Divergence in gene expression related to variation in host specificity of an ectomycorrhizal fungus

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Divergence in gene expression related to variation in host specificity of an ectomycorrhizal fungus

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Abstract
Ectomycorrhizae are formed by mutualistic interactions between fungi and the roots of woody plants. During symbiosis the two organisms exchange carbon and nutrients in a specific tissue that is formed at the contact between a compatible fungus and plant. There is considerable variation in the degree of host specificity among species and strains of ectomycorrhizal fungi. In this study, we have for the first time shown that this variation is associated with quantitative differences in gene expression, and with divergence in nucleotide sequences of symbiosis-regulated genes. Gene expression and sequence evolution were compared in different strains of the ectomycorrhizal fungus Paxillus involutus; the strains included Nau, which is not compatible with birch and poplar, and the two compatible strains Maj and ATCC200175. On a genomic level, Nau and Maj were very similar. The sequence identity was 98.9% in the 16 loci analysed, and only three out of 1075 genes analysed by microarray-based hybridizations had signals indicating differences in gene copy numbers. In contrast, 66 out of the 1075 genes were differentially expressed in Maj compared to Nau after contact with birch roots. Thirty-seven of these symbiosis-regulated genes were also differentially expressed in the ATCC strain. Comparative analysis of DNA sequences of the symbiosis-regulated genes in different strains showed that two of them have evolved at an enhanced rate in Nau. The sequence divergence can be explained by a decreased selection pressure, which in turn is determined by lower functional constraints on these proteins in Nau as compared to the compatible strains.

Keywords: comparative genomics, ectomycorrhiza, gene expression, host specificity, microarray

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Introduction
It has been estimated that at least 6000 species of fungi, primarily basidiomycetes with some ascomycetes and zygomycetes, form mutualistic relationships with woody plants (Malloch et al. 1980). These ecologically very important associations are called ectomycorrhizae and are the dominant mycorrhizal type associated with trees in temperate and boreal ecosystems (Smith & Read 1997). In ectomycorrhizae, the fungal partner obtains photosynthetic sugars from the host plant while, in return, the plant receives mineral nutrients from the fungus. The exchange of nutrients occurs in a specific symbiotic tissue that is formed between the fungal hyphae and the host roots. This tissue consists of a mantle, which develops from the fungal hyphae surrounding the root, and a Hartig net, which is formed by the hyphae penetrating between the outer cells of the root (Smith & Read 1997).
Analyses of DNA-based phylogenies have shown that the ancestors of the ectomycorrhizal homobasidiomycetes were free-living and that mycorrhizal symbionts have evolved repeatedly from saprophytic precursors (Hibbett et al. 2001). Many of these basidiomycetes form symbioses with several host species. Furthermore, it is known that fungi can differ markedly in their ability to form ectomycorrhizae and to promote the growth of the host plant (Smith & Read 1997). Screenings, mainly based on records
of sporocarp–plant associations, have shown that ectomycorrhizal fungi include both generalist and specialist species (Trappe 1962). Studies have also demonstrated that the magnitude of intraspecific differences in host preferences can be as large as the between-species differences (Smith & Read 1997; Cairney 1999). This variation is associated with differences in the ability to form the mantle and Hartig net. The molecular basis for the differential infectivity is not clear, but it has been suggested to reside in the capacity to produce hormones, extracellular enzymes and not yet identified recognition factors (Cairney 1999). Furthermore, it has been shown that the patterns of polypeptides produced by strains of the ectomycorrhizal fungus *Pisolithus tinctorius* are correlated with the infectivity of the strain (Burgess et al. 1995).

The genomic mechanisms that could account for the variation in host preferences between species or strains of ectomycorrhizal fungi are, however, not known. Generally such phenotypic differences could be the result of variations in gene content, of quantitative differences in gene expression, or of structural differences in gene products (King & Wilson 1975; Wray et al. 2003). DNA microarray technology has opened up new possibilities of comparing transcript abundance between closely related species and/or strains, and of identifying genes that are associated with morphological and physiological divergence (Ferea et al. 1999; Jin et al. 2001; Enard et al. 2002). In addition, DNA microarray-based comparative genomic hybridization can be used to assess genome rearrangements like amplification or deletion at single gene resolution, which might play an important role in adaptive evolution (Hughes et al. 2000; Dunham et al. 2002).

We have used a cDNA microarray to examine the differences in gene expression between incompatible and compatible strains of the ectomycorrhizal fungus *Paxillus involutus* (Basidiomycetes; Boletales). This fungus is widespread in the northern hemisphere and forms ectomycorrhizae with many species of coniferous and deciduous trees (Wallander & Söderström 1999). Strains of *P. involutus* are known to differ in their ability to form ectomycorrhizal associations with various hosts (Laiho 1970; Gafur et al. 2004). In this study we included a strain Nau that was originally isolated from oak in France (Marschner et al. 1999). It was recently shown that Nau, in contrast to several other strains of *P. involutus*, does not infect poplar in vitro (Gafur et al. 2004). For the comparative analysis, we identified the closest evolutionary relative of Nau to be the poplar-compatible strain Maj. In addition, we included a third strain ATCC 200175 (henceforward called ATCC), in which gene regulation during the formation of ectomycorrhizae on birch (*Betula pendula*) has previously been studied (Johansson et al. 2004). The cDNA array contained cDNA probes putatively representing 1075 *P. involutus* genes. The probes were obtained from a nonredundant set of expressed sequence tags (ESTs) produced either from cDNA libraries of the ectomycorrhizal tissue formed between the ATCC strain and birch mycelium or from saprophytically grown mycelia of the ATCC strain (Johansson et al. 2004). The fraction of *P. involutus* genes that is represented on the array can be estimated to correspond to approximately 14% of the total number of genes in the fungal genome assuming a gene content of 7700 (Le Quéré et al. 2002).

## Materials and methods

### Biological material, media and culture conditions

The strains of *Paxillus* (Table 1) were maintained on Modified Melin-Norkrans (MMN) agar medium (Brun et al. 1995). An axenic system for the formation of ectomycorrhizae between *Betula pendula* (Skuleskogen, SkogForsk, Sweden) and *Paxillus involutus* was used with reduced amounts of carbon (0.25 g glucose/L) (Brun et al. 1995). The association was grown under controlled conditions of 22 °C day/15 °C night temperatures, a day/night period of 15 h/9 h, and 60% humidity. The material was harvested after 14 days. After fixation the fungal–root tissues were examined under a light microscope (Axioplan, Carl Zeiss) (Gafur et al. 2004).

### cDNA microarray, labelling and hybridization analysis

Microarrays had previously been constructed (Johansson et al. 2004; Le Quéré & Wright et al. manuscript in preparation) using a nonredundant set of 2159 ESTs, either of fungal (1075 ESTs) or plant (1074 ESTs) origin. The plant ESTs, and 10 ESTs with uncertain origin, were excluded from this investigation. The mycorrhizal tissue (Maj and ATCC) or root tips with attached hyphae (Nau) was harvested and total RNA was isolated as described (Johansson & Melin-Norkrans 1995). DNA microarrays had previously been constructed (Johansson et al. 2004; Le Quéré & Wright et al. manuscript in preparation) using a nonredundant set of 2159 ESTs, either of fungal (1075 ESTs) or plant (1074 ESTs) origin. The plant ESTs, and 10 ESTs with uncertain origin, were excluded from this investigation. The mycorrhizal tissue (Maj and ATCC) or root tips with attached hyphae (Nau) was harvested and total RNA was isolated as described (Johansson et al. 2004). Antisense RNA (aRNA) was synthesized by T7 polymerase *in vitro* transcription using one round of amplification (MessageAmp, Ambion (Europe) Ltd). The aRNA was analysed by gel electrophoresis and the titre was determined spectrophotometrically. The aRNA targets were labelled (Cy3 or Cy5) and the microarray slides were hybridized and scanned as previously described (Le Quéré, Wright et al. manuscript in preparation). The experiments were designed as two-sample comparisons (ATCC and Maj; ATCC and Nau; Maj and Nau) using three independent biological replicates, including technical and dye-swapped control experiments.

### Statistical analysis

Data images were manually inspected and low-quality spots were excluded from further analyses. Reporters...
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Order</th>
<th>Species and strain name</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Habitat</th>
<th>Woody plants within a 10-m radius</th>
<th>Compatibility in laboratory</th>
<th>Accession number</th>
</tr>
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<td>Fagus, Quercus</td>
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<td>Picea, Picea, Betula</td>
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<td>Pine sand forest</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Tilia</td>
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<td>AY589910*</td>
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<td>France</td>
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<td>Quercus</td>
<td>Betula (–), Populus (–)</td>
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<td>Pv2</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>AF167689†</td>
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<td>Tilia</td>
<td></td>
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<td>AF098383‡</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Data taken from: *this study, †(Jarosch & Bresinsky 1999), and ‡NCBI.
related to *B. pendula* (Le Quéré, Wright et al. manuscript in preparation) were excluded and only data for reporters representing fungal and control genes were extracted. For those spots remaining, the raw fluorescence intensities for each channel on each slide were collected. For each channel, the mean background fluorescence was calculated. After local background correction for each spot, the reporters yielding intensities less than twice the background intensity were excluded and the fluorescence for the remaining reporters was multiplied to give a common channel mean of 5000 fluorescence units for each slide. As a result, data for 1022 reporters remained in the data set. The statistical approach, the mixed model analyses of variance (ANOVA) (Wolfgang & et al. 2001), served two purposes: first, normalization of the data to remove systemic biases that may have affected all genes simultaneously, such as differences in the amount of RNA that was labelled for a particular replicate of a treatment; and second, assessment of the contribution of biological and experimental sources of error to the variation in the expression of each individual gene. This procedure used differences in normalized expression levels, rather than ratios, as the unit of analysis of expression differences. We subjected the corrected log2-transformed measures \( y_{ijg} \) for the gene \( g \) (\( g = 1, \ldots , 1022 \)), which included scores for 50 573 fungal spot measures, to a normalization model of the form: \( y_{ijg} = \mu + A_i + D_j + \varepsilon_{ijg} \), where \( \mu \) is the sample mean, \( A_i \) is the effect of the \( i \)th array (\( i = 1–11 \)), \( D_j \) is the effect of the \( j \)th dye (Cy3 or Cy5), \( (A \times D)_i \) is the array–dye interaction (channel effect) and \( \varepsilon_{ijg} \) is the stochastic residual. We then subjected the residuals from this model, which can regarded as a crude indicator of the relative expression level (and are referred to in the text as ‘normalised expression levels’), to 1015 gene-specific models of the form: \( f_{ij} = \mu + A_i + S_i + D_j + \varepsilon_{ij} \) where \( S_i \) is the \( i \)th strain [ATCC, Maj, or Nau; two degrees of freedom (d.f.)]. In the gene models, which were fitted using PROC MIXED in SAS (SAS/STAT Software Version 8, SAS Institute Inc.), the \( A_i \) variable controls for spot effects and is random (10 d.f., leaving 8 d.f. for the residual error). The microarray data are available at the EBI-EMBL ArrayExpress database (http://www.ebi.ac.uk/arrayexpress) (accession number E-MEXP-179).

The overall distance between the expression profiles of two strains was calculated using the hybridization values of the transcriptome profiles as described by Enard et al. (2002). Briefly, the distance between the samples was calculated by summing the log2 values of the hybridization–signal ratios for genes that were expressed in all comparisons. The resulting distance matrix was used to build neighbour-joining trees (Saitou & Nei 1987) using the PHYLIp program (Felsenstein 1993). In a similar way, the genomic distances between the strains were calculated using data from comparative genomic hybridizations. In this experiment, DNA from the different strains was cophy-
alignments were made using clustal-w (Thompson et al. 1994) and a neighbour-joining method (Saitou & Nei 1987) with 500 bootstrap replications was used to develop the phylogeny.

Calculation of substitution rates

Nucleotide sequence information for 13 Paxillus coding regions (Table 2) was translated and the protein alignments for each gene were made by clustal-w (Thompson et al. 1994). Then the protein alignment was used as a template to align the corresponding coding nucleotide sequences by tranalign of emboss (Rice et al. 2000). The rates of nonsynonymous (d_n) and synonymous (d_s) nucleotide substitutions per site were estimated using the crann software (Creevey & McInerney 2003). The presumed species tree used in the input to crann was based on the ITS phylogeny.

Results

Phylogeny

To identify the closest evolutionary relative to Nau, an ITS phylogenetic tree using a number of strains and isolates of Paxillus was constructed (Fig. 1). The strain Maj that has been shown to be compatible with poplar (Gafur et al. 2004) was recognized as the closest relative to Nau. The Maj and Nau strains formed a clade with high bootstrap support (value 89) within the so-called ‘park’ group of Paxillus involutus strains (Fries 1985; Jarosch & Bresinsky 1999). The ATCC strain was found in another clade with high bootstrap support (value 83). This clade contained strains collected in various coniferous or mixed forests. This comprises the ‘forest’ group of P. involutus (Fries 1985; Jarosch & Bresinsky 1999).

The close genetic relationship between Maj and Nau was also evident from the DNA sequences of 16 loci (Table 2),...
which showed a 98.9% identity between Maj and Nau. The identities between ATCC and Maj, and ATCC and Nau in these loci were 95.6 and 95.2%, respectively.

**Phenotypic differences**

After 2 weeks of interaction, the ATCC and Maj strains of *P. involutus* colonized the roots of birch seedlings and developed a typical ectomycorrhizal tissue, as visualized by the hampered elongation and swelling of the fine roots, and the presence of a pseudoparenchymatous mantle. In addition, the hyphae of these strains had penetrated between the outer epidermal cells of the root and formed the Hartig net where nutrients and carbohydrates are exchanged between the two symbiotic partners (Brun *et al.* 1995). In contrast, the Nau strain did not develop such a mycorrhizal interface (Fig. 2a,b,d,e). Thus the differences in compatibility between Maj and Nau on birch were similar to those observed on poplar (Gafur *et al.* 2004). It is not known whether the examined isolate of Nau has completely lost its ability to form ectomycorrhiza with all potential hosts including oak.

**Differences in gene expression**

The patterns of gene expression for the ATCC, Maj and Nau strains after 14 days of contact with the birch were compared using cDNA microarrays. In total, 926 (86%), 747 (70%), and 747 (70%) of the 1075 fungal genes spotted on the cDNA arrays produced signal intensities above the twofold average background threshold in the hybridizations comparing ATCC and Maj, ATCC and Nau and Maj and Nau, respectively. The relative rates of evolutionary change in the transcriptomes of the three strains were estimated by summing the log2 values of the ratios of the hybridization signals for genes that were commonly expressed in all comparisons (Fig. 3). These analyses showed that the transcriptome distance between ATCC and Maj was slightly shorter than the distance between ATCC and Nau.

Following statistical analyses, we identified 66 genes that differed significantly in expression levels between the closely related compatible Maj and the incompatible Nau strain (Table 3). A subset of these genes [in total 37 genes, 36 being up-regulated and one down-regulated (EST clone CD273016)] was also differentially expressed in the compatible ATCC strain as compared to Nau. We considered that these commonly regulated genes in Maj and ATCC were associated with the colonization and development of the symbiotic ectomycorrhizal tissue. A visual presentation of the expression patterns of the 37 symbiosis-related genes is presented in Fig. 4 (left panel). Notably, 20 of them
have previously been reported to be regulated in the ectomycorrhizal root tissue formed between the ATCC strain and birch (Johansson et al. 2004) (Le Quéré, Wright et al. manuscript in preparation).

**Rapidly evolving genes**

To assess the possibility that the sequences of regulated genes have evolved at different rates in the compatible and incompatible strains, we calculated the \( d_n \) and \( d_s \) values for six regulated genes (cipC1, cipC2, cchA, lecA, gstA and rabA). In addition, we included seven genes in the analysis that had been found to be regulated in the interaction between the ATCC strain and birch (Fig. 5). Out of a total of 126 pairwise comparisons, 58 showed a \( d_n/d_s \) ratio below 0.6, which is indicative of purifying selection associated with functional constraints. In 61 comparisons the frequencies of \( d_n, d_s \) or both had a zero value. In the remaining seven comparisons the \( d_n/d_s \) ratio exceeded one. These were only found in two genes (cchA and cipC1). Interestingly, all the observations were between Nau and different compatible strains. However, the differences between the

**Table 3** Significant differences in gene expression between three strains of *Paxillus involutus* during interaction with birch seedlings (*Betula pendula*) as estimated by the mixed model ANOVA*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comparisons</th>
<th>Up</th>
<th>Down</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ATCC and Maj</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maj and Nau</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATCC and Nau</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The number of genes with \( P < 0.05 \) (Bonferroni corrected).

Analyses were made on 1075 fungal genes and three different strains (ATCC, Maj and Nau).

The identities of each of the clones in boldface have been confirmed by resequencing. Genes examined for sequence divergence (cipC1, cipC2, cchA, lecA, gstA and rabA) are marked (cf. Table 2 and Fig. 5).
A phylogenetic analysis of fungal cipC genes shows that the cipC1 and cipC2 genes of different strains of *P. involutus* were separated in two well-resolved clades with bootstrap support values of 95 and 97, respectively (Fig. 6). The duplication of the ancestral cipC gene has occurred rather recently, after the divergence of *Paxillus* from its ancestor within the bolete clade, as inferred from the phylogeny of ribosomal DNA sequences (Hibbett et al. 2001). Most importantly, the analysis shows that the cipC1 gene of Nau, diverged before the corresponding sequences from the compatible strains. The most probable explanation for this topology is the observed rate increase in the Nau strain. In contrast, the cipC2 portion of the tree shows the same topology as the ITS tree (Fig. 1) where Nau and Maj are the most closely related strains. Based on the alignment of the CipC1 protein sequences (83 amino acids), we identified 15 substitutions between Nau and the closely related compatible strain Maj. The $d_n/d_s$ ratio was estimated at 1.32 for the corresponding nucleotide sequences. When comparing Maj with a more distant strain like the compatible ATCC, there were no amino acid substitutions whatsoever. Furthermore, alignment of intron sequences of the cipC1 gene revealed nine substitutions between Nau and Maj, and none between Maj and ATCC.

The other gene that showed a $d_n/d_s$ ratio above one (1.76 when comparing Nau and Maj), was the cchA gene. Also in this case, the Nau gene has evolved rapidly resulting in 11 amino acid substitutions between Nau and Maj, but only three between the more distantly related Maj and ATCC. The phylogenetic tree showed a well-supported *P. involutus* clade (bootstrap support value of 95) with Nau and Maj diverging before the other strains (Fig. 7).
Accession numbers of the protein/nucleotide sequences from top nodes represent bootstrap support in percent of 100 replicates. Sequence alignment was generated using public databases. A maximum likelihood tree from nucleotide to the analysis using the mixed model were equally distant from the ATCC strain. A statistical array data showed that Maj and Nau were very similar and genomic hybridizations (Fig. 3). Analyses of the genomic in the genomic distances as analysed by comparative the compatible and incompatible strains was not reflected plant (birch). The variation in expression profiles between during the interaction with the roots of a putative host 3.4% (37 out of 1075 genes represented on the cDNA array) patterns of plant-induced gene expression. Approximately variation in host specificity was associated with changes in the among the symbiosis-regulated genes. A similar analysis showed that approximately 200 out of 1075 genes had significantly different signal intensities when comparing ATCC with either Maj or Nau. Ten of these variable genes were found among the symbiosis-regulated genes (Fig. 4). Among the symbiosis-regulated genes was a homologue (lecA) to a family of saline-soluble, low molecular weight fungal lectins (carbohydrate-binding proteins) (Balogh et al. 2003). The function of these proteins is unclear but it has been proposed that they are involved in development, storage of nutrients and defense reactions (Balogh et al. 2003). Two glutathione S-transferase (GST) homologues were also up-regulated. One of them (gstA) displayed a high degree of homology to a GST from the human pathogen Naegleria fowleri (identity 49%). GSTs are recognized as detoxification enzymes and are involved in the removal of reactive oxygen species such as H2O2 (Sheehan et al. 2001). H2O2 is an important component of the stress response in plants following their interaction with pathogens, and its production stimulates the expression of a number of cell-protecting enzymes including GSTs (Lamb & Dixon 1997). Notably, H2O2 has been shown to accumulate in the outer mantle during the compatible interaction between Maj and poplar, but not in the incompatible association between Nau and poplar (Gafur et al. 2004). Small GTPases, including Rho, Rab and cdc42, are important regulators for cell growth, cell cycle progression and organization of the actin cytoskeleton and they may be involved in the morphological changes accompanying the formation of ectomycorrhizae (Johansson et al. 2004). A more detailed phylogenetic analysis revealed that the rabA is homologous to members of a Rab family including Ypt31 and Ypt32 from Saccharomyces cerevisiae (Pereira-Leal & Seabra 2001) (Fig. 8). Ypt31 and Ypt32 are probably involved in intra-Golgi transport or in the formation of transport vesicles at the most distal Golgi compartment (Jedd et al. 1997).

We also obtained data indicating that the lack of compatibility with birch and poplar in Nau has been associated with an enhanced rate of sequence evolution in two of the differentially expressed genes, cipC1 and chhA. Although the d/n/d ratio of these genes exceeded one, which would indicate positive selection (Nei & Kumar 2000), d/n was not significantly different from d/n. More probably, the sequence divergence of cipC1 and chhA reflects a decreased selection pressure associated with the lower functional constraints on these proteins in Nau.

The cipC1 gene product of P. involutus displayed high sequence identity to a concomnymcin-induced protein (cipC) first identified in Aspergillus nidulans. The function of this protein is not known but its abundance is significantly increased in the presence of the antibiotic concomnymcin,
NP_116615, S12790, NP_116650, CAB11239 and S10026.
NP_012939, S43399, NP_014306, NP_014095, AAC69218, S04590,
NP_010948, NP_011305, NP_013713, O94655, CAA91357, NP_013363,
starting with is substitutions per site. Accession numbers running clockwise
is positioned in the group at the bottom of the figure. The scale unit
defined by Pereira-Leal & Seabra (2001). The
second gene with an enhanced rate of evolution is
which stimulates hyphal hyper-branching (Melin et al. 2002). CipC homologues have also been reported in several
EST studies of ectomycorrhizal fungi (Peter et al. 2003). The
econd gene with an enhanced rate of evolution is cchA
which translates into a protein of 70 amino acids and dis-
plays significant sequence similarity to a number of fungal
metallochaperones including the antioxidant 1 (atx1p)
protein of S. cerevisiae (identity 44%). The ATXI gene was originally identified as a gene conferring protection against
reactive oxygen species (Lin & Culotta 1995). Subsequently,
it was shown that atx1p is a cytosolic copper chaperone
that transfers copper from the plasma membrane copper
transporter Ctr1p to the intracellular copper-transporting
P-type ATPase Ccc2p, located in the Golgi compartment of
the secretory pathway (Pufahl et al. 1997). Ccc2p trans-
locates copper ions to secreted copper-containing enzymes
such as the iron oxidase Fe3p. Other enzymes that can be
provided with copper by this pathway are the copper-
containing laccases (Uldschmid et al. 2003), which are
thought to be involved in a number of processes related to
the function of the ectomycorrhizal symbiosis (Burke &
Cairney 2002).
The underlying reasons for the differences in the expression of the symbiosis-regulated genes are not known. However, duplications and/or deletions of genes are
probably not involved, because all of the differentially
expressed genes were found in the same copy number in
Maj and Nau. More probably, the observed differences in
expression are the result of changes in promoter elements
and levels of transcription factors.

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