

1 **Identification of novel toxin domains and characterization of a broadly distributed**
2 **family of lipid-targeting NlpC/P60**

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Abstract: Bacterial warfare is a common and ancient phenomenon in nature, where bacterial species use strategies to inhibit the growth or kill competitors. This involves the production and deployment of antibacterial toxins that disrupt essential cellular processes in target cells. Polymorphic toxins comprise a group of offensive systems with a modular structure featuring a conserved N-terminal translocation domain fused to diverse C-terminal toxin domains. The continuous arms race in which bacteria acquire new toxin and immunity proteins to promote increased adaptation to their environment is responsible for the diversification of this toxin repertoire. Here, we deployed *in-silico* strategies to analyze 10,000 genomes and identify toxin domains secreted via the type VI secretion system of *Salmonella*. We identified and manually curated 128 candidates, which are widespread polymorphic toxins detected in a vast array of species and linked to diverse secretion systems. In addition, 45 previously uncharacterized toxin domains were identified. STox15 was among the most frequent candidates found in the dataset and was selected for in-depth characterization. STox15 is an antibacterial effector belonging to the NlpC/P60 papain-like fold superfamily with a permuted catalytic core typical of lipid-targeting versions rather than peptidases or amidases. Biochemical analysis with recombinant protein and lipidomics of intoxicated *Escherichia coli* revealed that STox15 displays phospholipase activity cleaving off acyl groups from phosphatidylglycerol and phosphatidylethanolamine. **Importance:** This work broadens our understanding of polymorphic toxin domains and provides the first direct characterization of a lipid-targeting NlpC/P60 domain in biological conflicts.

Keywords: Polymorphic toxins, bacterial toxins, NlpC/P60, phospholipase, acyltransferase.

Introduction

Competition is a fundamental biological process in nature, occurring both within and between species that share a common environment. Bacteria actively participate in these ecological battles employing a potent arsenal of toxins as their weaponry¹. A prominent mechanism for toxin delivery among Gram-negative bacteria is via the type 6 secretion system (T6SS)². Phylogenetic analysis of T6SS components showed that there are four types of T6SSs (T6SS^{i-iv})³⁻⁵, with the canonical T6SSⁱ present in *Proteobacteria* being further classified into six subtypes (i1, i2, i3, i4a, i4b and i5)^{4,6,7}. The T6SS functions in a contact-dependent manner and rely on the biochemical properties of secreted effector toxins for its function⁸. These toxins frequently recombine and move via lateral gene transfer, allowing them to be delivered by different secretion systems, which warrants their name as polymorphic toxins⁹. During secretion via the T6SS, toxins are loaded onto a spear-like structure formed by hexameric rings of Hcp proteins capped by a spike comprising a trimer of VgrG sharpened by a PAAR protein¹⁰. Effectors are translocated into target cells either fused at the C-terminus of Hcp, VgrG, and PAAR proteins (named specialized effectors), or associated with these proteins via adaptors (cargo effectors)¹¹. Antibacterial toxins are often paired with immunity proteins that prevent self-intoxication, thus forming gene pairs that are frequently located near structural components of the T6SS^{8,12}.

The protective role of the endogenous microbiota against *Salmonella* infection has been recognized for years¹³; however, only recently have studies started to reveal the mechanism by which the microbiota maintains gut homeostasis and promotes colonization resistance¹⁴. Despite this understanding, there is a relative scarcity of information about the direct antimicrobial mechanisms employed by commensals and pathogens during these disputes for niche control¹⁵. T6SSs clusters are conserved across

several *Salmonella* spp., highlighting their importance to the fitness of these bacteria^{16,17}. *Salmonella* spp. encode T6SSs in different pathogenicity islands (SPIs), which were acquired by distinct horizontal transfer events^{16,17}. *S. Typhimurium* encodes a T6SS subtype i3 within SPI-6, which is important for interbacterial competition and gut colonization in mice^{18,19}. There is limited information about the identity or mechanism of the T6SS effector repertoire that contributes to these phenotypes.

Here, we set out to identify the repertoire of T6SS effectors in a dataset of 10,000 *Salmonella* isolates utilizing a computational approach, followed by careful manual curation. Employing sensitive sequence and structure searches alongside comparative genomics, we identified 128 candidates, including 45 new toxin domains which were not recognized in publicly available databases, and are widespread among several species. This comprehensive analysis indicates that *Salmonella* T6SSs subtypes i3 and i1 are associated with antibacterial and anti-eukaryotic effectors, respectively. Furthermore, our findings reveal that each of the 149 serovars contained in the dataset harbors a unique combination of effectors, likely required for their specific ecological interactions. A detailed examination of a selected candidate (STox15) encoding a newly identified domain showed that it is an antibacterial effector belonging to the NlpC/P60 superfamily with a permuted catalytic core. STox15 displays phospholipase activity *in vitro* and its ectopic expression in target cells modifies the membrane composition. This study offers a comprehensive characterization of new toxins, especially the arsenal linked to T6SSs in *Salmonella*, identifying novel effector families and providing an in-depth analysis of a new protein family that specifically targets lipids.

Results

99 **Identification of the T6SS toxin repertoire within 10,000 *Salmonella*** 100 **genomes**

101 T6SS effectors are often encoded in close genomic proximity to structural
102 components of the system^{16,20,21}. To identify new effectors, we employed a "guilt-by-
103 association" approach, which relies on the conservation of genomic context and is a
104 powerful strategy for pinpointing new effectors²². We applied this methodology to a
105 dataset of *Salmonella* genomes (10KSG)²³ (Fig. 1A). First, we located and classified the
106 T6SS clusters using hidden Markov models (HMMs) from different sources^{9,24-26}. We
107 collected 10 genes upstream and downstream of each locus encoding T6SS components,
108 referred to as genomic sites (Fig. 1A). A total of 42,560 genomic sites housing at least
109 one T6SS component were identified. We then applied a graph theoretic strategy
110 leveraging the Jaccard index for network construction²⁷, followed by the Louvain
111 algorithm²⁸ to automatically categorize genomic sites. Analysis resulted in five
112 categories: T6SS subtype i1, i2, i3, i4b, and orphan (Fig. 1A). Interestingly, we
113 observed mobility of the distinct subtypes among genomic sites and pathogenicity
114 islands, depending on the strain and/or serovar. Using tRNAs as markers to identify the
115 insertion sites²⁹, we found that subtype i3 (90%, 4929/5461 genomic sites) is mainly
116 located within SPI-6 and flanked by the aspartate tRNA (tRNA^{Asp})¹⁶, while subtype i1 is
117 not well conserved and found within SPI-19 associated with tRNA^{Ala} (12%, 66/532
118 genomic sites)¹⁶, and SPI-6 (3%, 18/532 genomes) flanked by tRNA^{Asp} - most subtype
119 i1 could not be assigned to a specific location (82%, 437/532 genomic sites). These
120 results indicate that distinct T6SSs subtypes are inserted into different genomic sites
121 that are hot spots for horizontal transfer events, and the combination between the
122 insertion site and the introduced subtype varies according to the *Salmonella* strain and
123 serovar.

124 Next, we focused on identifying toxins using three strategies (Fig. 1D). First, we
 125 located proteins containing N-terminal PAAR, VgrG and Hcp domains and additional
 126 C-terminal domains with more than 50 amino acids. These C-terminal regions were
 127 isolated and grouped (80% coverage and 1e-3 e-value). Second, we used the genomic
 128 sites containing T6SS components and analyzed up to five genes upstream and
 129 downstream via the software BastionX³⁰. Third, we used amino acid sequences, HMMs
 130 and PSSMs (position-specific scoring matrix) from SecReT6³¹, Pfam²⁵, and Zhang, et
 131 al.⁹ to search the 10KSG dataset for previously described effectors. For candidates not
 132 recognized by previously described models, we collected homologs from NCBI using 4
 133 iterations of PSI-BLAST³² and generated multiple sequence alignments and HMMs. We
 134 then used a series of sequence and structure-based strategies to classify and annotate the
 135 function of these candidates: i) profile-profile comparison methods such as HHsearch³³
 136 were used to detect distant homologs; ii) structural models were created using
 137 AlphaFold2³⁴ from multiple sequence alignments to perform searches in FoldSeek³⁵ and
 138 DALI³⁶ against PDB³⁷ and AlphaFoldDB³⁸; iii) the structure-structure comparison
 139 algorithm from FoldSeek was used to cluster groups of candidates. All information
 140 collected was manually examined to establish the final domain annotation (Fig. 1D).
 141 Candidates that displayed sequence or structural similarity to known toxin domains or
 142 proteins of unknown function that displayed conserved genomic organization and/or
 143 adjacent conserved putative immunity proteins across several species were maintained.

144 In total, we identified 128 groups of toxins (Table S1 and Fig. 1F). Eighty-three
 145 were already described in public databases (e.g. Ntox47)^{9,25}, or represent individual
 146 effectors that were experimentally characterized but for which HMMs have not been
 147 produced and made available (e.g. TreTu)^{21,39-54}. For the latter, the newly created
 148 HMMs were named with a “.st” suffix (e.g. TreTu.st). In addition, 45 groups comprise

149 new toxin domains or highly divergent variations that were not detected by previously
150 published HMMs (Fig. 1E). This justified them being distinct groups requiring the
151 design of new HMMs. These groups of effectors were named STox followed by a
152 number (e.g. STox_1) (Table S1 and Fig. 1F). It is worth noting that these toxin
153 domains are widespread across several species and constitute polymorphic toxin
154 domains⁹. A few examples of species encoding each STox, together with the amino acid
155 sequence alignments and AlphaFold prediction can be found at
156 <https://leebioinfo.github.io/10ksgt6ss>.

157 Inspection of genomic context across several bacterial species revealed that most
158 candidates exhibited a conserved adjacent gene coding for a predicted immunity
159 protein, thus suggesting antibacterial activity (83.6%, 107/128). Some effectors, which
160 lacked conserved immunity proteins, were predicted to display anti-eukaryotic activity
161 (12.4%, 14/128) (Table S1 and Fig. 1F). The analysis revealed a diverse array of
162 cellular targets and biochemical activities among the 128 toxin groups (Table S1 and
163 Fig. 1F). Notably, the activities of a few STox effectors could not be predicted
164 confidently and will require further analysis (Fig. 1F). Overall, these findings highlight
165 the significant diversity of toxins encoded by *Salmonella* and reveal an array of
166 effectors used in interbacterial competition and as virulence factors throughout a diverse
167 array of bacterial lineages.

168

169 ***Salmonella* serovars encode diverse sets of toxins with target-specific** 170 **activities**

171 After classifying the subtypes and carefully identifying the effectors within the
172 10KSG dataset, we estimated the average number of effectors per genome to be $3.57 \pm$
173 1.42 for genomes encoding one T6SS cluster (Fig. 2A, blue), and 5.35 ± 2.42 effectors

174 for genomes containing two clusters (Fig. 2A, orange). It is worth highlighting that our
175 manual curation was very stringent, so these numbers might be underestimated.

176 The most frequent effectors detected within the dataset were the peptidoglycan-
177 targeting Tlde1²⁰ and Tae4³⁹; followed by RNases Ntox47⁵⁵; the metallopeptidase Tox-
178 HopH1; and ADP-ribosyltransferases TreTu⁴⁰ and STox_62 (Fig. 2B). Together, these
179 toxin domains constitute the core effectors in the 10KSG dataset. Next, we determined
180 the 5 most frequent effectors detected in each of the 149 *Salmonella* serovars (Fig. 1C
181 and Fig. S2). Serovars that predominantly encode subtype i3 harbor predominantly
182 antibacterial effectors, while serovars containing subtype i1 lack toxins targeting the
183 peptidoglycan and show toxins with anti-eukaryotic activity, such as peptidases and
184 pore-forming proteins (Fig. 2C). The core effectors of each serovar can be found in Fig.
185 S2. This data supports the classification of *Salmonella* T6SS subtype i3 as antibacterial
186 and subtype i1 as anti-eukaryotic (Fig. 2E). Notably, effectors encoded within or close
187 to T6SS structural clusters, show minimum overlap (Fig. 2F), thus suggesting an
188 evolutionary scenario where T6SS clusters are acquired alongside with associated set of
189 effectors and/or that certain subsets of effectors are preferably exchanged among
190 bacteria harboring similar T6SS subtypes.

191 Previous analysis of subtype i3 identified the insertion of three variable regions
192 between the structural genes (VR1-3) in which effectors are encoded¹⁶ (Fig. 2G). Our
193 results indicate that VR1 and VR2 contain mainly toxins targeting the periplasm (e.g.
194 Tae2, Tae4, Tlde1, STox_15) whereas VR3 primarily houses toxins targeting the
195 cytoplasm (e.g. Ntox47, Tox-WHH, TreTu). The latter are typically associated with an
196 N-terminal PAAR domain and Rhs (Rearrangement hotspot) repeats, which assist in the
197 translocation across the bacterial inner membrane to reach the cytoplasmic targets^{40,55-57}
198 (Fig. 2G). The position of effectors at the edge of the T6SS cluster and the domain

199 architecture containing Rhs repeats facilitate recombination events⁵⁵, leading to the
200 greater diversity of effectors observed at the VR3 (Fig. S1).

201

202 **STox15 has a permuted NlpC/P60 domain and is evolutionarily related to**
203 **enzymes targeting lipids**

204 Among the newly identified toxins, STox15 emerged as one of the most
205 abundant (Fig. 2B). To analyze whether STox15 and its associated downstream gene
206 (SImm15) form an effector and immunity pair, we cloned these genes in compatible
207 vectors under the control of different promoters and assessed toxicity upon expression
208 in *Escherichia coli*. STox15 is toxic in the periplasm but not in the cytoplasm of *E. coli*
209 and co-expression with SImm15 neutralizes the effect (Fig. 3B). Next, we performed
210 time-lapse microscopy to evaluate bacterial growth and morphology at the single cell
211 level. *E. coli* carrying the plasmid with SP-STox15 grew normally in d-glucose
212 (repressed conditions) (Movie S1); however, shortly after induction of SP-STox15 with
213 l-arabinose, cells began lysing (Movie S2). It was curious that cells lysed without losing
214 their rod shape, which suggests that the peptidoglycan was not affected (Fig. 3C). After
215 lysing, residual structures resembling the intact peptidoglycan sacculus remained (Fig.
216 3C), indicating that this is not the target of STox15. In addition, we noticed that the
217 cognate immunity protein SImm15 contains a conserved domain with two
218 transmembrane helices (Fig. S3), suggesting that the site of its neutralizing action
219 occurs at the cell membrane.

220 Although the STox15 domain was not identified by any of the HMMs deployed
221 in the initial steps of this study, subsequent HHpred analysis revealed a significant
222 probability of homology with DUF4105 and the effector TseH from *Vibrio cholerae*⁴⁵
223 (data not shown), both of which are members of the NlpC/P60 superfamily^{58,59}. This

superfamily was previously defined as encompassing four families, which are divided into two higher-order groups (canonical and permuted)⁵⁸. Members of the canonical group (AcmB-like and P60-like) function as peptidases involved in peptidoglycan hydrolysis⁶⁰, while permuted members (YaeF-like and LRAT-like) exhibit a circular permutation in their catalytic core, creating a hydrophobic binding pocket that provides specificity for lipids^{61,62}. Closer inspection of the sequence and structure of STox15 revealed a circular permutation of the catalytic domain indicating that it belongs to the permuted NlpC/P60 group (<https://leepbioinfo.github.io/10ksgt6ss/>)⁵⁸.

To predict the function of STox15, we sought to understand its evolutionary relationship by constructing a phylogenetic tree using the sequences of STox15, TseH and additional permuted members, such as LRAT and YiiX. The analysis revealed the formation of five major clades including YiiX, LRAT, TseH, STox15 and DUF4105 (Fig. 3D, Table S2 and Table S3). Genomic context analysis predicted that proteins of the STox15 clade are toxins deployed in biological conflicts (Fig. 3D and 3E). Similarly, the TseH clade (Pfam DUF6695) displays genomic contexts indicative of biological conflicts (Fig. 3D and 3E). The clades LRAT and YiiX harbor proteins known to be involved in lipid metabolism: LRAT (lecithin:retinol acyltransferase) is an enzyme present in mammals and involved in the transference of acyl groups from phosphatidylcholine to all-trans retinol to produce all-trans retinyl esters that are storage forms of vitamin A⁶³; H-RAS-like suppressor (HRASLS) proteins are a group within the LRAT family that display both acyltransferase and phospholipase A1/2 activities⁶⁴; and YiiX-like family members from *Bacillus cereus* are active against lipids⁶².

Interestingly, STox15 emerged as the sister clade of DUF4105 (Fig. 3D and 3E). Our comparative genomics analysis revealed a recurring evolutionary pattern in which DUF4105 domain-containing proteins are repeatedly displaced by apolipoprotein N-

acyltransferases (Lnt) across three distinct genomic contexts (Fig. 3E). Hence, we proposed that DUF4105 could be working as an acyltransferase. Remarkably, DUF4105 was recently identified as the missing lipoprotein N-acyltransferase in *Bacteroides*⁶⁵, which was named Lnb (N-acyltransferase in *Bacteroides*). These experimental results confirmed our independent *in-silico* prediction for the function of DUF4105 and provide two different lines of evidence leading to similar conclusions. It is noteworthy that the DUF4105 clade identified in our analysis consists primarily, though not exclusively, of *Bacteroides* species, with a branch enriched in Gram-positives like *Firmicutes* (Fig. 3D). The list of homologs containing DUF4105 can be found in Table S3C and S3D.

Multiple sequence alignments of each of the permuted clades including STox15 revealed the conserved catalytic His and Cys residues characteristic of the NlpC/P60 superfamily (Fig. 3F)⁵⁸. Substitution of these residues for alanine (STox15_{H43A} and STox15_{C151A}) eliminated toxicity in *E. coli* (Fig. 3G). These findings collectively confirm that the enzymatic function of the NlpC/P60 papain-like fold domain is crucial for toxicity. Collectively, the periplasmic-acting phenotype of STox15, the presence of a membrane-associated immunity protein and the fatty acyl linkage targeting activities common in the permuted NlpC/P60 members strongly support a function for STox15 in targeting membrane lipids.

STox15 displays phospholipase activity and changes the membrane composition of intoxicated cells

To analyze the enzymatic activity of STox15, we incubated purified recombinant protein (Fig. S4) with either purified phosphatidylglycerol (PG) 16:0-18:1 or phosphatidylethanolamine (PE) 16:0-18:1 and analyzed the reaction product by HPLC

coupled to mass spectrometry (Fig. 4A and B). Results showed that STox15 has predominantly phospholipase A1 activity and cleaves both PG and PE (a preference for cleaving off the 16:0 acyl chain) as observed by the accumulation of 18:1 lysophospholipids (Fig. 4A and B).

Next, we set out to determine whether STox15 could cause changes in the composition of phospholipids when ectopically expressed by target cells. *E. coli* harboring the pBRA SP-STox15 plasmid were grown to OD_{600nm} of 1.0 in the presence of d-glucose (repressed), washed and resuspended in AB medium with l-arabinose to induce the expression of the toxin. Total lipids were extracted and analyzed by UHPLC-MS. We observed a general decrease in intact phospholipid forms in STox15_{WT}, especially phosphatidylglycerol (PG), when compared with the catalytic mutant STox15_{C151A} (Fig. 4A and 4B). In addition, an increase in lysophospholipids forms - either lysophosphatidylglycerol (LPG) or lysophosphatidylethanolamine (LPE) - and free fatty acids (FFA) was detected in the wild-type (Fig. 4A and 4B). Lysophospholipids possess amphiphilic properties and have an inverted cone-shaped molecular structure that interacts with and modifies membrane properties (e.g. curvature) similarly to detergents⁶⁶. The accumulation of lysophospholipids on the target cell membrane likely promotes the observed membrane disruption (Fig. 3C) due to its detergent-like properties⁶⁷. Collectively, these results confirm that STox15 targets phospholipids similarly to other proteins possessing a permuted NlpC/P60 domain, and that STox15 displays phospholipid-degrading activity. It remains to be determined whether STox15 also possesses acyltransferase activity as reported for other permuted NlpC/P60.

Discussion

299 Our comprehensive analysis of 10,000 *Salmonella* genomes has significantly
300 expanded the repertoire of polymorphic toxins, identifying 128 candidates, including 45
301 novel toxin domains. Our study employed a robust bioinformatic pipeline, integrating
302 classical methods with the latest structural bioinformatics techniques. The combination
303 of sensitive sequence and structure searches with comparative genomics provided a
304 comprehensive understanding of the identified toxin domains. In addition, the manual
305 curation of candidates ensured high confidence in our results, distinguishing our
306 approach from previous large-scale *in-silico* analyses. The identification of these novel
307 toxin domains builds upon the foundational work by Zhang et al.⁹ and others^{30,68-76},
308 which characterized the diversity of polymorphic toxin systems across bacterial
309 lineages. The identification of novel toxin domains highlights the constant evolutionary
310 arms race between bacteria, driving the diversification of toxin and immunity proteins.

311 This study not only broadens our understanding of toxin domains but also
312 provides the first direct characterization of a lipid-targeting NlpC/P60 domain. The
313 phospholipase activity of STox15, which cleaves acyl groups from phosphatidylglycerol
314 and phosphatidylethanolamine, underscores its role in membrane disruption during
315 bacterial competition. Interestingly, our phylogenetic analysis revealed an evolutionary
316 link between STox15 and a new family of lipoprotein N-acyltransferases in
317 *Bacteroides*, adding a new dimension to the functional diversity of these toxins.
318 Notably, one of the homologs of STox15 is TseH^{45,77}, which has been proposed to be an
319 endopeptidase due to its NlpC/P60 domain and similarity to the amidase Tse1^{78,79}.
320 However, unlike Tse1, TseH exhibits a permutation in its catalytic core⁷⁷. This
321 permutation, along with its evolutionary relationship to STox15 and other permuted
322 NlpC/P60, suggests that TseH actual substrate might be an acyl group in phospholipids
323 rather than a peptide/amide bond. Exploring the potential acyltransferase activity of

STox15 and its homologs could reveal further biochemical diversity within the NlpC/P60 superfamily.

In the context of *Salmonella* biology, the unprecedented diversity of T6SS effectors presents numerous opportunities for new studies. Our findings reveal the existence of a core repertoire of T6SS effectors for each serovar, suggesting that *Salmonella* acquire and maintain effectors in response to specific environmental pressures and contexts rather than accumulating an increasingly larger array of effectors. Notably, we observed a higher number of effectors in serovars isolated from environmental sources compared to those from patients, indicating that the number of effectors increases in more diverse environments where there are potentially more encounters with a variety of competitor species.

In conclusion, our comprehensive analysis has greatly enhanced the understanding of toxins involved in bacterial competition and pathogenesis. The identification of previously uncharacterized toxin domains highlights the potential for discovering novel biochemical activities. This study provides a solid foundation for future research into the complex dynamics of conflict systems and their implications for bacterial ecology and pathogenesis.

Methods

Comparative genomic analysis

The .gff files from the genome assemblies retrieved from the 10KSG project²³ were organized and stored in tabular format using Python scripts, based on the Biopython⁸⁰ and pandas⁸¹ libraries. Iterative searches were conducted using Jackhmmer⁸² with a 10e-6 e-value cutoff. Protein clustering was performed using MMseqs⁸³ to remove redundancy (80% coverage and 70% identity) and form

349 homologous groups (80% coverage and e-value $10e^{-3}$). Multiple sequence alignments
350 were generated using the local-pair algorithm in MAFFT⁸⁴, and phylogenetic trees were
351 constructed using FastTree⁸⁵. Domain identification and annotation was performed
352 using HMMsearch and HMMscan^{82,86} and models from the databases Pfam²⁵,
353 TXSScan²⁴, and BastionHub⁸⁷. Remote homology identification was performed using
354 HHpred³³ and FoldSeek.

355

356 **Bacterial strains**

357 A list of bacterial strains used in this work can be found in Table S4. Strains
358 were grown at 37 °C in Lysogeny Broth (10 g/L tryptone, 10 g/L NaCl, 5 g/L yeast
359 extract) under agitation. AB medium was used for lipidomics: 0.2% (NH₄)₂SO₂, 0.6%
360 Na₂HPO₄, 0.3% KH₂PO₄, 0.3% NaCl, 0.1 mM CaCl₂, 1 mM MgCl₂, 3 μM FeCl₃,
361 supplemented with 0.2% sucrose, 0.2% casamino acids, 10 μg/mL thiamine, and 25
362 μg/mL uracil. Cultures were supplemented with antibiotics in the following
363 concentration when necessary: 50 μg/mL kanamycin, 100 μg/mL ampicillin, and 50
364 μg/mL streptomycin.

365

366 **Cloning and mutagenesis**

367 All primers are listed in Table S4. STox15 and SImm15 were amplified by PCR
368 and cloned into pBRA vector under the control of P_{BAD} promoter⁸⁸ with or without pelB
369 signal peptide sequence from pET22b (Novagen)⁸⁹. SImm15 was cloned into pEXT22
370 under the control of P_{TAC} promoter⁹⁰. For protein expression and purification, STox15
371 was cloned into pET28a (Novagen), including a C-terminal Strep II tag. Point mutations
372 (STox15_{H43A}, STox15_{C151A}) were created using QuikChange II XL Site-Directed

373 Mutagenesis Kit (Agilent Technologies) or by splicing by overlap extension (SOE)
374 PCR. All constructs were confirmed by sequencing.

375

376 ***E. coli* toxicity assay**

377 Overnight cultures of *E. coli* DH5 α co-expressing effectors for cytoplasmic
378 (pBRA-STox15) or periplasmic (pBRA SP-STox15) localization and immunity protein
379 (pEXT22-SImm15) were adjusted to OD_{600nm} 1, serially diluted in LB (1:4) and 5 μ L
380 were spotted onto LB agar (1.5%) containing either 0.2% d-glucose or 0.2% l-arabinose
381 plus 200 μ M IPTG, supplemented with streptomycin and kanamycin, and incubated at
382 37°C for 20 h.

383

384 **Time-lapse microscopy**

385 For time-lapse microscopy, LB agar (1.5%) pads were prepared by cutting a
386 rectangular piece out of a double-sided adhesive tape, which was taped onto a
387 microscopy slide as described previously⁸⁹. *E. coli* DH5 α harboring pBRA SP-STox15
388 was subcultured in LB (1:50) with 0.2% d-glucose until reaching OD_{600nm} 0.4–0.6 and
389 adjusted to OD_{600nm} 1. Cultures were spotted onto LB agar pads supplemented either
390 with 0.2% d-glucose or 0.2% l-arabinose plus antibiotics. Images were acquired every
391 15 min for 16 hr using a Leica DMI-8 epifluorescent microscope fitted with a DFC365
392 FX camera (Leica) and Plan-Apochromat \times 63 oil objective (HC PL APO \times 63/1.4 Oil
393 ph3 objective Leica). Images were analyzed using FIJI software (Schindelin et al.,
394 2012).

395

396 **Protein expression and purification**

397 *E. coli* BL21(DE3) carrying pET28a STox15_{WT}-Strep or STox15_{C151A}-Strep
398 were grown in 4 L of LB supplemented with kanamycin (37 °C, 180 rpm) until OD_{600nm}
399 0.7. Expression was induced with 1 mM IPTG for 16 hr at 16 °C. Cells were harvested
400 via centrifugation at 5000 g for 20 min, and pellets were resuspended in lysis buffer (50
401 mM Tris HCl pH 8.0, 350 mM NaCl, 45 mM β-mercaptoethanol, 5 mg/mL lysozyme,
402 10% glycerol) and lysed at 4°C using a sonicator. The lysate was centrifuged at 40,000
403 g for 45 min at 4°C. The supernatant was loaded onto a 1 ml StrepTrap HP column
404 (Cytiva) equilibrated in buffer (50 mM Tris-HCl pH 8.0, 350 mM NaCl, 10% glycerol).
405 The column was washed with 40 column volumes (CV) of wash buffer (50 mM Tris-
406 HCl pH 8.0, 1 M NaCl, 10% glycerol, 45 mM β-mercaptoethanol), followed by a
407 second wash with 12 CV (50 mM Tris-HCl pH 8.0, 1.5 M urea) to remove chaperonin
408 GroEL⁹¹. The column was subjected to a third round of washes with 40 CV of wash
409 buffer and eluted with 10 CV of elution buffer (50 mM Tris-HCl pH 8.0; 350 mM
410 NaCl; 10% glycerol; 50 mM biotin). Fractions were buffer exchanged (25mM Tris-HCl
411 pH 7.5, 100 mM NaCl, 5% glycerol) and concentrated using an Amicon of 30 kDa
412 (Sigma). Protein aliquots were snap-frozen until use.

413

414 ***In vitro* phospholipase assay**

415 For *in vitro* enzymatic assay, phospholipids 1-palmitoyl-2-oleoyl-sn-glycero-3-
416 phospho-(1'-rac-glycerol) (PG 16:0-18:1) and 1-palmitoyl-2-oleoyl-sn-glycero-3-
417 phosphoethanolamine (PE 16:0-18:1) were purchased from Avanti Polar Lipids.
418 Substrates were resuspended and diluted in methanol to adjust the concentration of
419 aliquots. The methanol of each aliquot was dried under a nitrogen flow. A total of 1.2
420 mM of phospholipids (PG or PE) were resuspended in reaction buffer (25 mM Tris-HCl
421 pH 7.5, 100 mM NaCl, 0.5 mM CaCl₂, 0.5 mM MgCl₂, 180 mM sodium deoxycholate

422 and 0.5 mM DTT) and incubated with 0.8 mM of enzyme (STox15_{WT} or STox15_{C151A})
423 in a total volume of 100 μ L for 2 h at 37°C under agitation (350 rpm). Lipids were
424 extracted by adding 830 μ L of a mixture of MTBE/methanol/water (10:3:2.5, v/v/v),
425 followed by incubation under agitation for 1 h at room temperature. Samples were
426 centrifuged for 2 min at 220 g and 350 μ L of the top fraction was transferred to a new
427 tube, dried in a SpeedVac and stored at –80 °C until analysis.

428 For mass spectrometry analysis, samples were resuspended in 350 μ L of
429 isopropanol and analyzed in a Shimadzu 8060 Triple Quadrupole Liquid
430 Chromatograph Mass Spectrometer. Samples (0.1-0.5 μ L) were loaded into an Agilent
431 column C18 ZORBAX Eclipse Plus (4.6 x 150 mm, 5 μ m, 400 bar) with a flow rate of
432 0.5 mL/min and an oven temperature of 40 °C. HPLC gradients were as described
433 below for lipidomic analysis. The phospholipids and lysophospholipids of interest were
434 analyzed in the multiple reaction monitoring (MRM) mode using m/z transitions,
435 collision energies (CE) and dwell times as shown in Table S5A. Data was acquired by
436 Shimadzu LabSolutions and processed in LabSolutions Browser. Graphs were plotted
437 using GraphPrism 5.

438

439 **Lipidomics of STox15-intoxicated *E. coli***

440 *E. coli* MG1655 containing the plasmids pBRA SP-STox15_{WT} or SP-
441 STox15_{C151A} were cultured in LB containing 0.2% d-glucose at 37 °C for 14 h. Cells
442 were subcultured in LB 0.2% d-glucose until an OD_{600nm} of 1 and centrifuged (10 min,
443 2900 g, 30 °C). Cells were washed with 40 mL of preheated AB medium at 37 °C,
444 centrifuged (10 min, 2900 g, 30 °C), and resuspended in 5 mL of AB supplemented
445 with 0.2% l-arabinose to induce STox15 expression. Cells were incubated for 1 h at 37
446 °C with agitation (100 rpm). The cells were centrifuged (15 min, 2900 g, 4 °C) and

447 washed once with 1 mL of PBS pH 7.4. PBS was removed by centrifugation and the
448 cell pellet was stored at -80 °C until lipid extraction. A cocktail of class specific internal
449 standards was added to the cell mass prior to lipid extraction for subsequent
450 quantification and normalization (Table S5B). Total lipid extraction was performed
451 using an adapted version of the protocol described by Yoshida, et al.⁹². Briefly, cell
452 pellets were resuspended with 500 µL of cold methanol and 1 mL of MilliQ water and
453 transferred to glass tubes. A mixture of chloroform and ethyl acetate (4:1) was added,
454 followed by agitation for 1 min at 25 °C. Samples were centrifuged (2 min, 1500 g, 4
455 °C) and the lipid-containing phase (lower phase) was extracted and transferred to a new
456 glass tube that was dried under a nitrogen (N₂) flow until all solvent traces were
457 evaporated. Samples were stored at -80 °C until analysis.

458 Lipid extracts were diluted in 100 µL of isopropanol and analyzed using ultra-
459 high performance liquid chromatography (UHPLC Nexera, Shimadzu) coupled with an
460 ESI-Q-TOF mass spectrometer (Triple TOF 6600, Sciex) (UHPLC-Q-TOF/MS). 2 µL
461 of each sample were injected into the UHPLC-MS, and molecules were separated using
462 a CORTECS column (C18, 1.6 µm, 2.1x100 mm, Waters) with a flow rate of 0.2
463 mL/min and temperature set to 35 °C⁹³. The mobile phases consisted of (A)
464 water/acetonitrile (60:40) and (B) isopropanol/acetonitrile/water (88:10:2). Ammonium
465 acetate at a final concentration of 10 mM was incorporated in both mobile phases A and
466 B for the negative ionization acquisition mode. The gradient elution used in the
467 chromatography was from 40 to 100% (mobile phase) B over the first 10 min; 100% B
468 from 10-12 min; 100 to 40% B for 12-13 and holding 40% B for 13-20 min. The
469 negative mode was utilized for the examination of phospholipids and free fatty acids.
470 MS and MS/MS data acquisition was performed using Analyst 1.7.1 software (Sciex).
471 Mass spectrometry data was inspected using PeakView 2.0 software (Sciex), and lipid

472 molecular species were manually identified with the help of an in-house manufactured
473 Excel-based macro. Lipid species were quantified using MultiQuant software (Sciex),
474 where the precursor ions areas were normalized by the internal standards for each class
475 (Table S5B).

476

477 **Data availability**

478 All data supporting the findings of this study are available within the paper and
479 its Supplementary Information files or at <https://leepbioinfo.github.io/10ksgt6ss/>. All
480 data and code used for sequence and genome context analyses are available on a GitHub
481 repository at <https://github.com/leepbioinfo/10ksgt6ss>. The ROTIFER package can be
482 downloaded from the GitHub repository <https://github.com/leepbioinfo/rotifer>. The
483 contents of both repositories are made available under the Creative Commons
484 Attribution 4.0 International or the GNU Lesser General Public License (LGPL) v. 2.0.
485 We have also uploaded the GitHub data and code to Zenodo (DOI:
486 10.5281/zenodo.13845778).

487

488 **Author contributions**

489 G.G.N., R.F.S. and E.B.-S. conceived the study; G.G.N., S.S.-S., T.W.C.S. and
490 R.F.S. conducted bioinformatic analysis; S.S.-S., J.T.H., J.P.M., R.S.S. performed
491 experiments and analyzed data; B.M.P.-S., S.M., L.A. analyzed data and contributed
492 with discussions; G.G.N., R.F.S. and E.B.-S. wrote the manuscript with input from the
493 other authors.

494

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515

516 **Competing interests**

517 The authors declare no competing interests.

518

519 **Figure legends.**

520 **Fig. 1: The T6SS effector repertoire within 10k *Salmonella* genomes.**

521 (a) Pipeline used for classification of genomic sites and T6SS subtypes. (b) Number of
522 genomes containing the different T6SS subtypes within the 10KSG dataset. (c)
523 Examples of the genomic organization of T6SS structural clusters from distinct
524 phylogenetic subtypes. (d) *In silico* strategies used for the identification and
525 classification of T6SS effectors. (e) Comparison of profile Hidden Markov Models
526 (pHMMs) of STox to published models of related families. Each circle corresponds to a
527 population of proteins detected by an STox model. The relative frequency of proteins
528 detected by an STox model compared to a reference model is shown on the horizontal
529 axis. The HMM divergence score is shown in the vertical axis. The blue-white-red color
530 scale of each dot represents the values for the Spearman correlation index between
531 STox and reference alignment scores for the same proteins. Yellow circles represent
532 STox models that detect proteins that are not recognized by previously existing models.
533 The radius of each circle is proportional to the total number of proteins detected only by
534 STox models. The regression line does not include the data points for the models
535 represented by yellow circles. (f) Schematic representation of the functional classes of
536 T6SS effector domains identified in the 10KSG distributed according to target cell type
537 (see the complete list in Table S1).

538

539 **Fig. 2: The diversity of *Salmonella* T6SS effectors and target-specific subsets.**

540 (a) Normal distribution and fitted curve showing the number of effectors per genome
541 (single cluster in blue and >2 clusters in orange). (b) The most frequent effectors
542 identified in the 10KSG dataset. Each bar represents the number of genomes encoding a
543 specific effector. Colors represent different biochemical activities, with light colors
544 representing orphan effectors while dark colors represent effectors encoded within the
545 structural cluster. (c) The five most frequent effectors encoded in different *Salmonella*

546 serovars (see Fig. S2 for all the 149 serovars). Colors indicate the effector activity as in
 547 (b). **(d)** Schematic representation of the most common sets of effectors in genomes
 548 encoding different T6SS subtypes. The number of genomes is indicated on the right.
 549 Colors represent activity as shown in (b). **(e)** Pie chart illustrating the relative
 550 proportions of effectors by activities encoded within the T6SS subtypes i3, i1, and i2.
 551 **(f)** Venn diagram illustrating the proportion of overlap between effectors encoded
 552 within each T6SS structural cluster (blue: i1; purple: subtype i2; red: subtype i3; and
 553 green: orphan). **(g)** Schematic representation of the genetic organization of T6SSs
 554 showing the position of variable regions in which the effector and immunity proteins are
 555 encoded. Colors denote structural proteins forming the membrane complex (orange),
 556 sheath and inner tube (light blue), baseplate and spike components (green). Effectors are
 557 shown in red, and immunities in dark blue.

558

559 **Fig. 3: STox15 has a permuted NlpC/P60 domain that is required for toxicity.**

560 **(a)** Scheme of the genomic region encoding STox15 and SImm15 effector/immunity
 561 pair (barcode FD01848827). **(b)** *E. coli* toxicity assay. Serial dilutions of *E. coli*
 562 carrying pBRA and pEXT22 constructs, as indicated, were spotted onto LB agar plates,
 563 and grown for 20 hr. Images are representative of three independent experiments. **(c)**
 564 Time-lapse microscopy of *E. coli* carrying pBRA SP-STox15 grown on LB agar pads
 565 containing either 0.2% d-glucose (repressed) or 0.2% l-arabinose (induced). Scale bar: 5
 566 μ m. Timestamps in hh:mm. **(d)** Maximum-likelihood phylogenetic tree of permuted
 567 NlpC/P60 members. Dots represent the number of PSI-BLAST iterations required to
 568 collect homologs and the red star marks the query: *S. Oranienburg* STox15 depicted in
 569 (a). **(e)** Genomic organization of representatives from clades TseH and STox15 showing
 570 the genes are encoded in the context of conflict systems, and DUF4105 showing context

571 of lipid metabolism. **(f)** Sequence logo from the enzymatic core of permuted NlpC/P60
 572 from all clades shown in (d). The arrows indicate conserved His and Cys residues that
 573 were mutated in (g). **(g)** *E. coli* toxicity assay. Serial dilution of *E. coli* containing
 574 pBRA and pEXT22 constructs, as indicated, spotted onto LB agar plates and grown for
 575 20 hr. Images are representative of three independent experiments.

576

577 **Fig. 4: STox15 has phospholipase A activity and changes the composition of target**
 578 **cell membranes.**

579 **(a)** *In vitro* enzymatic assay with recombinant STox15 (red) or STox15_{C151A} (blue)
 580 incubated with different phospholipids (both 16:0-18:1 PG and PE) for 2 hr at 37 °C.
 581 The amount of lysophospholipids produced was analyzed and quantified by HPLC-
 582 MS/MS. **(b)** Quantification of the peak area of lysophospholipids normalized by the
 583 intact substrate. Data corresponds to the mean \pm SD. *** $p < 0.001$ and * $p < 0.01$, *ns* not
 584 significant (Student's t-test). **(c)** UHPLC-MS total ion chromatogram showing the
 585 profile of total lipids extracted from *E. coli* expressing STox15 (red) or STox15_{C151A}
 586 (blue). **(d)** Heatmap plot of top 20 altered lipids of intoxicated *E. coli* lipidome. Results
 587 display four biological replicates of each condition (WT or C151A) with the
 588 quantification of lipids species (Tukey test; $p < 0.05$ FDR adjusted). Data were
 589 expressed in nM mg of protein⁻¹ and normalized by log transformation (base 10) prior to
 590 analysis. Red (up) and blue (down) bars represent changes in lipid species concentration
 591 relative to the normalized mean. Letters differentiate between the isomers.

592

593 **Fig. S1: T6SS effector repertoire in the 10KSG dataset.** Each column indicates the
 594 presence or absence of a toxin as identified by the models developed in this study. Lines
 595 denote unique combinations of effectors. The histogram on the right shows the

596 frequency of genomes in the 10KSG dataset containing each specific repertoire. The
597 histogram at the bottom illustrates the frequency of genomes with at least one protein
598 identified by the above HMM model. Effector activities are color-coded as described in
599 Fig. 2B.

600

601 **Fig. S2: List of five most frequent T6SS effectors identified in each of the 149**
602 ***Salmonella* serovars contained in the 10KSG dataset.** Colors indicate the effector
603 activity as in Fig. 2B.

604

605 **Fig. S3: SImm15 is a two-transmembrane helices protein.** (a) Sequence alignment of
606 SImm15 homologs with orange rectangles indicating predicted transmembrane helices.
607 Sequences are colored according to the Clustal X color scheme⁹⁴. Consensus
608 abbreviations: h, hydrophobic (A, C, F, I, L, M, V, W, Y); l, aliphatic (L, I, V); a,
609 aromatic (F, W, Y); b, large residues (L, I, Y, E, R, F, Q, K, M, W); s, small residues
610 (A, G, S, V, C, D, N); u, tiny residues (G, A, S); p, polar residues (S, T, E, D, K, R, N,
611 Q, H, C); c, charged residues (D, E, H, K, R); +, positively charged residues (H, K, R);
612 –, negatively charged residues (D, E). (B) Transmembrane helix prediction for SImm15
613 using DeepTMHMM⁹⁵.

614

615 **Fig. S4: Recombinant protein purification used in enzymatic assay.** SDS–PAGE of
616 recombinant proteins during purification steps to obtain purified protein for enzymatic
617 assays. Affinity chromatography using Strep-Tactin sepharose to purify STox15
618 versions with C-terminus Strep-tag II: WT in (a) or C151A in (b). Recombinant proteins
619 were purified from the soluble fraction. An additional step of washing with 1.5M urea
620 was performed after the traditional washes to remove contamination with GroEL before

621 elution with biotin. Additional bands were identified by mass-spectrometry to confirm
622 identity. MK: marker; INS: insoluble; SOL: soluble; FT: flowthrough. GroEL:
623 chaperonin GroEL; Bccp: biotin carboxyl carrier protein; OmpF: outer membrane porin
624 F.

625

626 **Table S1. List of all T6SS toxin domains identified in this study in the 10K**
627 ***Salmonella* genomes dataset.**

628

629 **Table S2. List of all homologs collected by JackHMMER searches and used to**
630 **build the phylogenetic tree shown in Fig. 3D.**

631

632 **Table S3. Genomic context of members of each permuted NlpC/P60 members**
633 **shown in Fig. 3D.**

634

635 **Table S4. List of strains, plasmids and primers used in the study.**

636

637 **Table S5. (a) MRM transition for LC-MS/MS method of lysophospholipids. (b)**
638 **Internal standards used for lipidomics analysis in negative mode.**

639

640 **Movie S1. Time-lapse microscopy of *E. coli* harboring pBRA SP-STox15 growing**
641 **in media supplemented with 0.2% d-glucose. Timestamp in hh:mm. Scale bar: 5 μ m.**

642

643 **Movie S2. Time-lapse microscopy of *E. coli* harboring pBRA SP-STox15 growing**
644 **in media supplemented with 0.2% l-arabinose. Timestamp in hh:mm. Scale bar: 5**

645 **μ m.**

646

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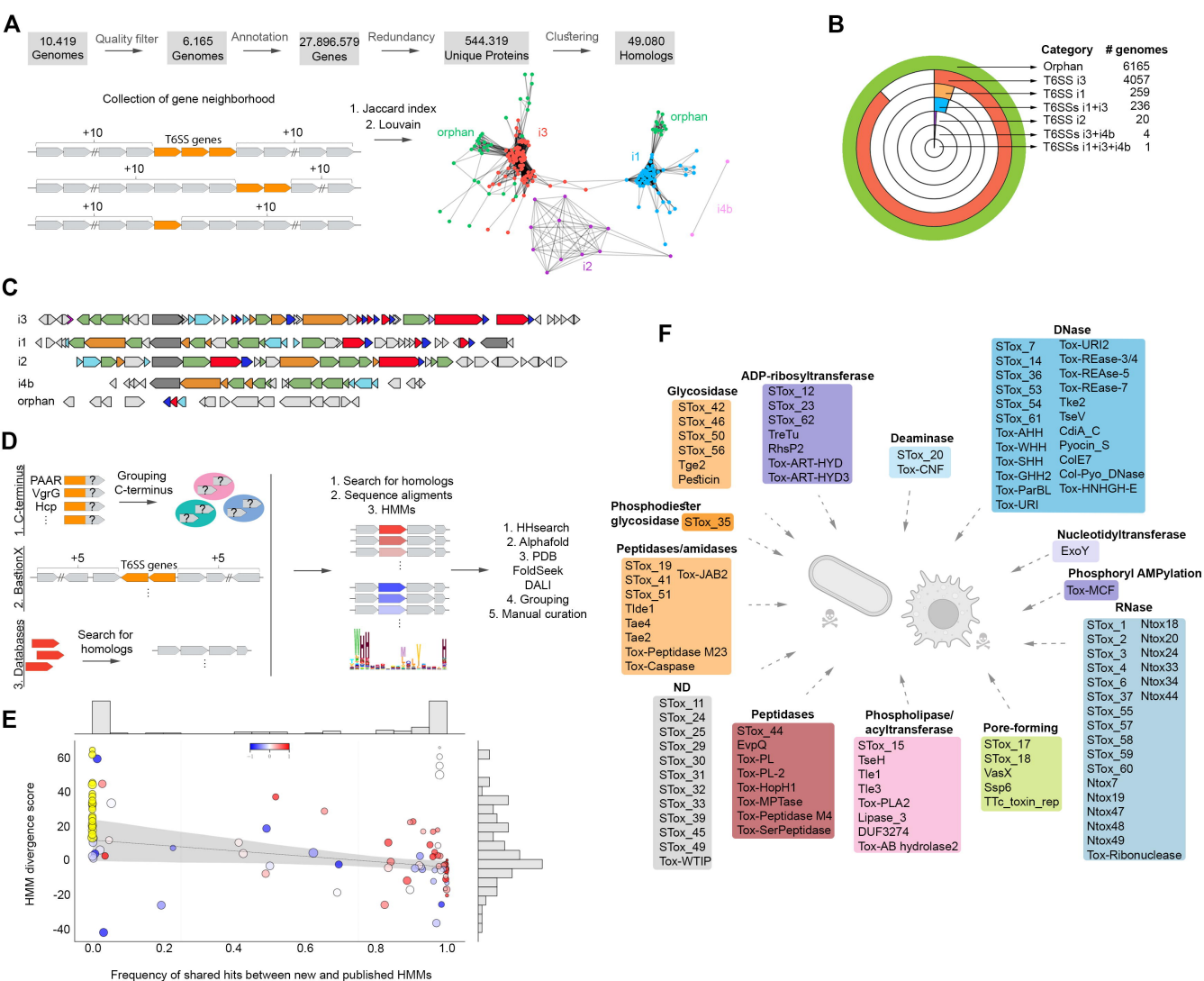
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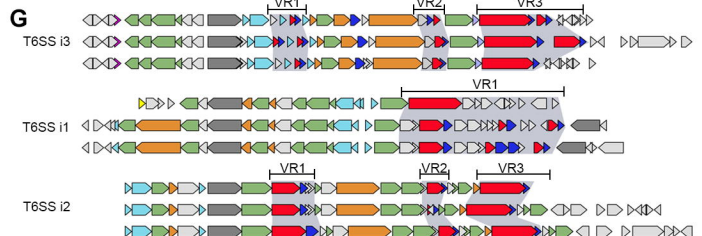
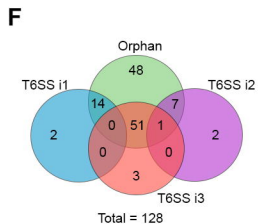
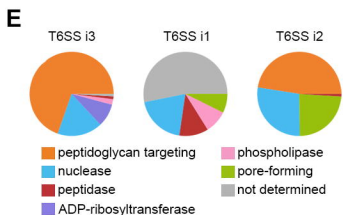
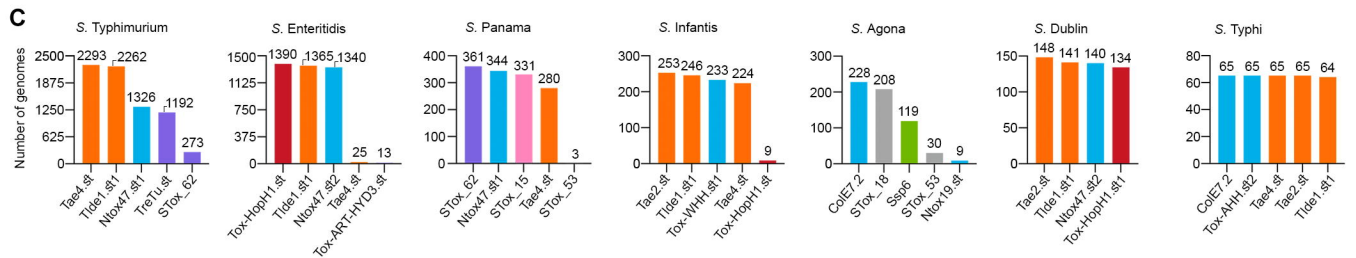
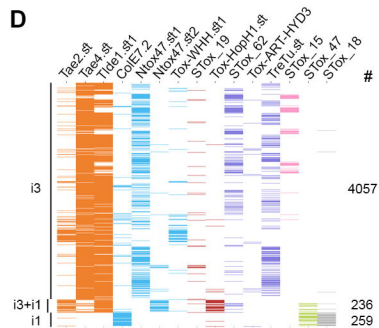
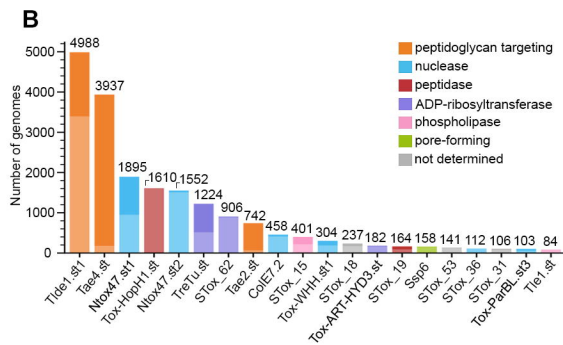
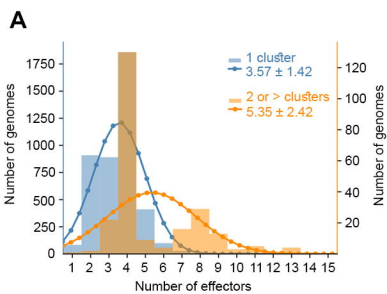
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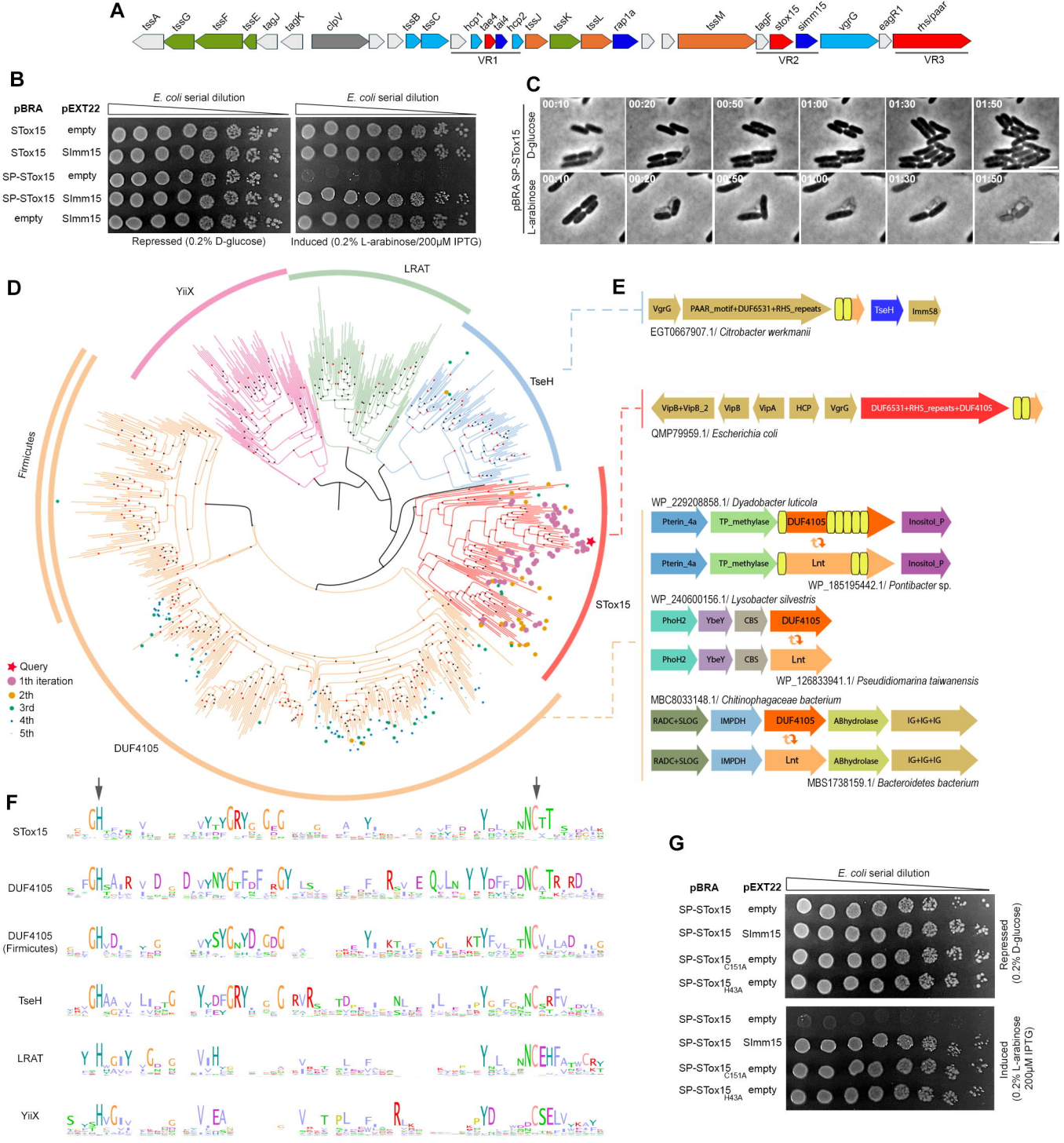
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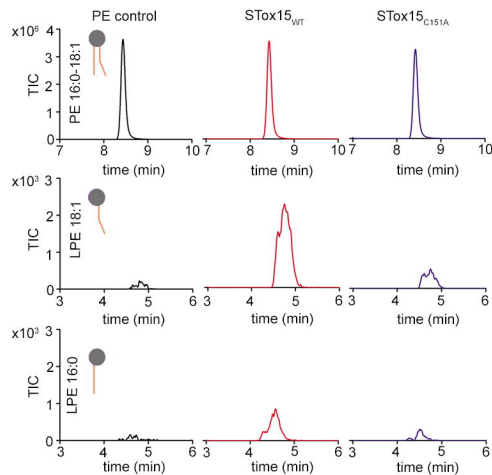
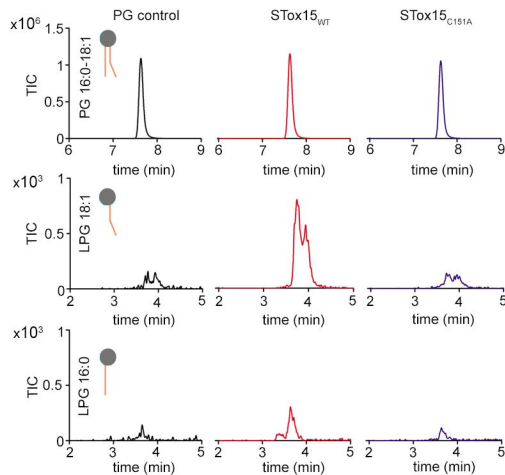
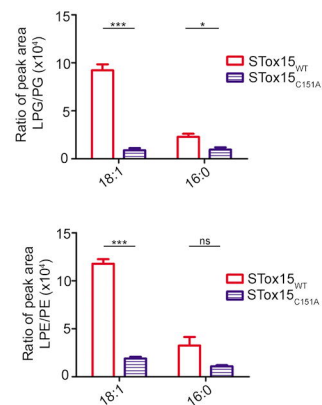
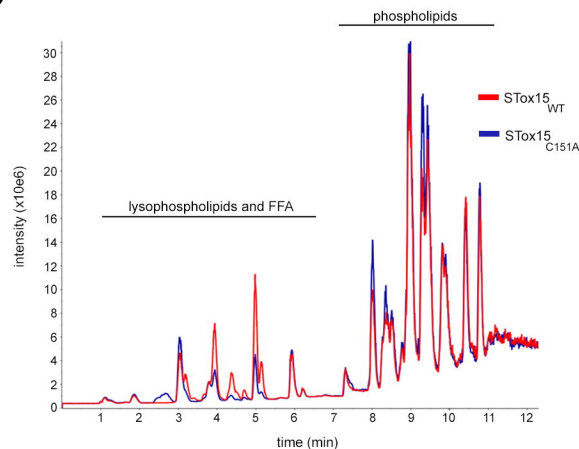
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