

Quantitative trait locus mapping identifies REME2, a PPR-DYW protein required for editing of specific C targets in Arabidopsis mitochondria

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Targeted RNA editing by C-to-U alteration occurs at hundreds of sites in the mitochondrial transcriptome of flowering plants. By using natural variation and positional cloning on a population of Arabidopsis recombinant inbred lines between the ecotypes Col and Ler, we found that two of these occurrences involve the Arabidopsis PPR-DYW protein REME2 (*Required for Efficiency of Mitochondrial Editing2*). The analysis of a knockdown mutant along with silenced tissues confirms the specificity of REME2 for both sites located in mitochondrial ribosomal protein genes (*rps3-1534* and *rps4-175*). The conservation level of both *cis* elements is relatively high, as is the amino acid conservation among flowering plants for both genes in that location, underlining the importance of these editing events and REME2.

Introduction

Nuclear-encoded proteins control the efficiency of RNA editing in plant organelles. In Arabidopsis mitochondria, particular members of the RIP family of RNA editing factors¹ (also named MORF proteins²) affect editing of many individual Cs. In addition, members of the PLS subclass of the large family of pentatricopeptide repeat (PPR) proteins are site-specific factors, each of which is responsible for determining the C to be edited at a small number of targets. A recent review described 12 different mitochondrial PPR proteins required for editing of 21 different C targets.³ The number of mitochondrial C targets controlled by these PPR proteins is likely underestimated, given that the entire RNA editome was not analyzed in some of the reports. With over 500 mitochondrial C targets in Arabidopsis,^{4,5} most PPR proteins are likely to control editing at multiple locations.

In order to identify nuclear-encoded RNA editing factors, we pioneered the use of natural variation between Arabidopsis ecotypes for mapping of quantitative trait loci (QTLs) affecting editing.^{5,6} These loci provide an unbiased means to search for editing factors, as genes encoding members of protein families not previously known to be editing factors can potentially be identified. Furthermore, genes can be identified even though knockout mutations would cause lethality due to the essential functions of many plant mitochondrial proteins. QTL mapping with 30 recombinant inbred lines, progeny of a cross between the two parental accessions Col and Ler, detected 12 major QTLs for 11 of the 13 editing traits analyzed.⁵ Positional cloning of one

of the QTLs already identified *REME1* (*Required for Efficiency of Mitochondrial Editing1*) unambiguously as the gene controlling editing of *nad2-558* and *mttb-552*.⁷ *REME1* encodes a PPR-DYW protein that is predicted to be targeted to mitochondria by both Predotar⁸ and TargetP⁹ and, thus, is an example of a member of this subclass of PPR protein implicated in mitochondrial editing.¹⁰⁻¹² Here we report on the use of QTL mapping for identification of REME2, another PPR-DYW protein involved in the editing of two other mitochondrial sites, *rps3-1534* and *rps4-175*.

Results and Discussion

Identification of REME2 as putative editing QTL controlling the editing of *rp3-1534* and *rps4-175*. Two non-silent sites, *rps3-1534* and *rps4-175*, show a difference in editing extent between Col and Ler, two widely used Arabidopsis accessions (Fig. 1A); in addition, the level of editing extent for both sites was very highly correlated among the parental accessions and the recombinant inbred lines (RILs⁵), suggesting that both traits could be controlled by the same factor. This prediction was further supported by the co-localization of both QTL controlling these two editing traits in the same interval on chromosome 4 between markers 7900K and 9500K (Fig. 1B). Assays of editing extent for *rps3-1534* and *rps4-175* in three additional RILs exhibiting recombination in the QTL interval further delineated the area comprising the QTL between 8810K and 9160K (Fig. 1C). This genomic area contains 105 genes (<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/projects/mapview/maps>).

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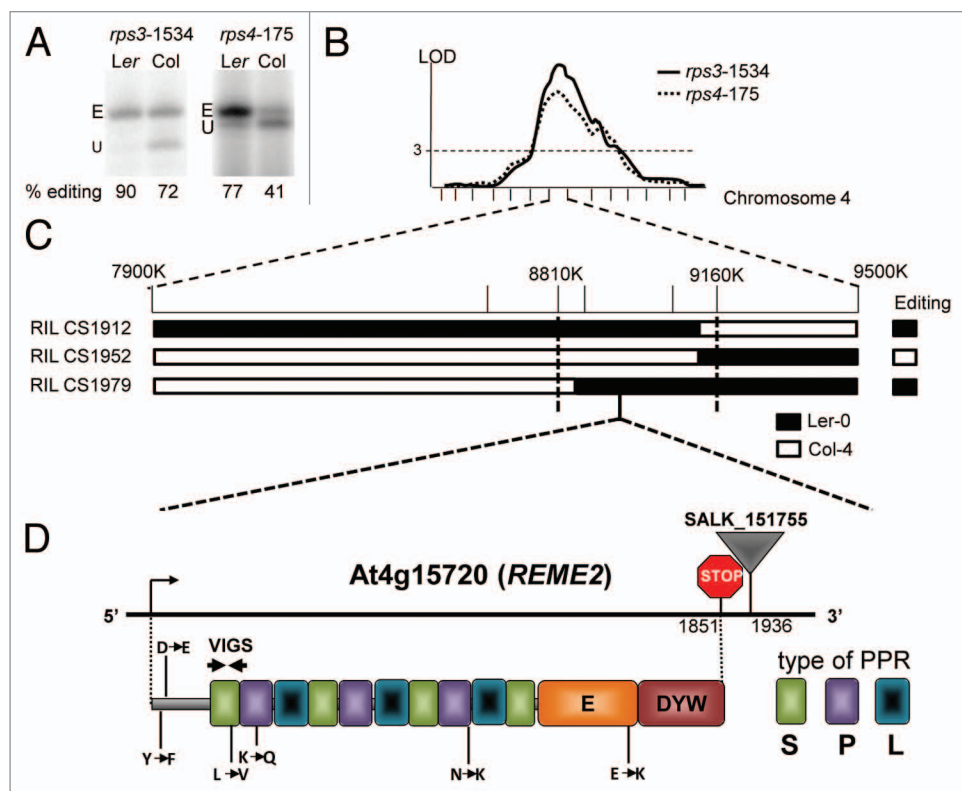


Figure 1. Mapping strategy used to identify the PPR-DYW protein encoded by At4g15720 as a possible mitochondrial editing factor. (A) Two Arabidopsis accessions, *Ler* and *Col*, exhibit a differential editing extent at two mitochondrial sites, *rps3-1534* and *rps4-175*. Poisoned Primer Extension (PPE) gels show a more intense unedited (U) band for *Col* than for *Ler* at the two sites assayed. The percentage of editing [edited (E)/edited (E) + unedited (U)] is given below each lane. (B) QTL mapping identifies an editing QTL that controls the editing of *rps3-1534* and *rps4-175* on chromosome 4 in the interval between markers 7900K and 9500K. The curves for the likelihood odds ratio (LOD) scores, a statistic used to detect a QTL, are very similar for the two editing traits analyzed; in particular the maximum LOD scores, above the significance threshold of 3, are located in the same interval, 7900K-9500K, for both *rps3-1534* and *rps4-175*. (C) Three recombinant inbred lines (RILs) that have recombined genomes in the QTL interval allow the further localization of the editing factor between 8810K and 9160K. (D) Among the 105 genes lying in the 8810K-9160K interval, only one, At4g15720, encodes a PPR protein which belongs to the DYW subclass. The localization of the T-DNA used in this study is shown on the gene model in the 3'UTR, 85 nucleotides downstream of the stop codon. The modular structure of the predicted protein encoded by At4g15720 with the type of PPR (P, S and L) symbolized by squares, is represented below the gene model. The 190-nucleotide region of At4g15720 RNA targeted by VIGS is delimited by facing arrows. The six amino acids substitutions occurring between REME2 encoded by *Col* and *Ler* are indicated (*Col* → *Ler*).

cgi?TAXID=3702&CHR=4&MAPS=cntg-r,clone,tair_marker,genes[8810000.00%3A9160000.00]&CMD=TEXT#1), among which only one, At4g15720, encodes a PPR-containing gene belonging to the DYW subclass (Fig. 1D). Because of the precedence for PPR-DYW proteins to be editing *trans*-factors, we decided to first test At4g15720 as a potential candidate editing factor, instead of carrying out more precise mapping of the QTL location.

Knockdown of At4g15720 both by T-DNA insertion and silencing confirms its role as an editing factor. We looked for an insertional mutation in At4g15720 in collections of T-DNA mutants. Among several T-DNA insertional mutants present in the SALK T-DNA express browser (signal.salk.edu/cgi-bin/tdna-express), only one, SALK_151755, was reported to be located in the coding sequence and to be homozygous. Both these statements were erroneous: SALK_151755 is a segregating population comprising the three possible genotypic classes: homozygous wild-type, heterozygous and homozygous mutants. Sequencing of the insertion amplified from a homozygous mutant revealed that

it is located 85 nucleotides from the stop codon, in the 3'UTR as depicted in Figure 1D. Expression of At4g15720 is downregulated in the homozygous mutant compared with the wild-type as demonstrated by semi-quantitative RT-PCR (data not shown). Like most genes encoding PPR-PLS proteins, At4g15720 is expressed at low levels in most tissues.¹³

Assays of editing extent in the SALK_151755 population showed a very significant reduction of editing extent for *rps3-1534* in homozygous mutants relative to the wild-type, on average 63% vs. 86%, respectively (Fig. 2A). Because a second independent T-DNA mutant was not available in the coding sequence of At4g15720, we tested the effect of silencing At4g15720 on the editing extent of *rps3-1534*. Virus-induced gene silencing (VIGS) of At4g15720 resulted in a significant decrease of editing extent for *rps3-1534* in silenced plants compared with the uninoculated plants, 49% vs. 77%, respectively (Fig. 2C). Analysis of both the T-DNA mutant and the silenced plants demonstrate that At4g15720 encodes the editing *trans*-factor promoting the editing extent of *rps3-1534*; we therefore named this gene *REME2*. Although Predotar and

TargetP did not predict an organelle localization of REME2, we observed that 100 amino acids of the N-terminus of REME2 could target GFP to mitochondria in onion epidermal cells (Fig. 3).

The editing extent of *rps4-175* in the T-DNA mutant and in silenced plants was significantly decreased in both types of plants when compared with either the wild-type or the uninoculated controls (Fig. 2B and D). REME2 therefore controls the editing of both mitochondrial sites *rps3-1534* and *rps4-175*.

The effect of REME2 on the editing extent of *rps3-1534* and *rps4-175* is specific as other mitochondrial sites do not show reduction of their editing extent in the *reme2* mutant when compared with the wild-type (Fig. 2E and F).

The putative *cis* elements of *rp3-1534* and *rps4-175* show high similarity. The current model of C recognition for editing in plant organelles proposes that a *cis* element that is mostly upstream of the targeted C is recognized through binding of a PPR *trans*-factor. Binding of a PPR protein factor to the *cis* element has been demonstrated in vitro for several sites¹⁴⁻¹⁶ and a code for recognition between the RNA target sequence and the PPRs has been elucidated.^{17,18} We checked for sequence similarity in the putative *cis* element around the two sites (-20 to +5) under the control of REME2 (Fig. 4A). A majority of the nucleotides, 64% (16/25), are conserved between the *cis* elements surrounding the two sites, thus supporting the model of recognition of these similar sequences by REME2. Compared with other putative *cis* elements recognized by the same PPR *trans*-factor, the level of nucleotide conservation observed between *rps3-1534* and *rps4-175* is relatively high; for example, the nucleotide conservation ranges from 44–64% in the putative *cis* elements recognized by SLO1, REME1 and MEF7 (Fig. 4A)^{7,19,20}

Adopting the same model as Barkan et al.¹⁷ to predict the nucleotides on the RNA target binding to REME2, we found that the nucleotides in the putative *cis* element of *rps3-1534* fit the model perfectly (Fig. 4B). By contrast, two of the guanines found in the putative *cis* element of *rps4-175* are not the expected nucleotides based on the recognition code. The discrepancy

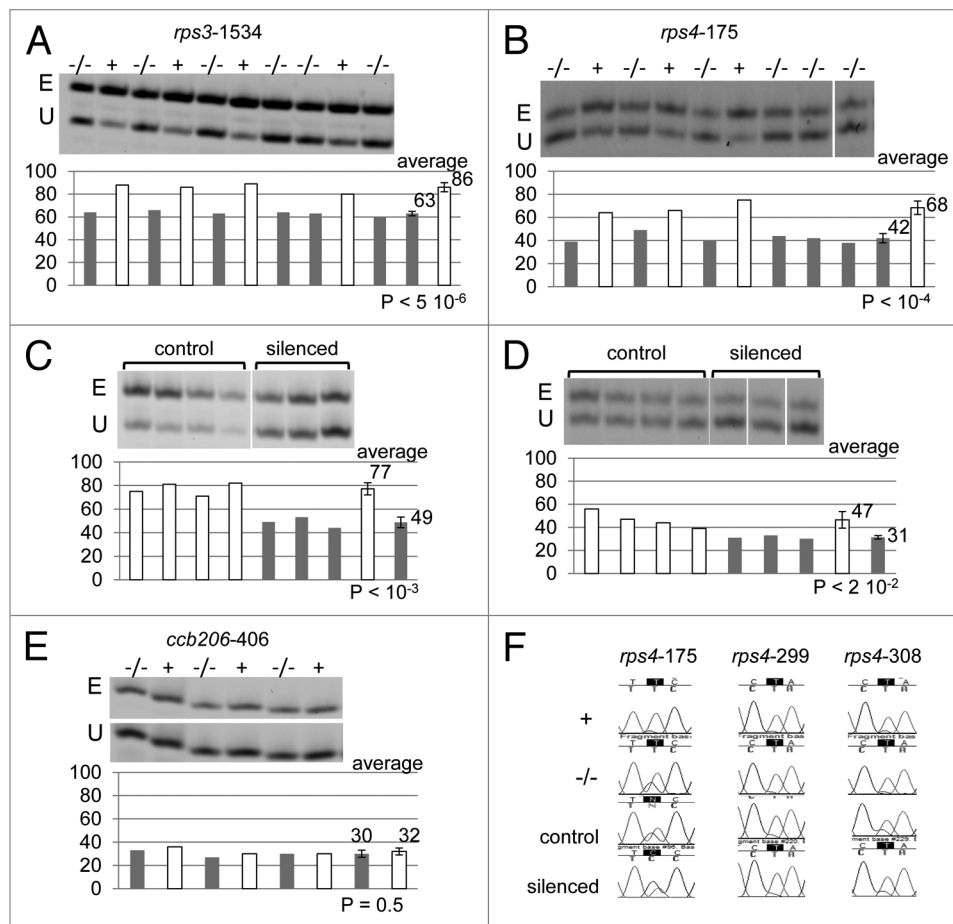


Figure 2. Analysis of *rps3-1534* and *rps4-175* editing extent in a mutant and in tissue silenced for REME2 demonstrate a specific control of these two sites by REME2. A T-DNA insertional mutant in the REME2 3'UTR exhibits a significant reduction of editing extent for *rps3-1534* (A) and *rps4-175* (B). Upper panels, PPE products separated on an acrylamide gel; E, edited; U, unedited; -/-, T-DNA mutant; +, wild-type. Below, the PPE gels are shown the quantification of editing extent based on the intensity of the E and U bands. Each bar corresponds to the editing extent based on the products of the lane directly above: gray bar, mutant; white bar, wild-type. On the right of the graphs are shown the averages with error bars (s.d.). Silencing of REME2 by VIGS results in a significant decrease of editing extent of *rps3-1534* (C) and *rps4-175* (D) in silenced plants. Upper, PPE gel; E, edited; U, unedited; control, uninoculated plants; silenced, REME2-silenced plants. As for (A and B), the graphs below the PPE gel show the quantification of editing extent corresponding to each lane: gray bar, silenced; white bar, control. Analysis of sites not controlled by REME2 does not reveal any reduction of their editing extent in *reme2* or in the REME2-silenced plant. (E) PPE gel shows a similar editing extent in *reme2* and the wild-type for *ccb206-406*. (F) RT-PCR bulk sequencing demonstrates the specificity of REME2 on *rps4-175* editing extent as other sites on the same transcript do not exhibit any difference between the wild-type (+) and *reme2* mutant (-/-) or between the control and the silenced plant.

between the observed nucleotides in *rps4-175* and the nucleotides expected to bind REME2 might explain the reduced editing extent of *rps4-175* in both Col and Ler when compared with *rps3-1534* (Fig. 1A).

SNPs in the Col and Ler alleles of REME2 might explain the differential editing extent of *rps3-1534* and *rps4-175* in the two accessions. The Ler REME2 allele was retrieved by using the genome browser (gbrowse.cbio.mskcc.org/gb/gbrowse/thaliana-19magic) representing the database from sequencing the genomes and transcriptomes of 18 natural *A. thaliana* accessions.²¹ Among the 12 SNPs found in the coding sequence of REME2 between

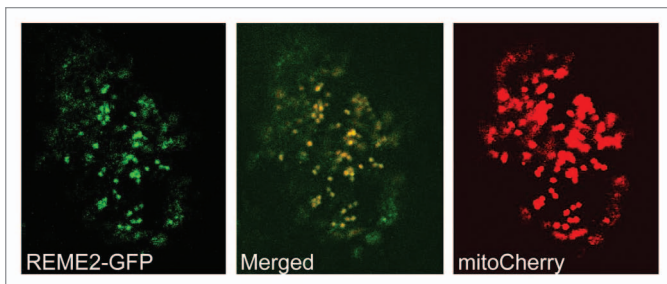


Figure 3. REME2 is targeted to mitochondria. The left panel shows the subcellular localization in onion epidermal cells of REME2 fused to GFP while the right panel is the mitoCherry fluorescent marker localized to the mitochondria. The middle panel is a merged figure showing co-localization of both fluorescent markers.

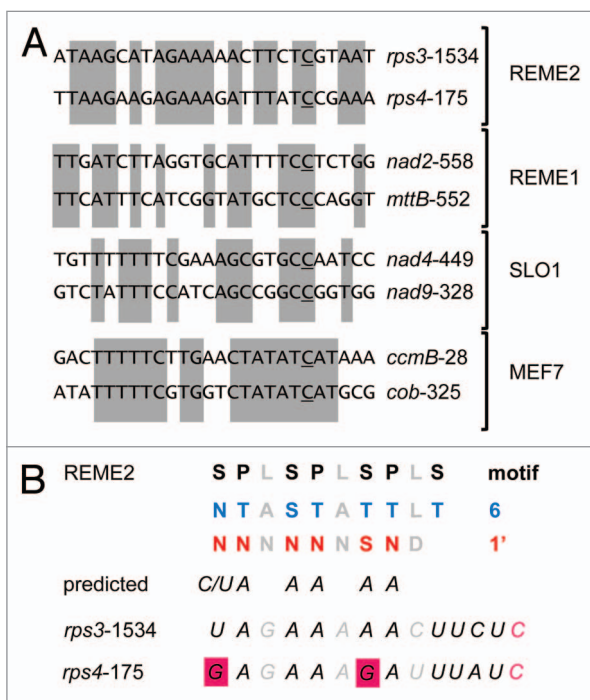


Figure 4. Analysis of the putative *cis* elements of the RNA targets recognized by REME2. (A) Nucleotide alignment of the putative *cis* element (-20 +5) of the two editing sites under the control of REME2, and those of sites under the control of three other PPR *trans*-factors. The target C for editing is underlined. Conserved nucleotides are highlighted in gray. The names of editing sites (gene-position) are given on the right of each sequence, along with the corresponding PPR *trans*-factors. (B) Predicted RNA nucleotides binding to REME2 according to the recognition code.¹⁷ The first row shows the modular structure of REME2 in relation to the nature of the PPR motifs, S, P, or L. Row 6 indicates the identity of the residues found at position 6 of each PPR motif, while row 1' shows the residue found at position 1 of the next PPR motif. The expected nucleotides binding to REME2 are predicted based on the identities of the residues at positions 6 and 1' in PPR motifs S and P only. The targeted C for editing is shown in magenta and nucleotides in the rps4-175 putative *cis* element that do not fit the recognition model are highlighted by a magenta box.

Table 1. SNPs found in REME2 encoded by Col and Ler alleles

Nucleotide position	Col→Ler nucleotide	Col→Ler amino acid	PPR motif	Residue position
65	A→T	Y→F		
72	C→T	silent		
75	C→G	D→E		
225	C→T	silent		
255	A→G	silent		
256	C→G	L→V	S	24
328	A→C	K→Q	P	17
471	G→T	silent		
582	T→C	silent		
1002	T→G	N→K		
1335	C→A	silent	P	33
1510	G→A	E→K	E	

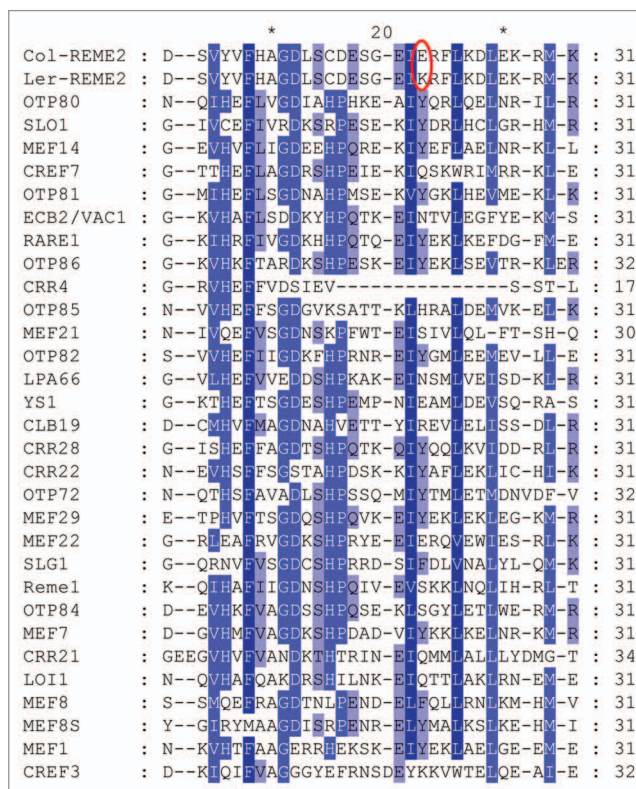


Figure 5. Alignment of the E+ motifs found in organelle editing *trans* factors. The amino-acid substitution between the Col and Ler REME2 proteins is circled. All known PPR protein editing factors containing an E+ domain are aligned.

Col and *Ler*, six result in non-synonymous codons, thus causing a change in the encoded amino acid (Table 1). Three of the SNPs are in PPR motifs that are predicted to be important for recognition of nucleotides in the *cis*-elements (Fig. 4B). However, none of the amino-acid substitutions between Col and *Ler* occur in a residue position that has been shown to be important for RNA recognition, namely positions 1 or 6 in S or P motifs (Table 1). It is

		<i>rps3-1534</i>						
		↓						
<i>A. thaliana</i> :	DNA:	AAA	ACT	TCT	CGT	AAT	GTA	TTT
	AA:	K	T	S	C	N	V	F
<i>Brassica napus</i>		K	T	S	C	N	V	F
<i>Lotus japonicus</i>		K	T	S	C	N	V	F
<i>Nicotiana tabacum</i>		K	T	S	C	N	V	F
<i>Beta vulgaris</i>		K	T	S	C	N	V	L
<i>Oryza sativa</i>		K	T	S	C	N	V	F
<i>Zea mays</i>		K	T	S	C	N	V	F
		*	*	*	*	*	*	:

		<i>rps4-175</i>						
		↓						
<i>A. thaliana</i>	DNA:	AAG	ATT	TAT	CCG	AAA	AAA	TAT
	AA:	K	I	Y	S	K	K	Y
<i>Brassica napus</i>		K	I	Y	S	K	K	Y
<i>Citrullus lanatus</i>		K	I	Y	S	R	E	N
<i>Cucurbita pepo</i>		K	I	Y	S	R	E	N
<i>Beta vulgaris</i>		K	M	Y	S	R	K	N
<i>Nicotiana tabacum</i>		K	I	Y	S	R	E	N
<i>Helianthus annuus</i>		M	I	Y	S	R	K	N
		*	:	*	*	:	:	:

Figure 6. Amino acid conservation between flowering species for the region around *rps3-1534* and *rps4-175*. The amino acid C or S for *rps3-1534* and *rps4-175*, respectively, resulting from editing of C targets by REME2, are highlighted in gray. The corresponding amino acid from species where editing is not necessary because the T is genomically encoded are not highlighted. An arrow indicates the position of the edited C in both transcripts for the Arabidopsis DNA sequence displayed above the amino acid alignment.

still possible that some amino acids differing between Col and *Ler* are important for the folding of the REME2 protein and result in the *Ler* version being more efficient in recognizing the RNA or the assembly of the editosome. One difference between accessions is in an amino acid of the E motif, which is essential for RNA editing, and has been proposed to recruit the editing enzyme.²² However, Glu is present in Col vs. Lys in *Ler*; not only do these amino acids have similar properties, but the amino acid difference also occurs at a position in the E motif that is not strongly conserved (Fig. 5). This difference is therefore unlikely to account for the more efficient editing *trans* factor activity of the *Ler* protein.

Alternatively, the amount of the editing *trans* factor might influence the level of editing extent, especially given the generally low level of PPR expression. We have previously shown that overexpression of the high editing Col *REME1* allele in a *Ler* background can result in a level of editing extent of its targets that is higher than in Col.⁷ Numerous SNPs and three indels in the *REME2* promoter region (1 kb upstream the start codon) might result in the *Ler* *REME2* being more expressed than the Col allele. Indeed, the amount of RNA-seq reads matching *REME2* is higher for *Ler* than for Col (gbrowse.cbio.mskcc.org/gb/gbrowse/thaliana-19magic).

A functional REME2 is likely to be essential to plant development. We were unable to find a null mutant for *REME2* in any of the mutant collections we searched. The mutant we characterized carries the T-DNA insertion in the 3'UTR, resulting in the knockdown of *REME2* expression. This finding suggests that *REME2* is essential to plant development and that homozygous mutants in the coding sequence of *REME2* are not viable.

Disruption of either RPS3 or RPS4 could potentially affect ribosome function and mitochondrial translation. We examined other flowering plants for which editing data are available in order to find out whether the two sites under REME2 control are also edited. In all such species, if a C is genomically encoded, the transcript undergoes editing, thus restoring the amino acid that is encoded by species carrying a T in their DNA sequences (Fig. 6). Editing at *rps3-1354* and *rps4-175* converts a codon for arginine to a cysteine codon and a codon for proline to a serine codon respectively, both non-conservative changes. Taken together, these facts indicate that editing under the control of REME2 is likely to be important for the proper function of both RPS3 and RPS4.

Materials and Methods

Plant material and preparation of nucleic acids. Seeds of Arabidopsis (*A. thaliana*) accession Col-4, Ler-0, and the RILs (CS1899) were obtained from the Arabidopsis Biological Resource Center (ABRC) (www.biosci.ohio-state.edu/plantbio/Facilities/abrc/abrchome.htm). Plants were grown under conditions and nucleic acids were prepared as previously described.⁵

CAPs markers. The development of the CAPs markers, 8810K and 9160K to genotype the RILs was done by amplifying the DNA with primers resulting in amplicons of different length depending on the parental allele, Col or *Ler*.

8810K-F1 = 5'-CGTAGATTCC AGGACAATAG AGAT-3'

8810K-R1 = 5'-TACCAGTTGG TATATGCCAC TATC-3'

9160K-F1 = 5'-CCACATCTCT AAGCTCCTCA TACG-3'

9160K-R1 = 5'-TAAGCGATAT GACTGGACCT GAAT-3'

Intracellular localization of REME2. The first 100 codons of *REME2* were cloned and transferred into pEarleygate 103 before being transiently introduced into onion (*Allium cepa*) epidermal cells as previously described.⁷

Measurement of editing extent and VIGS. Measurement of editing extent by PPE and the primers used for *rps3-1534* and *rps4-175* were done as previously described.⁵ The protocol and materials used for VIGS are detailed by Robbins et al.²³ The silencing fragment for *REME2* was designed by the CATMA database²⁴ and amplified by PCR using the following gene sequence tag primers:

REME2-F1: 5'-CGACTTCTTT CATCTCAAAA CC-3'

REME2-R1: 5'-AAACAGTTTG CGTGCACT-3'

Disclosure of Potential Conflicts of Interest

No potential conflicts of interest were disclosed.

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