coastal water, drinking water, marine and surface water) (for metadata and accession data see Table S2 in online supplementary material). Here, we defined animal feces, human feces and WWTPs as human-associated habitats, and permafrost soil, sediment, soil and water as non-human-associated habitats. The non-human-associated samples were further curated by <0.05% fecal contamination, which was represented by the total percentage of reads covered by three taxa as fecal markers, including uncultured crAssphage (Karkman, Pärnänen and Larsson 2019), Bacteroides (Savichtcheva, Okayama and Okabe 2007) and Escherichia coli (Carlos et al. 2010) (Fig. S1, see online supplementary material). The percentage of reads covered by the three taxa was calculated by the number of reads mapping to the three taxa divided by the total number of reads mapping to all taxa by kraken (Wood and Salzberg 2014) using the default library and settings. Non-human-associated samples with >0.05% fecal contamination were excluded. Identifying and annotating ARGs and intI1 genes

We used the Structured ARG reference database (SARG) (Yang et al. 2016), a well-curated database integrating CARD and ARDB, as a standard database for identifying and annotating ARGs (details in Supplementary methods, see online supplementary material). All the coding sequences (CDS) were extracted from GenBank files of WGD and were searched against SARG and the intI1 database (Zhang et al. 2018). In MGD, ARGs and intI1 genes were identified by a two-step similarity-search method, through USEARCH v8.0.1623_i86linux64 (Edgar 2010) and BLASTX 2.2.28+ (Camacho et al. 2009). The abundances of genes were calculated into units of ppm, gene copies per bacterial 16S and gene copies per bacterial cell (Yang et al. 2016). Briefly, the copy number of a gene was firstly normalized against its reference sequence length and then normalized to the total number of raw reads, total number of bacterial 16S rRNA genes and total number of bacterial cells, respectively (Yin et al. 2018). The total number of bacterial cells in metagenomes was inferred from the average coverage of 30 universal bacterial essential single copy genes (Nayfach and Pollard 2015).

Analysis and visualization

We combined the abundances of ARGs with the phylogenetic and ecological information of samples via self-written scripts using Python 3.6 (https://www.python.org/) and R 3.3.2 (Team

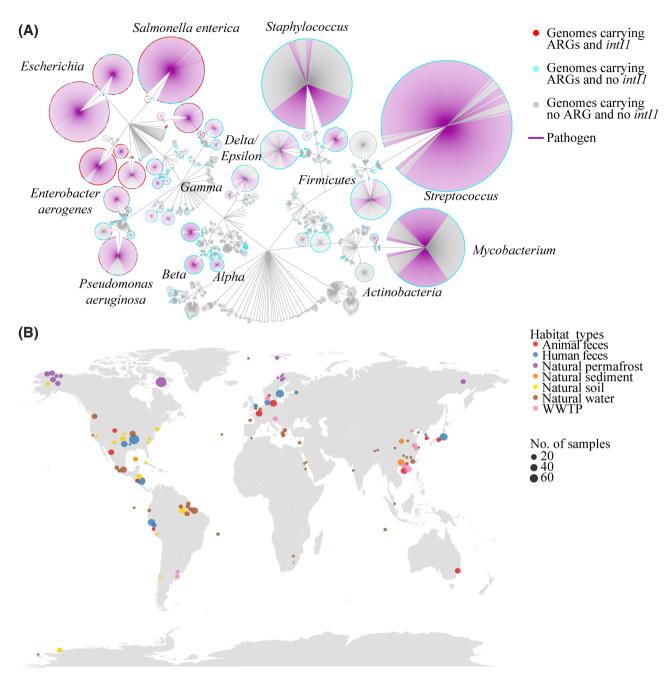


Figure 1. Overview of the Whole Genome Dataset (WGD) and Metagenome Dataset (MGD). (A) The phylogenetic relationship of 54 718 bacterial genomes of 45 phyla in WGD. Each genome is represented by a node and the pathogenic genomes are indicated by purple edges. The color of the node represents the co-occurrence of class 1 integrases (int1) and ARGs in that genome. To be specific, a red node indicates that the genome carries both ARGs and int11 genes; a blue node indicates that the genome carries ARGs, but not int11 genes; a grey node indicates that the genome carries neither ARGs nor int11 genes. We found no genomes carrying int11 genes but no ARGs. (B) The global map of metagenomic datasets in MGD. The size of the node is proportional to the number of samples and the color of the node represents the habitat-type.

2013). The rarefaction curves (Gotelli and Colwell 2001) of WGD and MGD were conducted by randomly subsampling genomes or metagenomic reads without replacement (Colwell *et al.* 2012; Deng, Daley and Smith 2015). All the networks were visualized with Cytoscape 3.3.0 (Shannon *et al.* 2003) in Tree or Hierarchic layout.

Availability and implementation

All data, results and scripts are available on ARGs-OSP (http://ar gs-osp.herokuapp.com/) and Github (https://github.com/caozh ichongchong/ARGs-OSP and https://github.com/bryanhou1/arg osp).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A global profile of the antibiotic resistome

We developed ARGs-OSP (http://args-osp.herokuapp.com/) to publish a global profile of the antibiotic resistome covering the phylogenetic and ecological distribution, diversity, abundances, host range and host pathogenicity of ARGs in WGD and MGD (Fig. 1). By constructing the rarefaction curves for WGD and MGD, we evaluated that both datasets provide good representation of the ARGs currently found in bacterial tree of life and global habitats (Fig. S2, see online supplementary material). Users can search and download the prevalence and abundances of ARGs across taxonomies and habitats from ARGs-OSP. The accessibility and convenience of this platform could meet the requirements of versatile research interests, such as host ranges of ARGs, dissemination of ARGs between undisrupted non-human-affected and human-affected habitats, and comparing ARGs in local samples to all global samples.

Most known ARGs are non-mobile and the mobile ARGs conferring tetracycline and beta-lactam resistance are widely distributed across bacterial species and highly prevalent in human pathogens. In whole bacterial genomes, 65% of ARGs in SARG were detected in 809 bacterial species across 13 phyla of a total of 3654 bacterial species across 32 phyla, and 27% of all ARGcarrying species are genomes of potential human pathogens. Even though human pathogens could be overrepresented in WGD, we found that genomes carrying an ARG are three times as likely to come from a pathogen as from an average genome in WGD. This observation indicates that ARGs could be strongly positively selected by antibiotics in human pathogens than non-pathogens (Ji et al. 2012; Vaz-Moreira, Nunes and Manaia 2014). Of all known ARGs identified in WGD, <20% are potentially mobile, i.e. were found on mobile genetic elements (MGEs) such as plasmids and integrons. ARGs conferring multidrug resistance (with an occurrence of 29.4%), beta-lactam resistance (15.5%), aminoglycoside resistance (10.5%) and tetracycline resistance (8.7%) were universally detected in bacterial species, which is consistent with a previous study investigating 2500 complete bacterial genomes (Pal et al. 2015). Some ARGs are frequently carried by a wide lineage of >50 bacterial species, i.e. tetA, tetM, acrB, aph(3'-I, aadA, mdtK, tolC, and class A betalactamase gene, with >50% prevalence in human pathogens. Some of these ARGs encoding efflux pumps, i.e. acrAB and mdtK, could be non-mobile ARGs (Nishino and Yamaguchi 2001; Piddock 2006) as they were not found on any MGEs. Instead, tetA, tetM, aadA, tolC and class A beta-lactamase gene were found on multiple MGEs, indicating that they are more likely to function mainly in antibiotic resistance and to be strongly selected by antibiotics. These mobile ARGs are widely distributed across bacterial phyla and the human microbiome, suggesting their importance in both medical and environmental fields.

The total abundance of ARGs is not significantly higher in human-associated habitats than in non-human-associated environments. We found that >90% of known ARGs are present in MGD. We observed a higher density and richness of ARG reads in human-associated environments of human feces, animal feces and WWTPs than in non-human-associated environments of water, sediment, permafrost and soil (Fig. 2). However, the abundances of total ARGs show little difference across habitats (<10-fold difference and P-value of 0.2 by Kruskal–Wallis test) after normalizing the total number of ARGs against the total number of bacterial cells per sample (Fig. S3 and supplementary results, see online supplementary material). This means that even though different habitats harbor different compositions of bacterial communities, the average level of antibiotic resistance within bacterial cells is quite stable (Ruppé *et al.* 2019). Thus, the high richness and density of ARGs in human-associated habitats could be mainly contributed by a high density of bacterial communities in these habitats (Pal *et al.* 2016). Since most known ARGs are non-mobile, this indicates that the diversity and richness of ARGs that are detected in MGD are tightly linked with the native bacterial community composition.

To compare to other studies, we normalized the abundances into ARG copies per bacterial 16S and summed up the total relative abundance of all ARGs in a metagenome sample. In detail, the animal feces samples harbor the highest abundance of ARGs (0.4 copies per bacterial 16S), where the sub-therapeutic usage of antibiotics for growth promotion (Aust et al. 2008; Hu, Zhou and Luo 2010) may promote the selection and dissemination of ARGs (Beaber, Hochhut and Waldor 2004). Non-human-associated permafrost and soil also display high abundances of ARGs (0.3 and 0.2 copies per 16S, respectively), which is at a similar level to human feces and WWTPs (0.2 and 0.1 copies per 16S, respectively). However, >90% of ARG reads in permafrost share a low similarity to ARG reads in other habitats (<90% amino-acid similarity), suggesting that most permafrost ARGs could be sequence variants or ancestors of the ARGs of clinical relevance in humanassociated environments. Besides, the majority (>90%) of ARGs in human-associated metagenomes and on plasmids share a high similarity (>90% amino-acid similarity) to ARG reference sequences. These observations indicate the importance for current ARG databases to differentiate the sequence variants of clinically relevant ARGs and to use a strict similarity cutoff, i.e. 90% amino-acid similarity, to identify clinically relevant ARGs. Within the soil, the habitat-subtype of rural soil has the highest level of ARGs (0.3 copies per 16S), indicating that these samples could be contaminated by the agricultural use of animal manure. The non-human-associated water and sediment display the lowest ARG abundances of 0.05 and 0.02 copies per 16S, respectively. Most habitats exhibit a similar resistance level to previous studies (Bengtsson-Palme et al. 2015; Li et al. 2015; Pal et al. 2016) except for a 10-100-fold higher detection of ARGs in soil and surface water. These differences could be partially explained by the pollution history of the soil environment (3fold ARG abundance in rural soil compared with Antarctica soil) and divergent types of surface water environment. Thus, we collected a large sample size of metagenomes from various habitatsubtypes to provide a more representative global profile.

Anthropogenicity appears to have a weak correlation with the total abundances of ARGs, but could increase the diversity of ARGs in human-associated environments. The function of ARGs, including the ARG families and their target antibiotics, was annotated by SARG. The sediment harbors the smallest diversity, <30%, of all ARG families. Even though the sediment habitat has the smallest sample size (32 metagenomes), its rarefaction curve appears to be leveling off (Fig. 2, and online supplementary results). Bacteria in soil, permafrost and human feces cover \sim 50% of all ARG families. Bacteria from animal feces, water and WWTP environments display a rich diversity covering almost 75% of all ARG families. The ARG families that have long been the focus of ARG-related research are widely distributed in all seven habitats, such as aminoglycoside resistance gene aph(3)-I, beta-lactam resistance gene TEM, sulfonamide resistance genes sul1 and sul2, macrolides, lincosamides, streptogramines (MLS) resistance genes macAB, tetracycline resistance genes tetA and tetM, multidrug resistance genes acrAB, and vancomycin resistance gene vanA (Berendonk et al. 2015; Pal et al. 2016). sul1, sul2,

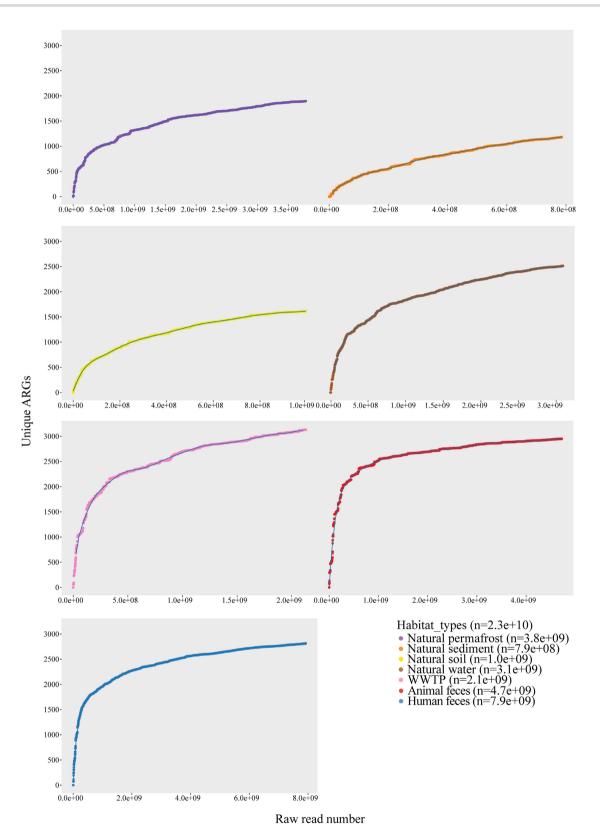


Figure 2. The rarefaction curves of the number of unique ARGs for seven habitat-types of the Metagenome Dataset (MGD) obtained by randomly subsampling metagenomic reads without replacement.

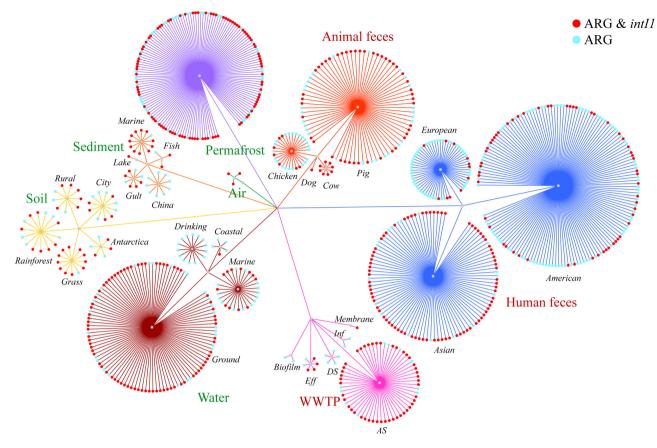


Figure 3. The ecological co-occurrence of class 1 integrases (int11) and ARGs in seven habitat-types. Each node represented a metagenomic sample and the color represents the co-occurrence of int11 and ARGs. To be specific, a red node indicates that the sample harbors both ARGs and int11; a blue node indicates the sample harbors ARGs but not int11. We found no samples harboring int11 but no ARGs. The colors of the edges indicate the habitat-types.

aph(3)-I and TEM were found on many MGEs, indicating that they could be strongly selected under the wide usage of antibiotics. *macAB* and *acrAB*, on the other hand, were not found on any MGEs and may convey ecological functions other than antibiotic resistance.

Co-occurrence of ARGs and intl1 genes

Although high abundances of intI1 genes and ARGs have been reported in many human-associated environments, the cooccurrence of intI1 genes and total ARGs has not been wellevaluated using metagenomes. The clinical intI1 genes are considered as a potential indicator of anthropogenic pollution (Gillings et al. 2015) because of their high abundance and universal occurrence in human-associated environments (Pruden, Arabi and Storteboom 2012; Ma et al. 2017a). Previous studies on the correlation between intI1 genes and human pollution mainly focus on: (i) bacteria carrying intI1 genes are highly abundant in human-associated environments and cannot be effectively removed from WWTPs (Du et al. 2014: 2); (ii) intI1 genes and ARGs are co-selected (Seiler and Berendonk 2012; Khan et al. 2013) and significantly correlated (i.e. $qacE/qacE \Delta$ 1, but not sul1) in habitats with or without human impact (Jechalke et al. 2014, 2015); (iii) intI1 genes increase with anthropogenic pollution, such as heavy metals, disinfectants, antibiotics and pesticides (Lehmann et al. 2016; Yang et al. 2017). Additionally, some ARGs (sul1, sul2 and tetM) are evaluated to have a strong correlation with intI1 genes in polluted environments (Lv et al. 2018). Thus, it is critical to evaluate the co-occurrence of intI1 genes and ARGs by our datasets.

The intI1 genes display a weak linear relationship with all ARGs, but a stronger one with ARGs carried on integrons. Overall, the total abundances of intI1 genes (including clinical intI1 genes and their environmental variants) have a positive correlation with the total abundances of ARGs in all environments (Table S3, see online supplementary material, and Fig. 4). However, intI1 genes were not detected in a large portion of animal feces and human feces samples (light blue nodes in Fig. 3), including samples with high abundances of ARGs. Moreover, intI1 genes are highly conserved in Gammaproteobacteria (red nodes in Fig. 1A) (Zhang et al. 2018), whereas ARGs are widely distributed across bacterial phyla (red and blue nodes in Fig. 1A). This indicates that intI1 genes are more likely to be correlated to a subset of ARGs, i.e. ARGs carried on integrons, than total ARGs. This also explains the relatively low abundance of intI1 genes in some animal feces (such as chicken feces), where Gammaproteobacteria is usually not dominant. Furthermore, the total abundances of intI1 genes and ARGs display a weak linear relationship in most habitats ($R^2 = 0.003-0.47$), especially in WWTPs, soil and permafrost ($R^2 = 0.003-0.008$), excluding samples without detection of intI1 genes (Table S3). Different habitats were found to comply with different linear relationships, with slopes ranging from 0.53 to 2.10. The intI1 genes fit better with linear relationships (in terms of R²) to a group of ARGs carried on integrons (integron-carried ARGs), which amounted to a total of 105 ARGs (accession data are listed in Table S4, see online supplementary material) that were found among all available clinical

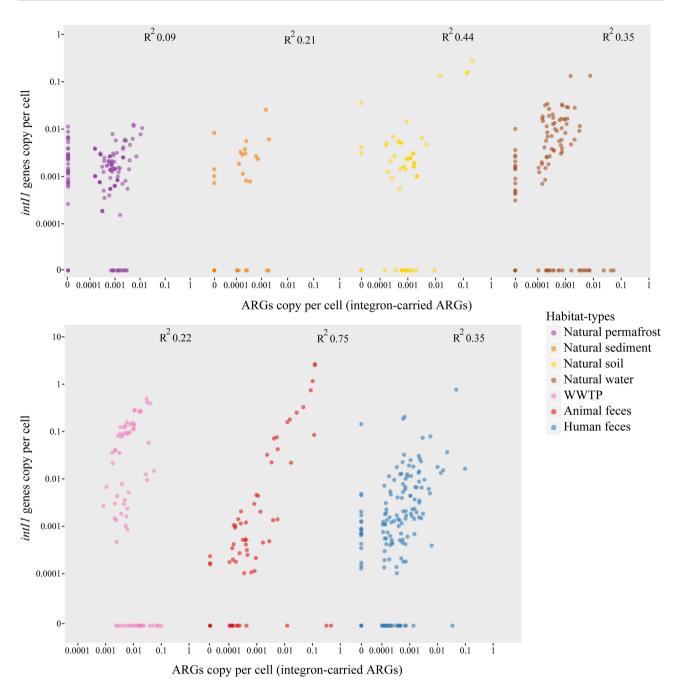


Figure 4. The co-occurrence of class 1 integrases (int1) and a group of 105 ARGs found among all available class 1 integrons (integron-carried ARGs) in seven habitattypes, fitted by linear regression (R²). Samples without detection of int11 genes were excluded when calculating linear regression.

and non-clinical class 1 integrons (Zhang et al. 2018), especially in animal feces ($R^2 = 0.75$).

CONCLUSIONS

In this study, a comprehensive profile of the antibiotic resistome was constructed by investigating the ARGs in WGD (54 718 bacterial genomes, 15 738 bacterial plasmids and 2977 bacterial integrons) and MGD (854 metagenomes). Both WGD (3654 species covering 32 bacterial phyla) and MGD (25 habitat-subtypes covering seven habitats) were evaluated to have good representativeness and coverage of known ARGs that reached a plateau of 2625 and 3821 unique ARGs, respectively, in rarefaction curves. Thus, they could serve as good resources to investigate the phylogenetic and ecological distribution of ARGs. All ARGs were identified and annotated using a standardized pipeline for equal comparison among different samples. An online searching platform, ARGs-OSP, was designed to publish all results obtained in this study, making the data easily accessible to other researchers without unnecessary re-computations. ARGs-OSP could provide a valuable resources for versatile research interests.

By analysing the profile of the antibiotic resistome, we found that >80% of ARGs in the SARG database are less likely to be mobile, as they were not found in any plasmid or integron collected in WGD. Mobile ARGs conferring tetracycline and betalactam resistance were detected in multiple human pathogens across bacterial phyla, indicating their importance for future research and intervention. Moreover, both total ARGs and intI1 genes show little correlation to the degree of anthropogenicity. These observations highlighted the need to differentiate ARGs based on properties indicating their potential risk to human health, such as gene mobility, correlation to anthropogenicity, host range and host pathogenicity, to help prioritize ARGs of clinical relevance and importance. However, although in this study, clinical intI1 genes were not distinguished from environmental variants of intI1 genes, sequence variance between clinical and environmental intI1 genes should be considered in future studies.

The major limitation of this study lay in the database of ARGs and the datasets of WGD and MGD. No ARGs were found among a wide lineage of the environmental microbiome (80% of bacterial species). Although WGD is populated by bacterial species of research interest and medical importance, almost 30% of ARGs in SARG were only detected in MGD, but not WGD, indicating that the current collection of bacterial genomes could not fully represent the environmental microbiome. Plasmid assembly from short read sequences is often problematic, therefore investigating the association of ARGs on plasmids is problematic in both MGD and WGD (Blau et al. 2018; Reid et al. 2020). MGD mainly covers the representative habitat-types, but not extreme environments. Moreover, ARGs detected in MGD largely represent the natural resistome of native bacterial communities. In contrast, the analysis of WGD has numerous advantages and would allow many questions to be addressed, such as the co-occurrence of ARGs with metal resistance genes (Li, Xia and Zhang 2017), intI1 genes (Zhang et al. 2018) and MGEs (Reid et al. 2020). However, with the decreasing cost of sequencing, new datasets of high quality and massive quantity will facilitate the continual expansion of WGD and MGD. In addition, the development of new technologies such as long-read sequencing and single-cell sequencing will also supply genomes, plasmids and metagenomes of high quality. Periodic updating and flexible visualization are expected in ARGs-OSP for more convenient and versatile usage in future studies.

SUPPLEMENTARY DATA

Supplementary data are available at FEMSEC online.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A.N.Z. acknowledges the University of Hong Kong for a postgraduate studentship. C.J.H. would like to thank University of Hong Kong for a research fellowship. The authors appreciate the help of Miss Vicky Fung and Miss Lilian Y.L. CHAN for technical assistance with the High Performance Computing & Grid Computing System.

FUNDING

The authors would like to thank National Key R&D Program of China (grant No. 2018YFC0310600) and Hong Kong Theme-based Research Scheme (T21-711/16-R) for financial support.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

A.N.Z. and T.Z. developed this research project. A.N.Z. downloaded the datasets, analysed the data, designed the platform and wrote the manuscript. C.J.H. and M.N. constructed the platform. L.L.G. provided suggestions in the data analysis and manuscript preparation. T.Z. guided webpage development and revised the manuscript.

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