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Phyllotaxis from a single apical cell

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Keywords

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Abstract

Phyllotaxis, the geometry of leaf arrangement around stems, determines plant architecture. Molecular interactions coordinating the formation of phyllotactic patterns have mainly been studied in multicellular shoot apical meristems of flowering plants. Phyllotaxis evolved independently in the major land plant lineages. In mosses, it arises from a single apical cell, raising the question of how asymmetric divisions of a single-celled meristem create phyllotactic patterns and whether associated genetic processes are shared across lineages. We present an overview of the mechanisms governing shoot apical cell specification and activity in the model moss, *Physcomitrium patens*, and argue that similar molecular regulatory modules have been deployed repeatedly across evolution to operate at different scales and drive apical function in convergent shoot forms.

1 Convergent evolution of phyllotactic patterns in plants

2 Phyllotaxis – the regular arrangement of leaves around stems – is a primary determinant of plant architecture and amongst the most striking and elegant natural 3 patterns [1]. Deciphering how the periodic emergence of leaves is coordinated in 4 5 space and time at the apex of growing shoots constitutes an enigma that has puzzled biologists, mathematicians and physicists for centuries [2]. Besides some early 6 7 studies in ferns [3], most experiments investigating the cellular and molecular 8 mechanisms of phyllotaxis have been carried out in flowering plants, including Arabidopsis thaliana (thale cress), Solanum lycopersicum (tomato) and Zea mays 9 (maize) [4]. In these plants, leaves bulge out at the periphery of the shoot apical 10 meristem, a multicellular structure located at the shoot tip and that contains a stem 11 12 cell niche at its center. The phyllotactic pattern is defined by the number of leaves 13 forming at a given node (i) and the divergence angle between consecutive leaf initiation events (α). Phyllotaxis is frequently spiral with a divergence angle close to 14 the golden angle ($i = 1, \alpha \approx 137.5^{\circ}$) as in anabidopsis or tomato, but it may also be 15 distichous ($i = 1, \alpha = 180^{\circ}$) as in maize, or reflect a few other arrangements [4,5]. 16 17 Similar phyllotactic patterns are described in ferns, lycophytes, leafy liverworts or 18 mosses but in comparison with flowering plants, they emerge from meristems with a simpler structure [6–9]. An extreme example is seen in bryophytes whose meristem is 19 composed of a single apical stem cell (Figure 1). Evidence from phylogeny and the 20 fossil record suggests that leaves (e.g. fern fronds, lycophyte microphylls) or leaf-like 21 structures (e.g. bryophyte phyllids) evolved multiple times independently, which 22 implies that despite compelling morphological resemblance phyllotaxis is a 23 convergent feature of major plant groups [10]. The continuing development of the 24 25 moss *Physcomitrium patens* as a model system beyond flowering plants offers unprecedented opportunities to investigate how phyllotaxis can emerge from a single 26 apical cell and whether shared mechanisms underlie morphogenesis from unicellular 27 28 and multicellular shoot apical meristems [11,12].

29

30 Apical cell shape and cleavage directs phyllotaxis

31 The production of phyllids (hereafter named leaves) in the moss gametophore (i.e.,

32 the gametophytic leafy shoot, hereafter named leafy shoot) is directly determined by

33 the activity of a single apical cell. Each asymmetric cleavage of the apical cell produces a leaf initial and perpetuates the apical cell itself to sustain shoot growth, 34 as evidenced by live imaging of physcomitrium shoot buds [9]. The relationship 35 between apical cell division angle and resulting phyllotactic patterns has mainly been 36 inferred from histological observations of fixed specimens [6,13,14]. In some moss 37 species, the apical cell is lenticular with two alternating division planes that produce 38 opposite segments ($j = 1, \alpha = 180^{\circ}$), resulting in distichous phyllotaxis like in *Fissidens* 39 (Figure 1A, 1B). In most species, the apical cell is tetrahedral, resembling an inverted 40 pyramid, and produces leaves by successive rotating divisions of three cutting faces. 41 Divisions parallel to apical cell side walls distribute leaves at fixed circumferential 42 positions around the stem (j = 1, $\alpha = 120^{\circ}$), resulting in tristichous phyllotaxis like in 43 Fontinalis (Figure 1C, 1D). Divisions may also be oblique to the side walls and 44 successive leaves will be positioned at a slightly broader angle ($j = 1, 120^{\circ} < \alpha < 180^{\circ}$), 45 46 resulting in spiral phyllotaxis like in *Physcomitrium* or the hair cap moss, *Polytrichum* 47 (Figure 1E, 1F) [6,9]. Other less common scenarios have also been described, but in all cases, direct measurements of apical cell geometry, orientation of successive 48 apical cell division planes and leaf divergence angles are still needed to quantitatively 49 understand the functional link between cell division orientation in single-celled 50 51 meristems and phyllotactic patterning [6,14,15]. To date, the molecular mechanisms controlling apical cell division patterns also remain elusive. However, the existing data 52 suggest that understanding how the geometry and division plane orientation of the 53 54 shoot apical cell are specified in the first place from the gametophore initial cell (i.e., the leafy shoot precursor cell) holds some of the keys to decipher how moss 55 phyllotaxis is established and perpetuated in development. 56

57

58 Geometry distinguishes shoot initials

In physcomitrium, leafy shoots spring up from a network of filaments – the protonema. A small proportion of protonemal side-branches (c. 2-5%) becomes leafy shoots, while the majority gives rise to other filaments [16,17]. Although both leafy shoot and filament initial cells emerge as a localized swelling at the distal end of protonemal cells, several geometrical features allow them to be distinguished before the first division [9,18,19]. In comparison with filament initials, leafy shoot initials have a more 65 bulbous and irregular shape, a greater width and a wider division plane angle relative to the growth axis of the filament from which they emerge (Figure 2) [9,20]. These 66 features might be related to distinct cellular growth modes: filamentous cells elongate 67 by tip growth while leafy shoot initials might expand by diffuse growth [9,21]. Genes 68 69 encoding cell wall remodeling proteins, including cellulose synthase (CESA), xyloglucan endotransglycosylase, expansin, cellulose synthase-like D (CSLD) and 70 pectin methylesterase (PME) enzymes, are differentially expressed between 71 72 filamentous cells and nascent shoot buds, which suggests that the different geometries and growth properties could result from different wall compositions [22]. 73 Indeed, disruption of the *PpCESA5* gene leads to severe morphological defects in the 74 75 leafy shoot, but not in the filaments [23]. Although apical cell specification is not 76 affected in *ppcesa5* knock-out mutants, leaf emergence is impaired due to cellulose 77 deficiency and associated defects on cell expansion, growth anisotropy and cytokinesis. This reveals a shared feature with flowering plants as CESA genes also 78 play a key role in shoot morphogenesis and phyllotaxis in arabidopsis. CESA1 and 79 80 CESA3 genes are expressed throughout the shoot apical meristem, and corresponding mutants have smaller shoot apical meristems with fewer cells and 81 increased surface curvature than wild-type, which affects the distribution of 82 phyllotactic angles in the inflorescence [24]. Other arabidopsis cell wall related genes 83 84 such as CSLD, PME, Xyloglucan α -Xylosyltransferase or α -xylosidase are also essential for shoot apical meristem maintenance, leaf emergence or phyllotactic 85 patterning, but their contribution in plants with single-celled meristems has not been 86 explored so far [25–28]. Furthermore, it remains to be tested whether controlled 87 88 changes of wall composition in the side-branches of moss filaments may be sufficient 89 to trigger specific cell growth mode and fate transition.

90

91 Stem cell regulators and microtubules dictate division plane orientation

The apical stem cell governing physcomitrium leafy shoot morphogenesis is established by a series of four oblique divisions from the shoot initial cell (**Figure 2**) [9]. In contrast, filament initials divide exclusively perpendicular to the growth axis, which suggests that cell geometry might subtend division plane orientation, as described in other plant tissues [29–31]. Live imaging of shoot initials has revealed that the angle of the first three divisions is robust, indicating that division plane
establishment is tightly controlled and crucial for phyllotaxis [9,32]. This is also
suggested by mutants where apical cell formative divisions are defective and leafy
shoot development cannot proceed normally [33], such as *Defective Kernel1 (DEK1)*[34,35], *No Gametophores 1 (NOG1)* [18], *Targeting Protein for Xklp2 (TPX2)* [36] or
mutants in the CLAVATA (CLV) signaling pathway [37].

103 Cytoskeleton reorganization is an integral feature of plant cell division [38], and 104 the study of the microtubule-associated protein TPX2 has provided direct evidence 105 for a role of the cytoskeleton in cell division plane positioning and shoot 106 morphogenesis. The hypomorphic *tpx2-5* mutant produces stunted gametophores 107 with obvious leaf patterning defects. This phenotype is explained by the abnormal 108 displacement of the mitotic spindle (i.e., a microtubule-based structure that guides 109 chromosome segregation in the two daughter cells) towards the basal side of shoot initials and the consequent mispositioning of the phragmoplast (i.e., an array of 110 111 microtubules arranged perpendicular to the division plane that accompanies cell plate 112 expansion towards the plasma membrane fusion site during cytokinesis) and, hence, the oblique division plane (Figure 2). This mechanism is dependent on actin 113 microfilaments, as treatment with the actin inhibitor latrunculin B suppresses spindle 114 115 position defects of *tpx2-5* mutants [36]. The gametosome, a cytoplasmic microtubule 116 organizing center that forms in prophase, also plays a key role. Transient oryzalin treatment of shoot initials causing specifically depolymerization of gametosome 117 microtubules is sufficient to alter spindle and division plane orientation [32]. 118 119 Unfortunately, it has not been shown whether gametosome disruption affects 120 development at later stages. Altogether, this shows that the transient deployment of 121 microtubule-based structures is needed to tilt the division plane in shoot initials. In this context, it remains to be seen whether microtubule-dependent division plane 122 123 orientation is prescribed by initial cell shape, mechanical forces, or both, as proposed 124 in other plant tissues [39,40].

Beyond its structural role, the proper positioning of the cell division plane is 125 126 likely needed to compartmentalize positional cues involved in the establishment of 127 asymmetric cell identities. For example, the graded distribution of CLAVATA3/EMBRYO SURROUNDING REGION-RELATED (CLE) peptides may 128

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129 provide positional information to specify distinct cell fates in arabidopsis [41,42]. Interestingly, transgenic mosses in which *PpCLE* expression has been silenced rarely 130 form shoots with more than one leaf. The first and second division plane of Ppcle 131 mutant shoot initials deviate from a normally oblique orientation and are often parallel 132 133 to each other, which is not seen in wild-type plants (Figure 2). Altered division plane 134 orientation is also reported in *Physcomitrium clv1a1b* double mutants and receptor-135 *like protein kinase 2 (Pprpk2)* mutants and affects shoot morphogenesis at various 136 stages. This role for CLV signaling is conserved in evolution as arabidopsis *clv1/barely* 137 any meristem 1 (bam1)/bam2/bam3 mutants show abnormal periclinal divisions in root 138 tissues [37]. Components of the CLV signaling pathway have first been identified as regulators of stem cell homeostasis in the arabidopsis shoot apical meristem. 139 140 Perturbation of CLV activity in flowering plants typically leads to a variety of phenotypes ranging from moderate meristem enlargement to fasciation and massive 141 142 cell overproliferation, correlating with a gradual increase in stem cell number and 143 activity [43-46]. Such increase in meristem size perturbs leaf divergence angles in 144 arabidopsis *clv3-2* mutants that transit through decussate and whorled phyllotactic patterns over their lifetime [47]. Overproliferation of ectopic apical stem cells was 145 146 observed in moss *Ppclv* mutants, and exogenous treatment with PpCLE peptides is 147 sufficient to suppress cell proliferation in wild-type shoots. Thus, *CLV* genes exert key 148 roles in leaf initiation and positioning in mosses and flowering plants and may operate 149 at different scales, through regulation of stem cell homeostasis, cell identity and 150 division plane orientation. In moss, the analysis of PPCLV mutants highlights the 151 functional link between cell division orientation and shoot architecture, and further 152 work is needed to determine how PpCLV signaling controls microtubule-dependent 153 division plane orientation.

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155 Hormonal interactions control apical function

In addition to cell geometry and the above-mentioned molecular players, the phytohormone auxin influences microtubule distribution [48] and can act on division plane orientation control, as proposed in arabidopsis [49]. Whether a similar mechanism operates in unicellular meristems is unknown, but several lines of evidence indicate that auxin-based shoot patterning is a shared characteristic of

161 mosses and flowering plants (Figure 3). Pharmacological perturbations of polar auxin transport in tomato and arabidopsis [50-53] and genetic studies of auxin influx and 162 163 efflux carriers have established a prominent role for auxin transport in phyllotaxis 164 control [54,55]. Computational models and 4D quantitative imaging using auxin 165 biosensors have allowed to define further that auxin transport functions in phyllotaxis by self-organizing zones of lower auxin concentration that act as inhibitory fields 166 around organs, a mechanism that may account for the diversity of phyllotactic 167 168 patterns observed in flowering plants [56-61]. Radioactive auxin transport assays have been used to assess the conservation of polar auxin transport beyond flowering 169 170 plants [62,63]. These experiments have failed to detect long-range unidirectional auxin movement in the leafy shoot of four different moss species [62], and it has been 171 172 proposed that auxin could flow by a diffusion-like mechanism in physcomitrium [64]. 173 Nevertheless, treatment of wild-type moss with the polar auxin transport inhibitor, N-1-Naphthylphthalamic Acid (NPA), and/or the synthetic auxin, 1-Naphthaleneacetic 174 acid (NAA), causes a range of developmental defects such as stunted shoots with 175 176 fewer and narrower leaves, suppression of leaf outgrowth or loss of apical cell activity [65]. Canonical PIN-FORMED (PIN) genes are conserved in physcomitrium, and PINA 177 and PINB are highly expressed in the gametophyte [65–67]. pinA pinB double mutants 178 179 have twisted leaves and reduced leaf cell proliferation, resembling plants that accumulate auxin. They also display hypersensitivity to exogenous auxin, which 180 181 causes phenotypes also seen in wild-type moss treated with both NPA and NAA, such as growth termination. This led to the proposal that PIN proteins sustain apical 182 183 function and rhythmic leaf production by exporting auxin out of the apical cell and 184 newly formed leaves [65]. Thus, both in mosses and flowering plants, PIN-mediated 185 auxin transport regulates meristem function and leaf development.

Local auxin biosynthesis is also essential to shoot apical meristem activity in arabidopsis. Notably, PLETHORA (PLT) transcription factors determine lateral organ position by controlling auxin levels [68,69]. *plt3/5/7* mutant plants display abnormal phyllotaxis with an increase of successive 180° divergence angles. Transcript levels of *YUCCA1* (*YUC1*) and *YUC4* auxin biosynthetic genes are reduced in *plt3/5/7* mutants, PLT5 directly promotes *YUC4* expression, and heterozygous *yuc1 yuc4* double mutants tend to have distichous leaf arrangement [68]. It is worth stressing

193 that YUC-dependent auxin biosynthesis more likely occurs in developing primordia [60] than in the meristem center as previously proposed [68]. In physcomitrium, four 194 APB (for AINTEGUMENTA, PLETHORA and BABY BOOM) genes are orthologous to 195 196 arabidopsis *PLT*s, and their expression is induced by auxin and associated with leafy shoot initials [16]. Quadruple apb mutants are unable to initiate leafy shoots and 197 ectopic APB4 expression raises shoot number, suggesting that APBs are necessary 198 199 and sufficient for apical cell specification. APB4 might regulate auxin biosynthesis 200 [16], but this has not been tested at the transcriptional level.

201 Cytokinin promotes leafy shoot initiation in moss (Figure 3), probably by converting receptive cells to shoot apical cells, and this effect is enhanced by auxin 202 [16,64,70,71]. Although APB expression is not regulated by cytokinin, abp guadruple 203 204 mutants fail to respond to the synthetic cytokinin BAP, suggesting that auxin-induced 205 APBs are required for cytokinin-dependent shoot initiation in moss [16]. Studies of arabidopsis histidine phosphotransfer protein 6 (ahp6) and abphyl1 (abph1) 206 207 phyllotactic mutants have highlighted the importance of auxin-cytokinin crosstalk in 208 flowering shoot development [72,73]. AHP6 is activated plant by 209 MONOPTEROS/AUXIN RESPONSE FACTOR5 and hence acts downstream of auxin 210 to set the pace of organ production [72]. Unlike wild-type maize plants, *abph1* mutants display decussate phyllotaxis ($j = 2, \alpha = 90^{\circ}$), and this is caused by the disruption of 211 212 a cytokinin-inducible type A response regulator (ARR) [74]. NPA treatment restricts ABPH1 expression in the shoot apical meristem, ZmPIN1a expression and auxin 213 214 levels are reduced in *abph1* mutants, and cytokinin promotes *ZmPIN1a* expression in an ABPH1-dependent manner. These results emphasize the importance and possible 215 216 conservation of auxin-cytokinin interactions at the shoot apex of land plants and support a probable involvement in the regulation of moss phyllotaxis (Figure 3) [73]. 217

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219 Concluding remarks and future perspectives

Although shoot architecture diversified independently in the gametophyte and sporophyte generations of the plant life cycle [75], analogous shoot forms and phyllotactic patterns arose by convergence in both generations and their development is underpinned by a series of deep homologies (defined in [76] as "the sharing of the genetic regulatory apparatus that is used to build morphologically and 225 phylogenetically disparate (...) features"), as illustrated throughout this article (Figure 226 **3** and references therein). Further work is now needed to elucidate how conserved hormonal regulatory modules pattern phyllotaxis from single apical cells and how 227 polarity cues are set at the single-cell level and translated into asymmetric divisions 228 (see **Outstanding questions**). The concept of inhibitory fields introduced above 229 230 comes notably from surgical experiments on fern meristems [3]. It is thus of particular interest to question whether auxin-based inhibitory fields exist in other spore-231 producing plant species, possibly at the scale of one or a few cells. Beyond mosses, 232 233 these questions have started to be addressed in Selaginella kraussiana in which NPA treatment perturbs phyllotaxis and causes shoot apex termination [63], but the lack 234 235 of a lycophyte transformation method hinders functional genomic analyses. Recently, an efficient genetic transformation procedure has been established for the fern 236 237 Ceratopteris richardii, opening the possibility to bridge a huge gap in our understanding of plant form evolution [77]. The development of more spore-producing 238 plant models will be pivotal to explore the mechanisms of phyllotaxis control in a 239 broader evolutionary context and in meristems with increasing complexities [78]. 240

241

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440

441 Figure 1. Phyllotactic patterns in mosses

(A, B) A single lenticular apical cell produces distichous phyllotaxis ($j = 1, \alpha = 180^{\circ}$) in 442 443 Fissidens taxifolius. (C, D) A single tetrahedral apical cell produces tristichous phyllotaxis ($j = 1, \alpha = 120^{\circ}$) in *Fontinalis antipyretica*. (E, F) A single tetrahedral apical 444 445 cell produces spiral phyllotaxis ($j = 1, 120^{\circ} < \alpha < 180^{\circ}$) in *Polytrichum commune*. Spiral phyllotaxis is also typical of the model moss Physcomitrium patens. (A, C, E) Numbers 446 447 indicate the sequence of leaf emergence, from the youngest "1" to the oldest visible leaf. In (C), the leaves numbered "3", "6", "9" and "12" are not visible. (B, D, F) "AC" 448 449 marks the apical cell and numbers indicate the relative order and position of leaf 450 emergence, "1" being the youngest leaf. Arrows indicate parastichies, *j* corresponds 451 to the leaf number per node and α is the divergence angle. Image credits : (A, E) 452 Hermann Schachner, https://commons.wikimedia.org, (C) Hugues Tinguy, 453 https://inpn.mnhn.fr.



Figure 2. <u>Asymmetric divisions underpin tetrahedral apical cell specification and</u> proliferation in the moss *Physcomitrium patens*

454

(A) In physcomitrium, the gametophore initial cell (i.e., the leafy shoot precursor cell) 457 develops from the protonema (i.e., the filamentous tissue produced by spore 458 459 germination) and is characterized by an irregular and oblong shape (drawing to the left of the arrow). In wild-type (WT), the first division of the leafy shoot initial is oblique 460 461 and produces apical (marked by an asterisk) and basal domains with asymmetric 462 identities. In abnormal situations this division may be symmetrical and perpendicular 463 to the growth axis (Ppcle mutants) or skewed toward the basal side of the initial (tpx2-464 5 hm mutant), which may affect or prevent leafy shoot apical cell specification or lead 465 to conspicuous leaf patterning defects. (B) In WT, following the first division of the shoot initial (i), the apical domain (marked by an asterisk) undergoes a series of 466 467 oblique divisions (ii-iv) leading to the formation of the tetrahedral apical stem cell 468 (coloured in green) at the origin of spiral phyllotaxis. (A) adapted from [9,36,37], (B) redrawn from [9] with permission from corresponding author. 469



470

471 Figure 3. <u>Hormonal cues control apical function in moss and flowering plant leafy</u>

472 <u>shoots</u>

473 (A) Interacting auxin and cytokinin-dependent regulatory modules control shoot apical 474 meristem function and phyllotactic patterning in *Arabidopsis* thaliana. Mutated forms 475 of genes in bold are associated with phyllotaxis defects. (B) Gametophore apical cell 476 specification and activity are regulated by at least partly similar regulatory modules in Physcomitrium patens. Mutants in genes shown in bold are unable to form 477 gametophores or have apical cell and leaf developmental defects. Molecular 478 479 interactions are inferred from the following references : (i), [54]; (ii), [50,51,56–58]; (iii), 480 [79]; (iv), [69]; (v), [68]; (vi), [72]; (vii), [37,47,80]; (viii), [65]; (ix), [81]; (x), [16]; (xi), [82] and involve the following genes : AUXIN RESISTANT 1 (AUX1), LIKE AUXIN 481 RESISTANT 1 (LAX1), PIN-FORMED (PIN), AUXIN RESPONSE FACTOR (ARF), 482 MONOPTEROS (MP), PLETHORA (PLT), YUCCA (YUC), ARABIDOPSIS HISTIDINE 483 PHOSPHOTRANSFER PROTEIN (AHP6), ARABIDOPSIS RESPONSE REGULATOR 484 (ARR), CLAVATA3 (CLV3), AINTEGUMENTA, PLETHORA and BABY BOOM (APB), 485 CLAVATA3/EMBRYO SURROUNDING **REGION-RELATED** 486 (CLE). Molecular 487 interactions occurring outside the shoot are not mentioned in the figure, e.g. auxin 488 regulation of PLTs in the arabidopsis root [83]. Dashed lines in (A) indicate the indirect regulation of CLV3 expression by cytokinin, via Type-B ARR and WUSCHEL (WUS), 489 490 and of cytokinin signaling by CLV3 via CLAVATA1 and WUS. In moss shoots (B), 491 PpCLE and cytokinin have antagonistic developmental effects, but evidence for a 492 direct or indirect interaction between PpCLE and cytokinin is lacking. Auxin 493 biosynthesis, signaling and transport components are shown in blue, and cytokinin 494 signaling components are shown in green. Double lines indicate auxin-cytokinin495 signaling crosstalks.