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Review

Iron around the clock

3 Q1 Nicolas Tissot, Jonathan Przybyla-Toscano¹, Guilhem Reyt, Baptiste Castel, Céline Duc², 4 Jossia Boucherez, Frédéric Gaymard, Jean-François Briat*, Christian Dubos*

Laboratoire de Biochimie et Physiologie Moléculaire des Plantes (INRA, CNRS, Montpellier SupAgro, Université Montpellier 2), 34060 Montpellier Cedex 2, France

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ABSTRACT

Carbon assimilation, a key determinant of plant biomass production, is under circadian regulation. Light and temperature are major inputs of the plant clock that control various daily rhythms. Such rhythms confer adaptive advantages to the organisms by adjusting their metabolism in anticipation of environmental fluctuations. The relationship between the circadian clock and nutrition extends far beyond the regulation of carbon assimilation as mineral nutrition, and specially iron homeostasis, is regulated through this mechanism. Conversely, iron status was identified as a new and important input regulating the central oscillator, raising the question of the nature of the Fe-dependent signal that modulates the period of the circadian clock. Several lines of evidence strongly suggest that fully developed and functional chloroplasts as well as early light signalling events, involving phytochromes, are essential to couple the clock to Fe responses. Nevertheless, the exact nature of the signal, which most probably involves unknown or not yet fully characterized elements of the chloroplast-to-nucleus retrograde signalling pathway, remains to be identified. Finally, this regulation may also involves epigenetic components.

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33 Introduction

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Circadian clocks control various daily rhythms in organisms, providing them with a competitive advantage [1]. Input signals

E-mail addresses: briat@supagro.inra.fr (J.-F. Briat),

christian.dubos@supagro.inra.fr, christian.dubos@versailles.inra.fr (C. Dubos). ¹ Present address: Université de Lorraine, Interactions Arbres – Microorganismes, adapt the phase of rhythms in plants to local environmental changes through the central oscillator. The central oscillator is a complex network of interlocked feedback loops involving numerous transcriptional regulators. Central to this network is a feedback loop that connects the morning and evening part of the circadian clock regulatory circuit. This loop is composed of two morning-expressed R1/2-MYB transcription factors [2] CIRCADIAN CLOCK ASSOCIATED 1 (CCA1) and LATE ELONGATED HYPOCOTYL (LHY), and of the evening-phase transcriptional repressor TIMING OF CAB EXPRESSION 1/PSEUDO-RESPONSE REGULATOR 1 (TOC1/PRR1) [3]. Although most of the regulations of the clock occur at the transcriptional level, post-transcriptional and post-translational regulations are also concerned. For example, the evening loop component ZEITLUPE (ZTL) is a F-box protein that targets the highly

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^{*} Corresponding authors at: Bat 7, Campus INRA/SupAgro, Place Viala, 34060 Montpellier Cedex 1, France. Tel.: +33 04 99 61 26 13/29 32.

UMR1136, F-54500 Vandoeuvre-lés-Nancy, France. ² Present address: Génétique, Reproduction et Développement, CNRS UMR6293, Clermont Université, INSERM U1103, 24 avenue des Landais, 63171 Cedex Aubière, France.

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Fig. 1. Schematic representation of the reciprocal interaction existing between iron homeostasis and the circadian clock. The regulation of plant iron homeostasis is under circadian regulation, controlling optimal distribution of iron pools at the cellular and sub-cellular levels throughout plants. Iron status of the plant is modified depending on iron availability in the soil solution, which in turn alter circadian clock periodicity that adapt plant physiology to its new environment.

phosphorylated forms of TOC1 for ubiquitylation and subsequent degradation by the proteasome [4]. Conversely, the interaction of TOC1 with PRR3 prevents its ZTL-mediated degradation [4].

Light and temperature are the major inputs of the clock [5]. Many biological processes including stomatal opening [6], photosynthesis [1], and flowering [7] are outputs of the circadian clock, through the re-programming of expression of various gene sets [8]. More recently, nitrogen, copper, magnesium [9–11] as well as iron [12,13] mineral nutrition has been shown to be regulated by the clock. They constitute another important input acting on the expression of central oscillator genes (Fig. 1) [12–14].

Photosynthesis efficiency is also dependent upon mineral nutri-61 62 tion in addition to light, temperature and the circadian clock. Fe, among metals, has a major role in this process because of its redox 63 properties within proteins of the electron transport chain. Altered 64 Fe homeostasis in Arabidopsis thaliana mutants lacking the iron 65 storage protein ferritin in their leaves had impaired carbon assim-66 ilation, resulting in a decrease in biomass production [15]. Because 67 Fe homeostasis and photosynthesis are interdependent and both 68 are regulated by the circadian clock ([16]; Fig. 1), it is a major issue 69 to understand how these various determinants of biomass pro-70 duction are integrated into the physiology of plants. In addition 71 to its major role in the photosynthesis process, Fe is also required 72 for respiration, DNA synthesis, nitrogen and sulphur assimilation, 73 and hormone synthesis. Furthermore, Fe being highly reactive with 74 oxygen, it can produce reactive oxygen species (ROS), which are 75 potentially toxic for cell structures [15]. As a consequence Fe con-76 tent, speciation and distribution in plants need to be finely tuned 77 through the control of Fe homeostasis. 78

This paper highlights recent new developments that put for-79 ward a link between Fe homeostasis and the circadian clock. The 80 principal aim is to propose a critical review of our understanding 81 of the control of Fe homeostasis by the clock, and the impact of Fe 82 nutrition on the expression of clock components. To what extent 83 clock and Fe regulatory circuits can be integrated into a compre-84 hensive scheme will contribute to improve our understanding of 85 86 the mechanisms by which plants adapt to their fluctuating environment.

Clock regulation of Fe homeostasis

Fe homeostasis in plants results from the action of integrated regulatory pathways controlling the expression of genes at the transcriptional and post-transcriptional levels. The activation or repression of these genes depends on Fe availability, namely Fe scarcity or Fe excess [17]. These genes encode proteins that are required for Fe uptake by the roots, Fe distribution throughout the whole plant body, and intracellular compartmentation and storage [18,19].

Graminaceous plants (cereals) use a chelation strategy to acquire Fe from the soil. Their roots secrete methionine derivatives from the mugineic acid family of phytosiderophores (MAs), which chelate and solubilize Fe(III) in the rhizosphere. The resulting Fe(III)–MAs complexes are taken up by root cells. This MA secretion by roots fluctuates throughout the day in a diurnal manner [20]. For example, MAs secretion from barley roots occurs within 2-3 h after sunrise under Fe-deficient conditions. This rhythmic secretion of phytosiderophores in cereals is mainly mediated by changes in light rather than temperature [21]. Furthermore, large-scale expression analysis of Fe-deficiency stressed barley roots revealed that among the genes whose mRNA steady state level was increased, 25% exhibited different abundance levels in Fe-deficient roots at noon and at night [22]. However, these studies do not address whether these regulations are driven by light independently of the circadian clock. In addition, among the genes highlighted by this transcriptomic approach, no Arabidopsis orthologous genes encoding clock components (e.g. CCA1, LHY, etc.) have been identified.

The first molecular evidence that Fe homeostasis was connected to the clock came from a genetic screen designed to search for regulators of the expression of the Arabidopsis AtFer1 ferritin gene, encoding a Fe storage protein located in the plastids [23]. TIME FOR COFFEE (TIC), a previously described regulator of the circadian clock [24,25], repressed AtFer1 expression. This finding prompted determining whether AtFer1 was a cycling gene (i.e. whose expression is rhythmically regulated by the circadian clock). Indeed AtFer1 cycles with peak expression at dawn. Cycling is abolished in genetic backgrounds mutated for genes of the central oscillator such as cca1-11 or *lhy-21*. Regulation of ferritin genes (*AtFer1*, *AtFer3* and *AtFer4*) expression by the clock was confirmed by showing that they are direct transcriptional targets of PRR7, a central clock component [26]; PRR7 being involved in the adaptation to iron excess. Furthermore, the promoter activities of AtFer1 and two other genes involved in the Fe deficiency response (namely IRT1, for IRON-REGULATED TRANSPORTER 1, the major Fe²⁺ transporter in roots, and bHLH39, a key transcription factor involved in this process) are under circadian control [27].

Fe as an input regulating the clock

Three independent studies have recently demonstrated that the period length of the circadian clock is directly modulated by the iron status of Arabidopsis plants. The period is longer under Fe-deficient conditions and shorter under Fe-excess conditions [12–14].

The impact of iron status on the periodicity of the expression of key central oscillator genes was evaluated through the analysis of their promoter activity using the luciferase reporter gene (Tables 1 and 2). This analysis demonstrated that the period length of all the studied circadian clock genes was affected in a Fe-dependent manner, with a greater effect on *CCA1* and *TOC1* promoter activities [12–14]. These variations in the period length are quantitative and directly dependent on the amount of Fe actually available for the plant. This finding was also observed at the mRNA steady state levels [12]. However, the periodicity of the circadian oscillations is also regulated at the post-translational level

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