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*The AAA+ ClpX machine unfolds a keystone subunit to remodel the Mu transpososome*

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**Citation:** Abdelhakim, Aliaa H., Robert T. Sauer, and Tania A. Baker. "The AAA+ ClpX machine unfolds a keystone subunit to remodel the Mu transpososome." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 107.6 (2010): 2437 -2442. © 2011 by the National Academy of Sciences

**As Published:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.1073/pnas.0910905106>

**Publisher:** National Academy of Sciences (U.S.)

**Persistent URL:** <http://hdl.handle.net/1721.1/61360>

**Version:** Final published version: final published article, as it appeared in a journal, conference proceedings, or other formally published context

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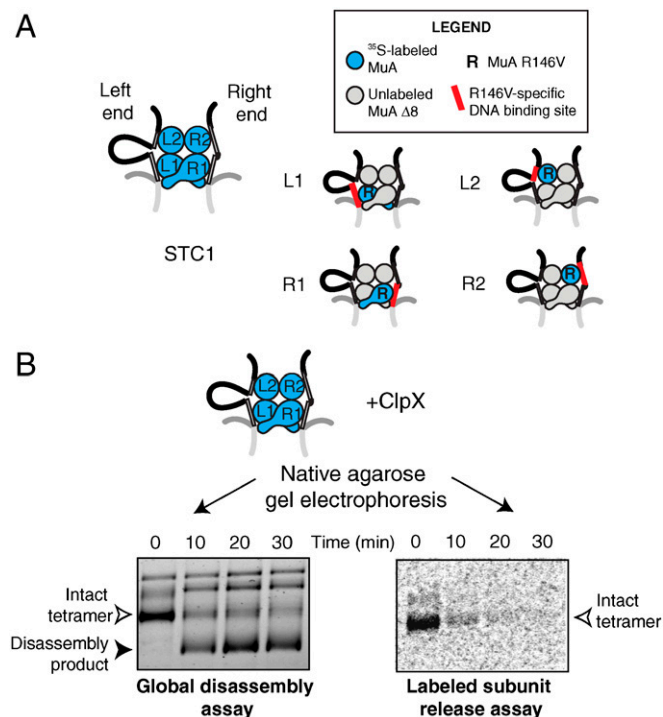


**PNAS**

<sup>a</sup>Department of Biology, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA 02139 and <sup>b</sup>Howard Hughes Medical Institute, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA 02139

AAA+ ATPase | ClpX unfoldase | ClpXP protease | integrase | transposase

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**Fig. 1.** Description of altered-specificity MuA targeting and disassembly experiments. **A.** The stable transpososome (STC1) consists of four MuA subunits assembled on left and right DNA ends. Subunits bound to the L1 and R1 sites catalyze DNA cleavage and joining, and adopt an interwoven structure, represented schematically by a drumstick shape. MuA<sup>R146V</sup> can be targeted to each of the four DNA-binding sites in the STC using a R146V-specific DNA-binding-site. Blue subunits are labeled with <sup>35</sup>S-methionine; “R” indicates MuA<sup>R146V</sup>; red indicates a DNA-binding-site specific for MuA<sup>R146V</sup>. **B.** ClpX action on assembled transpososomes is monitored using two assays: a global disassembly assay and a labeled MuA subunit release assay. The rate of global disassembly is monitored by the rate of appearance of a specific DNA disassembly product (Closed Arrow; Open Arrow shows intact transpososomes). The rate of labeled subunit release is monitored by disappearance of radioactive signal from the position on the native agarose gel corresponding to intact transpososomes (Open Arrow). Gel images are the same as the wild-type reaction in Fig. S1.

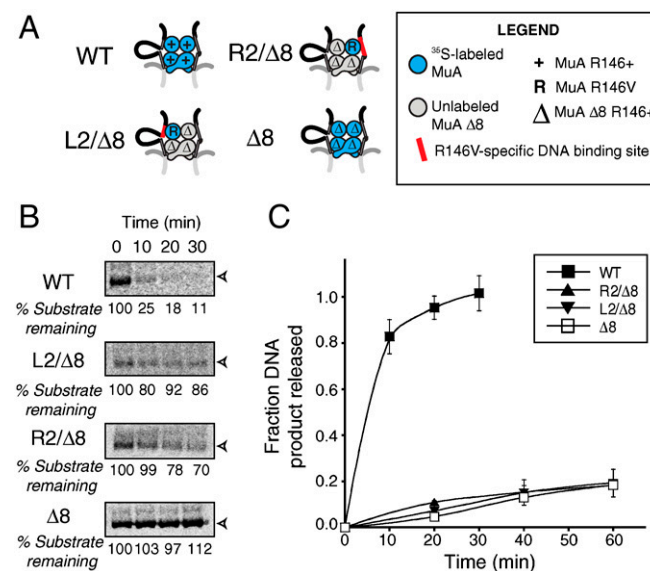
singly at each of the four MuA binding sites (R1, R2, L1, and L2) to generate four miniMu targeting plasmids, bound <sup>35</sup>S-MuA<sup>R146V</sup> to these plasmids, and filled the remaining wild-type sites with unlabeled MuA (Fig. 1A). This scheme resulted in incorporation of one subunit of <sup>35</sup>S-MuA<sup>R146V</sup> into each type of transpososome; these complexes were then purified for ClpX-mediated disassembly assays (described below).

To determine which of the transpososome subunits must be unfolded by ClpX to destabilize the complex, ClpX action on the transpososomes was simultaneously monitored using two assays; (i) a global disassembly assay measured the appearance of a specific DNA disassembly product (hereafter called DNA product); and (ii) the release of <sup>35</sup>S-subunits was monitored by disappearance of labeled transpososomes. Both assays were performed on the same reaction samples and were visualized on native agarose gels (Fig. 1B). Whether unfolding of a particular subunit caused disassembly was assessed by determining if release of the labeled subunit and global disassembly were correlated. Control disassembly reactions were performed with complexes assembled on a wild-type miniMu plasmid with either <sup>35</sup>S-MuA or <sup>35</sup>S-MuA<sup>Δ8</sup>, a variant lacking eight C-terminal residues required for efficient ClpX recognition (19). Complexes containing <sup>35</sup>S-MuA<sup>Δ8</sup> were not disassembled at an appreciable rate (<10% product released by 20 min, when the reaction with wild-type MuA is nearly complete) and no appreciable removal of

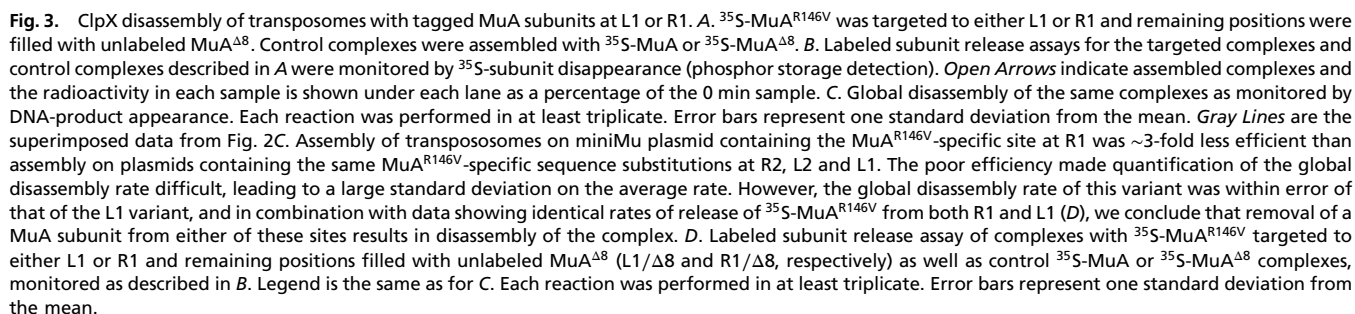
<sup>35</sup>S-MuA<sup>Δ8</sup> was detected (Figs. 2 and 3 and Fig. S1). Complexes containing a <sup>35</sup>S-MuA<sup>R146V</sup> subunit were disassembled at the same rate as <sup>35</sup>S-MuA complexes, indicating that the R146V substitution did not alter ClpX recognition or disassembly (Fig. S1).

**ClpX Unfolding of MuA Subunits at R2 or L2 Does Not Result in Global Destabilization.** We targeted full-length <sup>35</sup>S-MuA<sup>R146V</sup> to a single cognate site at position L2 or R2, filled the remaining sites with unlabeled MuA<sup>Δ8</sup>, and assayed ClpX-catalyzed transpososome disassembly (Fig. 2A). As monitored by loss of radioactivity, ClpX released at least some <sup>35</sup>S-MuA<sup>R146V</sup> from these transpososomes, albeit at a rate substantially slower than that observed with the wild-type <sup>35</sup>S-MuA control (Fig. 2B, see quantification of radioactivity under each lane). Global disassembly of mixed MuA<sup>R146V</sup>/MuA<sup>Δ8</sup> transpososomes occurred at a rate similar to that observed with the MuA<sup>Δ8</sup>-complex control, which is poorly recognized by ClpX (Fig. 2C). Thus, the results of these subunit-targeting experiments indicate that ClpX can recognize and unfold full-length subunits bound to L2 or R2, albeit slowly, but that removal of these subunits does not result in marked destabilization of the STC1.

**ClpX Unfolding of Subunits Bound at L1 or R1 Destabilizes STC1.** Using the experimental approach described above, we targeted <sup>35</sup>S-MuA<sup>R146V</sup> either to a cognate L1 site or to a cognate R1 site and filled the remaining wild-type sites with unlabeled MuA<sup>Δ8</sup> (Fig. 3A). As assayed by appearance of DNA product, these transpososomes were disassembled by ClpX efficiently; disassembly was much more rapid and complete than that observed with the complexes containing <sup>35</sup>S-MuA<sup>R146V</sup> targeted to the R2 or L2 sites, although somewhat slower than the fully wild-type transpososomes (Fig. 3C). Similarly, radiolabeled subunits were removed from the transpososomes efficiently, although slower than observed with the fully wild-type transpososomes (Fig. 3B, D). In



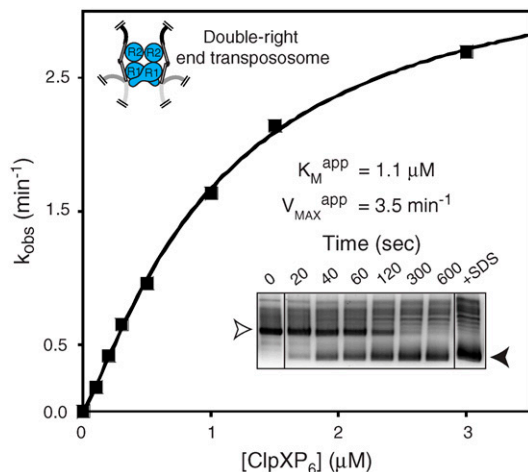
**Fig. 2.** A tagged MuA subunit at the L2 or R2 position is unfolded by ClpX without transpososome disassembly. **A.** <sup>35</sup>S-MuA<sup>R146V</sup> was targeted to either L2 or R2 and remaining positions were filled with unlabeled MuA<sup>Δ8</sup>. Control complexes were assembled with <sup>35</sup>S-MuA or <sup>35</sup>S-MuA<sup>Δ8</sup>. **B.** Labeled subunit release assays for the complexes and control complexes described in A were monitored by <sup>35</sup>S-subunit disappearance (phosphor storage detection). Open Arrows indicate assembled complexes. The percent of radioactivity present in the lane compared to the 0 min sample is shown below each lane. **C.** Global disassembly of the same complexes as monitored by DNA-product appearance. Each reaction was performed in at least triplicate. Error bars represent one standard deviation from the mean.



**STCs Containing Two Mu DNA Right Ends Are Disassembled Efficiently.** We sought to confirm by a different approach that MuA subunits at R1 and L1 are functionally equivalent for ClpX disassembly. One prediction of this model is that a transpososome assembled on two right ends (with an R1-R1 combination at the catalytic

sites) would be disassembled as efficiently as a wild-type transpososome by ClpX. STCs efficiently assemble on two MuA DNA right ends and these symmetrical complexes have been widely used to characterize the transpososome biochemically and structurally (15, 20). Therefore, to approach the question of recognition determinants within the transpososome, we replaced the L1 and L2 binding sites with an R1 and an R2 site in the same mini-Mu plasmid, so that the wild-type and double right-end STCs would be the same except for these binding-site substitutions. STCs assembled efficiently on this plasmid (Fig. 4). Previous studies showed that ClpXP disassembles the wild-type STC1 with an apparent  $K_M$  of  $\sim 1.0 \mu\text{M}$  and an apparent  $V_{\text{max}}$  of  $\sim 3.1/\text{min}$  (21). We found that ClpXP disassembled the double right-end transpososome with an apparent  $K_M$  of  $\sim 1.1 \mu\text{M}$  and an apparent  $V_{\text{max}}$  of  $\sim 3.5/\text{min}$  (Fig. 4). Because the kinetic parameters for remodeling the double right-end complex were essentially the same as for the wild-type complex, we conclude that no special features of the left end of the Mu DNA contribute to recognition of the complex. Furthermore, as the experiments presented above reveal that ClpX targets one of the catalytic subunits (R1- or L1-bound) to destabilize the complex, these data indicated that an R1-R1 combination at the catalytic sites is recognized as efficiently as an L1-R1 combination by ClpX in the context of a transpososome.





**Fig. 4.** Transpososomes containing two right sides are recognized by ClpXP with the same efficiency as wild-type transpososomes. ClpXP-mediated disassembly curves for transpososomes assembled on a miniMu plasmid containing two right ends ( $K_M^{app} = 1.1 \pm 0.1 \mu\text{M}$ ;  $V_{MAX}^{app} = 3.5 \pm 0.2 \text{ min}^{-1}$ ). The rate of disassembly was determined by increasing enzyme concentration as described (21). Data were fit to a modified Hill equation [reaction rate =  $(V_{MAX}^{app}) / (1 + (K_M^{app} / [\text{ClpXP}])^n)$ ], where  $n$  is the Hill coefficient ( $n \sim 1.0$  for this reaction). Inset shows appearance of the DNA product upon addition of enzyme. Open Arrow indicates the position of the assembled complex; black arrow indicates the disassembly product used for rate quantification. The same affinity ( $K_M^{app}$ ) of ClpX<sub>6</sub> for this double right-end complex is observed in the absence of ClpP, however the rate of the reaction for each concentration of enzyme, as well as the  $V_{MAX}$ , are lower, as was observed in previous studies (22).

## Discussion

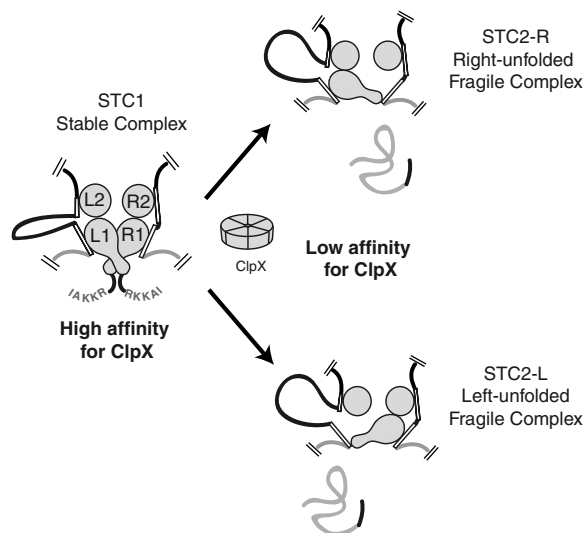
### ClpX as a Machine for Disassembly of Macromolecular Complexes.

Many ClpX substrates are multimeric proteins or proteins that participate in multisubunit complexes. However, the way in which ClpX selects and unfolds subunits to achieve remodeling of these complexes is only beginning to be understood. Because the transpososome is a relatively well characterized complex, it is an ideal multimeric ClpX substrate to use to parse the molecular interactions required to mediate remodeling. Multiple studies have established that ClpX destabilizes the transpososome by unfolding only a limited number of subunits from the complex (4, 7, 22), but it remained unclear which subunit(s) must be unfolded to achieve remodeling. We find that ClpX remodels the transpososome by unfolding the MuA subunit bound either at R1 or L1. Unfolding of either of these subunits results in generally similar disassembly rates and extents, although inefficient complex assembly when the altered-specificity mutant was positioned at the R1 site made quantification somewhat difficult. However, MuA positioned at R1 and L1 was released from complexes at the same rate as monitored by the <sup>35</sup>S-subunit assay, global disassembly rates for these two complexes were within experimental error, and the transpososomes assembled on two right DNA ends were disassembled with the same kinetic parameters as the wild-type complexes. Thus, we conclude that there is no significant difference between ClpX recognition of the R1- vs. L1-bound MuA subunit. In contrast, ClpX unfolds subunits bound to the L2 and R2 sites more slowly than those bound to L1 and R1. Furthermore, unfolding of the L2- and R2-bound subunits does not promote complex disassembly, as global disassembly occurred at the same rate and extent as observed with a control MuA variant that is not recognized by ClpX. These results suggest that L2- and R2-bound subunits are not required for the stability of the assembled transpososome. ClpX's preference for unfolding the catalytic L1/R1 subunits indicates that the enzyme targets the most stable elements of the transpososome to destabilize the complex. The

observation that unfolding the L1/R1 subunits is most destabilizing provides further evidence that the L1/R1 and L2/R2 pairs make different intersubunit contacts within the complex.

ClpX unfolds one subunit or occasionally two subunits from the STC1 (7). We propose that ClpX stochastically recognizes and unfolds a single MuA subunit bound at either L1 or R1. Once this subunit is unfolded, the remodeled complex would typically not be subject to further unfolding (Fig. 5). The end result of remodeling, therefore, is a mixture of two principal complexes that make up the majority of the STC2 population—one fragile complex created by unfolding the L1-bound subunit, and another created by unfolding the R1-bound subunit (Fig. 5).

Previous biochemical analyses using DNase protection and heparin competition show that of the four subunits of the transpososome, only those at the L1, R1, and R2 DNA sites are stably bound; these studies thus suggested that these three subunits were necessary to maintain transpososome stability (10, 11). However, these experiments could not determine whether the L2 subunit contributed to stability of the transpososome via protein-protein contacts not observable by DNA-protection assays. Our finding that ClpX mediated unfolding of a MuA subunit bound to either L2 or R2 does not result in any substantial appearance of DNA disassembly products demonstrates that these two subunits do not make contacts essential for the stability of the assembled transpososome. Rather, our results demonstrate that the presence of an intact L1/R1 subunit pair is necessary to maintain the stability of the complex. The stability provided by the L1/R1 MuA interaction pair may mimic transposition complexes such as the Tn5 transpososome, which is a stable dimer both during and after the transposition reaction (23). Additionally, our results are supported by cryo electron-microscopy data, which reveal extensive protein-protein contacts unique to the two catalytic subunits in a double right-end Mu complex (20). The network of contacts between the L1 and R1 MuA subunits therefore appears to be the major factor responsible for the exceptional thermodynamic stability of the transpososome.



**Fig. 5.** Model for destabilization of the STC by ClpX. The assembled STC1 presents the interwoven L1-R1 subunits to ClpX for high-affinity binding. In the assembled state, the left-end loop is severely bent. ClpX can select either the L1 or R1 subunit to destabilize the complex, resulting in a heterogeneous STC2 mix containing complexes that were destabilized on the right side (STC2-R) and complexes that were destabilized on the left (STC2-L); in both types of complexes, constraints on the left-end loop are relaxed. The interwoven structure of the STC1, initially responsible for high-affinity presentation of the substrate to ClpX, is lost upon destabilization, and the STC2 is released from the enzyme.

By using altered binding specificity to target MuA subunits to different DNA sites in the transpososome, we were able to pinpoint which subunits ClpX unfolds to remodel the transpososome and to determine how different subunits contribute to complex stability. Conceptually, one could use targeted ClpX unfolding to dissect the role of subunits within a wide variety of complexes by tagging specific subunits with appropriate recognition tags. Indeed, such selective unfolding of subunits from a complex has been previously applied to analyze the contribution of the L22 subunit to the stability and function of the ribosome (24). Our study provides proof-of-principle for this method using a natural oligomeric substrate, which has evolved to allow disassembly by ClpX-mediated unfolding of its most stable elements.

Although ClpX destabilizes complexes containing a MuA recognition tag at either L1 or R1, the rate of disassembly is only about half 50% that observed with complexes composed of all wild-type subunits. Thus, although ClpX unfolding of one tagged subunit bound at L1 or R1 is sufficient for destabilization, other tagged subunits in the complex appear to play a role in optimal recognition or destabilization of the complex. This stimulatory role of tags on “secondary” MuA subunits probably involves creating a higher affinity interaction between ClpX and the transpososome via tethering interactions with the N-domains of the ClpX hexamer, as MuA tags are known to contribute to recognition in this fashion (21). For example, the C-terminal MuA tags in both subunits of the L1/R1 pair could bind ClpX. Once one of these subunits was removed from the transpososome by unfolding, the remaining subunit would not be interwoven with its partner and therefore would be recognized poorly by ClpX (21). A mechanism of this type would make the probability of a second unfolding event by ClpX extremely low (Fig. 5). The tethering activity provided by the tags uniquely within the STC1 may thus be a mechanism to limit the unfolding by ClpX to one catalytic MuA subunit, preserving the subunit composition of the STC2 required to ultimately recruit the DNA-replication machinery.

Although our results show that ClpX has preference for the L1 and R1 subunits of the transpososome compared to L2 and R2, our experiments were performed using complexes with only one MuA tag, which removes all tag-dependent secondary tethering interactions. The preference for the catalytic subunits may, in fact, be more pronounced in a wild-type complex in which tethering contacts by all four tags could target a high affinity interaction between ClpX and the L1 or R1 subunits.

**ClpX Preference for MuA Subunits Does Not Signal Left-End Initiation of DNA Replication.** Our results indicate that ClpX has no intrinsic preference for left versus right catalytic subunits during remodeling. However, previous footprinting studies showed that ClpX-mediated remodeling of the STC1 is accompanied by large DNA conformational changes on the left side of the transpososome (7). Most of the footprinting changes observed occur within the left-end loop and the L2 site, whereas minimal changes were detected within the actual L1 and R1 sites (7). The unique left-end loop is not bound by MuA and is thought to be in a severely bent configuration when both L1 and L2 are bound by MuA in the STC1. It is conceivable that the same interwoven structure that is the major source of stability for the transpososome is also responsible for restraining the conformation of the left-end loop. Upon destabilization of the complex by ClpX, either by unfolding the L1 or R1 subunit, releasing the constraints on the loop could result in the large conformational change detectable by footprinting (7) (Fig. 5). This change in the loop may bias changes observed by footprinting in the remodeled transpososome to the left end of the complex. Indeed, if ClpX can remove MuA subunits bound either to L1 or R1 with equal probability, as we observe, then the interactions at these sites would remain in half of the STC2 population, explaining why minimal changes in footprinting are observed at these sites.

If ClpX does not discriminate between the left and right catalytic subunits during the conversion from STC1 to STC2, at what point is the preference for left-end initiation of replication established? Unlike most genomes, phage Mu does not have a replication origin. Instead, it uses the forked DNA structures generated during recombination as the nucleation sites for replication-fork assembly in a reaction that mimics replication restart (25). Why the DNA fork at the left end is preferentially used for initiation is not understood. Studies from Nakai and colleagues have shown that a multicomponent (partially purified) fraction, known as MRF $\alpha$ , is responsible for the conversion of the STC1 to a replication-competent complex known as the prereplisome (25). Although ClpX is one of the factors in MRF $\alpha$  required for the transition from STC1 to STC2, there are other incompletely characterized factors (known as faction MRF $\alpha$ DF) that completely disassemble MuA from the STC2, creating the prereplisome scaffold for the assembly of the replication machinery (26). The large conformational change in left-end DNA caused by ClpX-mediated remodeling of the STC1 may provide a signal for MRF $\alpha$ DF to disassemble the loosely bound MuA subunits in the STC2, allowing the replication machinery to initiate replication on the left side of the Mu genome. Other structural asymmetries between the left and right side of the transpososome may also play a role in the left end replication preference, such as the presence of the DNA-binding site for HU, a DNA-bending protein, as well as the *pac* DNA packaging site within the left-end loop of the transpososome (27).

The transition from the stable to the fragile transpososome occurs concomitantly with disruption of the stably interwoven subunits in the transpososome. Destabilization of complexes by unfolding of the most stable local structural elements by ClpX and other AAA+ unfoldases may be a general mechanism for remodeling other multimeric substrates. For example, Dps is a dodecamer that protects DNA by forming extremely stable biocrystals upon entry into stationary phase (28). Upon exit into exponential phase, ClpX may target only those Dps subunits that are critical for biocrystal stability, allowing destabilization of the complex using minimal energy. Further discovery of remodeling substrates may help reveal such commonalities in the mechanisms of complex destabilization by ClpX and other unfoldases.

## Materials and Methods

**DNA for Transposition and Cloning.** All altered-specificity MuA variants and the miniMu constructs were produced using the Quikchange kit (Stratagene). The sequence of each altered Mu DNA binding site can be found in Namgoong and Harshey (18). For construction of the double right-end miniMu plasmid, pMK586 was digested with ClaI and EcoNI to remove the left-end binding sites, treated with calf intestinal phosphatase, and ligated to 5'-phosphate annealed oligonucleotides containing R1 and R2 MuA binding sites with appropriate DNA overhangs.

**Protein Purification.** Unlabeled MuA variants (29), HU protein (30), ClpX (31) and ClpP (32) were purified as described.  $^{35}$ S-MuA,  $^{35}$ S-MuA $^{\Delta 8}$ , and  $^{35}$ S-MuA $^{R146V}$  were purified using the same protocol as the unlabeled MuA variants, with the several modifications included in *SI Text*.

**Transpososome Assembly.** Transpososomes (formed as intramolecular strand transfer complexes) were assembled *in vitro* in 25 mM Hepes (pH 7.6), 1 mM MgCl $_2$ , 140 mM NaCl, 1 mM DTT, 15% glycerol, 20  $\mu$ g/mL BSA and 12% DMSO. Transposition reactions contained 30  $\mu$ g/mL circular miniMu or miniMu altered-specificity variant (4,415 base pairs) and 130 nanomolar (nM) *E. coli* HU protein. To assemble mixed transpososomes, 300 nM  $^{35}$ S-MuA $^{R146V}$  was preincubated with miniMu DNA for 5 min at 30 °C, 50 nM of unlabeled MuA or MuA $^{\Delta 8}$  was added, and the mixture was incubated at 30 °C for 90 min. Preincubation of MuA $^{R146V}$  was necessary to prevent wild-type MuA from binding to the altered-specificity Mu sites (14, 18). Transpososomes were purified prior to disassembly by passage through  $\sim$ 100  $\mu$ L of phosphocellulose resin packed into a minispin column (Pierce) and equilibrated in 25 mM Hepes (pH 7.6), 0.1 mM EDTA, 5 mM DTT, 10% glycerol and 300 mM KCl.

**Disassembly Assays and Visualization.** A master mix (14  $\mu$ L) containing ClpX and ATP regeneration mix (ATP, creatine phosphate, and creatine kinase) was preincubated for 90 s at 30 °C and added to 40  $\mu$ L of transpososomes assembled as described above (final concentrations: [ClpX<sub>6</sub>] = 0.2  $\mu$ M; [ATP] = 8 mM; [creatine kinase] = 50  $\mu$ g/mL; [creatine phosphate] = 10 mM). Samples (12  $\mu$ L) were removed from the reaction mix at different times and stopped by addition of 2  $\mu$ L of 500 mM EDTA. For each time point, 1  $\mu$ L was removed, diluted into 25 mM Hepes (pH 7.6), 0.1 mM EDTA, 5 mM DTT, 10% glycerol, 300 mM KCl, and 100 mM EDTA, and used to monitor the rate of disassembly by appearance of DNA disassembly product; the rest of the sample was used for labeled subunit release analysis on a separate agarose gel. Samples were electrophoresed on 0.9% high gelling temperature (HGT)-Agarose gel (Lonza) containing 10  $\mu$ g/mL BSA and 10  $\mu$ g/mL heparin. Gels containing samples for storage-phosphor quantification were first stained with Sybr Green I (Invitrogen/Molecular Probes) or Vistra Green

(GE/Amersham), pressed and dried using a Biorad Dryer and placed into phosphorimager cassette. Gels containing samples for DNA-product appearance quantification were stained with Sybr Green I or Vistra Green and visualized using a Typhoon 4100 imager. Rates of disassembly were quantified using Imagequant (GE) using the rolling-ball background subtraction method (radius = 200). DNA-product appearance was quantified as previously described (21).  $K_M$  and  $V_{max}$  values for ClpX disassembly of double right-end transpososomes were determined as described (21).

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.** We would like to thank A.S. Meyer, C.T.H. Schweidenback and A. Hochwagen for critical reading of the manuscript, as well as members of the Baker and Sauer laboratories for helpful discussions and reagents. This work was supported by National Institutes of Health Grants GM-49224 and AI-16892. T.A.B. is an employee of the Howard Hughes Medical Institute.

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