Title: Single-Nucleus Transcriptomics Reveals How Tissue Context Shapes the Circadian Transcriptome of the Arabidopsis Leaf

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Abstract

Background: Circadian regulation enables plants to coordinate cellular processes with daily environmental cycles, yet the dynamics and hierarchy of the clock across cells and tissue types remains poorly understood.

Results: We developed a 24 hour single nucleus RNA-sequencing (snRNA-seq) circadian time course of the mature *Arabidopsis thaliana* leaf to characterize circadian regulation across tissues. We captured ~30,000 nuclei across seven circadian time points, recovering all major leaf cell types. We identified over 7,400 genes with cluster-resolved circadian regulation, and used coexpression analysis to define five major temporal expression clades shared across all cell types. We leveraged these assignments to identify genes with cell type-specific temporal shifts in expression. Single cell gene regulatory networks (scGRNs) were generated for each cluster through GENIE3, identifying many shared and unique transcription factor (TF) target interactions across clusters. A close examination of CCA1 targets identified Photosystem II repair components in a subset of mesophyll cells and a large number of auxin-associated genes in only a handful of clusters despite robust expression in other clusters, suggestive of cell type-specific CCA1 target regulation.

Conclusions: Our results demonstrate the extent to which circadian transcriptional regulation is present in the mature Arabidopsis leaf, and highlight the immense complexity in cell type specific regulation. This dataset provides a high-resolution resource for dissecting circadian gene regulation at cellular resolution and advances our understanding of tissue-specific clock dynamics in plants.

Keywords: single-nuclei, transcriptome, gene regulatory network, circadian clock, Arabidopsis

Background

The Earth's rotation on its axis generates predictable fluctuations in the day-night cycle. Over time, organisms from unicellular to complex multicellular species, including humans, have evolved endogenous circadian oscillators [1]. These autonomous time-keeping mechanisms allow organisms to anticipate and adapt to these daily changes in light and temperature [1,2]. The circadian mediated alignment of cellular processes with external cues is central to survival and fitness [3]. Although clock genes vary across kingdoms, the fundamental principles of circadian regulation—such as transcriptional-translational feedback loops and entrainment by environmental cues known as zeitgebers—are remarkably conserved [4–8].

In plants, the circadian clock is integral to coordinating physiological processes with daily environmental changes, ensuring optimal growth, metabolism and development [9–11]. The plant circadian system consists of transcriptional regulators that function through transcriptional-translational feedback loops to generate rhythmic gene expression patterns with a roughly 24-hour period [12,13]. Dawn expressed *CIRCADIAN CLOCK ASSOCIATED 1* (*CCA1*) and *LATE ELONGATED HYPOCOTYL* (*LHY*) MYB transcription factors are followed by the sequential expression of the transcriptional repressors *PSEUDO RESPONSE REGULATORS PRR9, PRR7* and *PRR5* and the evening-phased *TIMING OF CAB EXPRESSION 1 (TOC1)/PRR1* [14–19]. Additional repressors include the Evening Complex (EC) consisting of *LUX ARRHYTHMO (LUX)-EARLY FLOWERING 3 (ELF3)* and ELF4 that contribute to circadian clock function and coordinating growth and development [20]. *NIGHT LIGHT-INDUCIBLE AND CLOCK-REGULATED1 (LNK1)*, and *LNK2* act as co-activators of *REVEILLE4* (*RVE4*) and *RVE8* to positively regulate *PRR5, TOC1* and the EC [19,21–23]. *LIGHT-REGULATED WD1* (*LWD1*) and

LWD2 are additional co-activators that along with *TEOSINTE BRANCHED 1-CYCLOIDEA-PCF20* (*TCP20* and *TCP22*) positively regulate *CCA1*, *PRR9*, and *PRR7* [24,25].

Unlike the centralized circadian control observed in mammals, where the suprachiasmatic nucleus (SCN) acts as the master pacemaker [26], plants possess a decentralized network of circadian oscillators distributed across tissues and organs [27]. Across certain tissue types there is evidence to suggest a complex hierarchical organization of circadian oscillators in plants. The shoot apical meristem (SAM) appears to serve as a dominant clock [28] providing long distance signaling to the root clock [29]. However, detached roots can maintain rhythmicity [30] suggesting the SAM is not required for clock function. Local signaling provides additional synchronization as observed in the leaf where the vascular clock appears dominant over the mesophyll clock [31]. Tissue-specific circadian clocks have been shown to regulate distinct physiological processes supporting the importance of local coupling of oscillators within a cell type. For example, the vascular clock plays a pivotal role in controlling flowering time via regulation of *FLOWERING LOCUS T (FT)* expression in phloem companion cells [31–33], while epidermal clocks modulate temperature-dependent cell elongation [32]. Overexpression of *CCA1* in guard cells led to enhanced water use efficiency (WUE) in a promoter specific manner, whereas no effect was observed when expression of *TOC1* was perturbed [34]. This suggests that both the guard cell clock and signaling from non-guard cell clocks are required for full response.

Several studies have shown that different plant tissues maintain distinct circadian periods [27,31,35–39]. In Arabidopsis seedlings, the cotyledon and hypocotyl have been found to exhibit shorter periods than the root [27,36,38]. Guard cells exhibited longer periods compared to adjacent

mesophyll and epidermal cells [40], and vascular tissues maintained more robust circadian rhythms compared to mesophyll cells [31,36]. Similarly, the *CHALCONE SYNTHASE* (*CHS*) promoter principally expressed in epidermal tissue has a longer period when compared with the mesophyll expressed Chlorophyll a/b-binding protein gene (*CAB*) [41]. In addition to organ level variation in circadian behavior, there are tissue level differences that reveal altered coupling of circadian oscillators across cell types. Within individual tissues, circadian rhythms vary spatially; regions of high cell density, such as shoot and root meristems, tend to have more tightly coupled clocks whereas the leaf can maintain independent phases of circadian clock gene promoter oscillations [28,37,39]. Single cell imaging of a pCCA1::CCA1-YFP fusion protein and bioluminescence recording of a LUCIFERASE (LUC) reporter driven by the promoter for the clock component *GIGANTEA* (*GI::LUC)* at near cellular level have revealed tissue-specific differences, such as the shorter periods observed in root tips compared to other regions across the root [27,38]. These tissue specific variations in clock behavior highlight the complexity of intra-tissue clock partitioning and emphasize the need to understand the importance of these distinct oscillators.

Traditionally, the study of plant circadian rhythms has been limited to methods such as bulk RNA sequencing (RNA-seq), which masks tissue-specific nuances by averaging signals across heterogeneous cell populations. However, recent technological advances, including single-cell and single-nuclei RNA-seq, have enabled unprecedented resolution, providing an opportunity to unravel cell specific circadian regulation. A snRNA-seq circadian time course on 8-day old Arabidopsis seedlings revealed highly conserved rhythmic expression of the core clock genes across most cell types, yet their phase and amplitude was highly variable. Consistent with tissue

specific roles of the circadian clock, most circadian regulated genes were expressed in specific cell types. Cotyledons exhibited more pronounced intra tissue cycling gene similarity than the root, although phase differences were observed across subclusters suggesting altered clock characteristics even within a tissue type [42,43]. A comprehensive understanding of how these tissue-specific oscillators regulate distinct biological processes will facilitate more targeted approaches for improving plant productivity and resilience.

In this study, we captured the transcriptional profiles of over 30,000 nuclei across a 24 hour circadian time course to investigate circadian regulation in mature leaves of Arabidopsis with single-nuclei resolution. This high-resolution analysis revealed the existence of distinct circadian oscillators operating within specific cell types and enabled us to identify five predominant phase dependent expression clades present across all cell types. Through a single cell gene regulatory network analysis we resolved cluster specific and conserved regulatory connections across cell types. Our findings provide new insights into the complexity of tissue specific circadian clock regulation across the leaf.

Results

Construction and cell type identification of a circadian single nucleus time course in mature leaves of Arabidopsis

To capture circadian clock regulated genes across different cell types in the Arabidopsis leaf, we conducted a single nucleus RNA sequencing (snRNA-seq) time course experiment on 13 day old Arabidopsis plants. We entrained seedlings to a 12 hour photoperiod at 22°C for 11 days prior to transfer to constant light (LL) (Fig 1A). Pairs of samples were collected over 24 hours at four-hour

intervals starting at ZT48 (zeitgeber, hours after dawn), isolating above-ground tissue by cutting over the root:shoot junction. Fresh tissue was immediately used for nuclei isolation and 10X Genomics-based single nuclei capture. Initial assessment of these libraries through Cellranger [44] revealed promising nuclei capture rates ranging from ~2,000-4,000 for most libraries, and median genes detected metrics were similar to several previously reported single nucleus libraries, ranging from ~1,000-1,500 genes detected (Table S1) [43,45,46]. We observed higher than expected levels of background RNA (as defined by the fraction of reads assigned to cells in Cellranger), likely due to our sampling decision to minimize handling time by skipping both fluorescence activated nuclei sorting and density gradient purification, and note that of the initial 14 snRNA-seq libraries, one library did not pass QC (ZT24B), and one library had reduced nuclei capture rates (Table S1) (ZT04B).

Previous research identified that unguided integration of time course datasets can lead to phase-specific clustering, where genes with peak expression at a certain time of day influence clustering and obfuscate cell type specific signatures [43,47]. Core clock components, such as *CCA1*, are widely expressed across cell types [27], and we reasoned that our experimental design might introduce phase-specific biases not captured in single time point single cell experiments. We observed that a large portion of cluster specific cell type markers identified in previous experiments have been shown to be circadian regulated (Fig 1B), with a handful of cell types defined by a majority of genes previously observed to cycle [48,49]. We found that we could achieve cell type specific clustering by masking ~7,000 circadian regulated genes from integration anchoring, and subsequently using a large set of 15,000 variable genes as integration anchors (Fig 1C). To construct our circadian gene list, we combined the full set of cycling genes identified in

Romanowski et. al, and merged this list with genes identified as cycling in our own pseudo-bulk data (see methods). Our time course captured ~30,000 high quality nuclei, with predicted identities from all the major tissue types found in the Arabidopsis leaf. A majority of the nuclei captured were identified as actively photosynthetic or of mesophyll origin, with relatively smaller numbers of well described cell types, such as guard cells, phloem companion cells, and dividing cells (Fig 1D). This includes many cell types with a high proportion of circadian regulated marker genes, such as guard cells, which were often missing or unresolved when integrated without masking.

Tissue and cell type assignments were confirmed by examining expression of previously reported marker genes (Table S2), and further refined by Gene Ontology (GO) enrichment analyses and cluster-specific biomarker analysis (Fig 1E-H, Table S3). Cluster-specific expression of previously reported marker genes identified clusters 6, 9 and 14 as phloem companion cells, dividing cells, and guard cells, respectively (Fig 1E). Examining the most significantly enriched GO terms in each cluster highlighted tissue of origin very effectively for mesophyll, epidermal, and photosynthetic cells, with GO terms associated with water use, fatty acid biosynthesis, and light harvesting among the most enriched terms for each tissue (Fig 1F, Table S1). Finally, we used cluster-specific biomarkers to refine our tissue and cell type assignments in many clusters (Fig S1). Expression of *FAMA*, a bHLH transcription factor involved in stomatal development [50], was highly specific to cluster 14, with moderate expression only found in cluster 13 (Fig 1G). Expression of *NPCC6* (*NUCLEAR-ENRICHED PHLOEM COMPANION CELL GENE 6*) was previously reported to be highly specific to phloem companion cells [51], and was identified as a highly significant cluster 6 biomarker in our dataset (Fig 1H).

Cycling gene expression is widespread across all cell types of the mature Arabidopsis leaf

As an initial quality check, we examined pseudo-bulk expression profiles of a handful of circadian clock components and outputs over our single nucleus time course (Fig 2A). We saw robust oscillations coinciding with previously reported expression patterns in all of the examined components [48,52,53]. We next examined whether these expression patterns persisted within and across clusters for a suite of circadian clock components (Fig 2B). We observed similar expression patterns across most clusters for *CCA1* and *TOC1*, where we observed robust and similar cycling across a large number of clusters. In contrast, many clock components were only identified as cycling in a subset of clusters. In most cases, such as with *GI, LUX*, and *PRR5*, patterns were consistent across clusters in which they were called cycling; however, a handful of clock components were observed with shifted phase in one or more clusters. One striking example of this is *ELF3*, which has an earlier phase in guard cells (Fig 2B). In order to better characterize these expression patterns, we utilized JTKcycle [54] to identify cycling genes using both pseudo-bulk and cluster-resolved expression values. We identified 4,769 genes with cycling gene expression patterns in our pseudo-bulked dataset (Table S4). Our analysis revealed that ~68% (3264/4769) of our rhythmic genes from the pseudo-bulk data set overlaps with a previous bulk-RNAseq circadian regulated gene list [48].

Cluster-specific cycling genes were identified for all clusters other than Cluster 16, where tissue sampling variability likely drove non-uniform distribution of root hair cell type across the time course (Fig S2). The total number of genes identified with cluster-specific cycling patterns ranged from ~1,800 in Cluster 0, to ~300 in Cluster 8_1 (Fig 2D, Table S5). While we noted that the clusters with the fewest identified cycling genes were also relatively small clusters, our ability to

consistently capture robust rhythms for key clock TFs such as CCA1 and TOC1 is encouraging (Fig 2B). We observed 4,825 genes cycling within at least one cluster, and noted that more than half of all cycling genes were identified as cycling in only a single cluster (Fig 2E). Examination of the phase of cycling markers in each cluster identified that most clusters contain genes with peak expression across our time course; however, a handful of clusters have clear biases towards cycling genes at key time periods, including an apparent over-representation of morning-phased cycling genes in guard cells (Fig S3). Many core clock components were identified as cycling in many clusters, with *CCA1* and *TOC1* significantly cycling in 18 and 14 clusters across the dataset respectively, and note that the shifted expression observed in *ELF3* in guard cells met our threshold for significance (Fig 2B). Due to our decision to process nuclei from fresh tissue at every time point, a 48 h time course was not feasible. To limit the false-negatives associated with capturing a single cycle we included a biological replicate at every time point to help reduce this concern, and have adopted a stringent significance threshold for cycling status [55].

Our analysis revealed 7,417 rhythmic genes across clusters with 59% overlapping with previous bulk RNA-seq data [48]Fig S4, [48]. Furthermore, we observe a significant overlap of cycling genes between our data set and a recent 24 h and 48 h circadian snRNA-seq data set [43], with 41% of genes identified as cycling genes in the 24 h dataset and 63% overlapping with the 48 h dataset (Fig S4). The high overlap with the 48 h time course supports our inclusion of a second replicate and indicates that we have identified a significant number of genes that have been previously reported as circadian regulated at bulk and at the single cell level.

Coexpression network analysis identifies five major temporal expression patterns across all cell types

Due to the limitations inherent in calling phase from a single 24 hour cycle [54] we confirmed the cycling and phase using the weighted gene correlation network analysis (WGCNA) package in R [56]. The method has been previously applied for grouping cycling genes with similar phases into modules [57,58]. This resulted in clustering of genes on the basis of expression pattern into 26 modules. To remove genes with weak correlations with the module eigengene pattern, we filtered the modules by kME (Module Eigengene connectivity) value; only genes with kME ≥ 0.6 were retained. We next calculated correlation metrics for the modules identified by using the average zScore of each module for the time course. We then used the metrics to perform hierarchical clustering of the modules. Euclidean distance calculated from the correlation values, where shorter distance indicates strong relationship and more similarity between the modules, identified five major clades among all modules. Representative expression patterns for each clade was calculated by averaging the zScore of all the genes and resulted in five major gene expression patterns throughout the day: early morning genes (clade 3), morning genes (clade 2), mid day genes (clade 1), evening genes (clade 4) and late night genes (clade 5) (Fig 3A, Table S6). Additionally, we examined the distribution of the five clades across our clusters and each tissue type had representation of all five expression patterns (Fig 3B). Some tissue types were more enriched in certain expression patterns, for example C5 (Vasculature) and C14 (GC) clusters had a larger proportion of genes with morning expression pattern (clade 2).

To analyze the biological processes enriched for the clades identified, we performed Gene Ontology (GO) enrichment analysis (Table S3). The GO analysis identified some common and

unique enrichment terms among the clades; the early morning clade (clade 3) had genes involved in auxin response, tropism and regulation of stomatal closure. Similarly, we saw enrichment of genes for indole-containing compound catabolic/biosynthesis processes and cellular response to ABA enriched in the midday clade (clade 2). The GO terms related to preparation for photosynthetic machinery were enriched in the second half of the day indicating the plant's strategy to prepare for the energy harvesting processes of the next day (Fig 3A).

To examine whether genes cycling across clusters exhibited similar phase patterns we identified genes that were found in multiple clades. The majority of genes (5611) were exclusive to one clade only, whereas 1540, 114, and 1 gene were found in 2, 3, and 4 clades respectively. For the genes present in two clades, we find most shifts occurred between adjacent clades (Fig 3C; grey ribbons); however, a small fraction of genes exhibited more dramatic anti-phase changes (Fig 3C; yellow ribbons). Examining these genes at the cluster level reveals similar changes between clusters suggesting a common regulatory mechanism (Fig. 3D). Notably, we identified a handful of genes in our photosynthesizing cluster that showed phase shifts when compared to phloem companion cell (PCC) or guard cell (GC), resulting in their segregation into different clades (Fig 3D). As our analysis revealed that the same genes can have tissue specific expression patterns, we next aimed to construct tissue-specific gene regulatory networks to enhance our understanding of the unique regulatory mechanism at play in each tissue type.

Single cell gene regulatory networks uncover tissue-specific regulation of gene expression through CCA1 in photosynthesis- and auxin-associated targets

We next constructed circadian single cell gene regulatory networks (scGRNs) to better characterize the ways in which circadian genes are differentially regulated across tissues. We implemented the GENIE3 algorithm on individual clusters while simultaneously limiting our input dataset to genes which are cycling in that specific cluster. In parallel, we iteratively shuffled each cluster's data and ran GENIE3 to identify null distributions of each dataset. The weight value corresponding to the 95th percentile was used as a weight cutoff for the unshuffled connections, leaving ~156,000 TF-target connections spread across all clusters (Fig 4A, Table S7). Approximately 25% of the edges had TFs and targets assigned to the same WGCNA clade, while the remaining 75% were assigned to different WGCNA clades (Fig 4B). The enrichment for similar expression patterns within TF-target edges suggests we have captured more instances of transcriptional activation than repression, which would naturally fall into different clades.

GRN target sets in individual clusters were broadly enriched for photosynthetic and circadian GO terms (Fig 4C), reflective of the strong regulatory control the clock exerts on the timing of photosynthetic activity and other rhythmic processes [52,59–61]. Comparison of the GRNs between clusters identified generally larger target overlaps between clusters of similar cell types (Fig 4D), supporting that different cell types within a common tissue maintain some amount of shared network structure. Enrichment was also identified for a number of environmental responsive terms, including temperature and light responses. Given that both light and temperature are key zeitgebers in plant circadian entrainment [62], examining the specific interactions underlying these enrichments could provide new insights into how clock entrainment is maintained in diverse cell types.

Many TFs had targets identified across multiple clusters, including CCA1, which had predicted targets in 18 of the 19 analyzed clusters. We saw that CCA1-centered networks were also more similar within similar tissue types, with Jaccard index based hierarchical clustering highlighting the similarity within mesophyll clusters and vascular clusters (Fig 4E). This relationship was also seen in other clock components, such as LNK2, PRR7, and TOC1; however, clock components identified as cycling in fewer clusters, such as LNK3 or ELF3, tended to only share overlap in mesophyll associated clusters (Fig S5).

As an initial step when examining TF-resolved scGRNs, we investigated overlap of CCA1 and PRR7 edges with previously published ChIP-seq datasets, identifying many overlapping targets and highlighting a subset of interactions for evaluation (Fig 5A). Examination of shared targets of CCA1 between pairs of clusters revealed that the similarity between CCA1-centered networks was largely driven by which and how many photosynthesis-associated targets were identified (Fig 5B). A suite of 11 light-harvesting chlorophyll a/b-binding proteins (LHCB) with CCA1 edges spanned at least 3 clusters, whereas 7 of the 9 CCA1 edges found in only one or two clusters were associated with Photosystem II repair, with 6 of these 20 CCA1-target pairs (Fig 5B) supported by ChIP-seq binding [63]. The combined action of broad light harvesting influence and cell type specific PSII repair targets of CCA1 highlight the complex and layered regulation by the clock to fine-tune photosynthetic activity.

In addition to the similarity of photosynthesis-associated targets across clusters, we also noted that auxin responsive genes in CCA1-centered networks contained a high proportion of edges restricted to a single cluster (Fig 5C). More than 20% of all genes assigned to auxin-responsive GO

categories were identified in CCA1-centered networks in at least one cluster, with edges called between CCA1 and 64 unique targets. A majority of these CCA1-target pairs were identified in Photosynthetic clusters c0 and c1; however, 13 pairs were unique to clusters other than c0 or c1, and an additional 21 pairs were present in at least one non-Photosynthetic cluster. To further support these TF-target connections, we again leveraged previously published CCA1 ChIP-seq experiments [63], identifying a subset of 18 TF-target edges supported by bulk ChIP-seq binding (Fig 5C). Given the single cell nature of our dataset, we were curious if we could identify instances of cell type specific CCA1 activity. While many of these ChIP-validated edges were only found in Photosynthetic cells, more than half were also present in at least one other tissue or cell type. Because our initial GRN construction was constrained to only cycling genes in each specific cluster, we noted genes which were included in network construction in at least one other cluster (Fig S6), identifying a total of 10 CCA1 target genes that were included in GRN construction for more clusters than a CCA1 edge was identified in.

Examination of the PRR7-centered networks identified many edges associated with red light signaling and abscisic acid signaling (Fig 5D-E). Similar to the CCA1 photosynthesis network, we observed predicted regulation of light harvesting complex (LHC) components by PRR7 across many clusters (Fig 5D). A majority of these PRR7-LHC edges were supported by previously published ChIP-seq binding data [64], again highlighting the strong connection between the circadian clock and the daily timing of photosynthetic capacity. Among edges detected only in one or two clusters, we observed several well-described light signaling components, including targets implicated as PRR7 bound in the referenced ChIP-seq dataset, such as *ELONGATED HYPOCOTYL5 (HY5)* and *SUPPRESSOR OF PHYA-105 1 (SPA1)*. The ABA-associated PRR7

network, similar to the photosynthesis-associated CCA1 network, contained a large proportion of edges identified in only one cluster. Of note is an edge identified between PRR7 and *GIBBERELLIC ACID INSENSITIVE (GAI)* in the Epidermal cluster 2, where GA has well defined roles in regulating organ growth and physiology [65,66]. More than half of the multi-cluster edges were also identified as PRR7 bound promoters in the referenced ChIP-seq dataset, including robust, wide-spread regulation of a suite of expected clock components (Fig5 5E). These PRR7 links to *CCA1, LHY, RVE2, RVE8,* and *ELF3* support that the scGRNs constructed and analyzed in this work have captured biologically relevant interactions between circadian regulated TFs and their varied targets across cell types.

Discussion

Unlike animals, plants lack a central nervous system, leading to a long-standing effort to uncover the nature of intercellular communication of circadian clocks in plants. Prior studies have demonstrated that Arabidopsis tissues have autonomous clocks that can anticipate environmental inputs and regulate responses [35,36,38,67,68]. To understand the nuances of the cell specific role of the circadian oscillator we conducted a single-nucleus RNA-Sequencing (snRNA-seq) time course experiment and constructed tissue specific circadian GRNs. In this study we captured ~30,000 nuclei and were able to identify all major tissue types as have been previously identified in other single cell/nuclei expression studies of leaf tissue [49,69,70]. This provided us the opportunity to identify tissue specific circadian regulated gene expression. As reported in earlier investigations, around 30% of the Arabidopsis transcriptome is circadian regulated with time of day (TOD) dependent expression patterns [48,52,53,71]. Not surprisingly, many of the marker genes commonly used for cell type identification during cluster annotation [49,69,70] have been

shown to be circadian regulated [48]. The substantial proportion of marker genes with TOD dependent expression patterns affected our ability to integrate the time course data into cell type specific clusters (Fig 1B). To resolve the cell type identities of the clusters, we decided to mask rhythmic genes from integration anchors to identify and annotate clusters in our time series experiment.

Following cell type clustering, we resolved 16 cluster populations, identified by previously reported marker genes and validated by GO analysis (Fig D-F). The clusters were further grouped into six major tissue types (Fig 1D) i.e. Mesophyll (M), Epidermis (E), Dividing cells (D), Vasculature (V) and Root Hair (RH). Although in our sampling approach we aimed to enrich the above ground tissue, identification of RH cells despite their low numbers validates our annotation strategy and its ability to pull out even small populations of cells with distinct identity. Our pseudo-bulk analysis shows cycling of *CCA1*, *LHY*, *PRRs*, *RVEs*, *LNKs* and other clock genes (Fig. 2A) with peak expression at their expected time of the day based on previous bulk RNA-seq studies [72]. Our cycling analysis of the sn-clusters revealed that many of these core clock genes cycle in most of the clusters identified (Fig. 2B). For example, *CCA1* cycled in all but one cluster, *TOC1* and *LHY* cycled in the vast majority of clusters (Fig. 3D). Therefore, our data suggests that core clock components oscillate robustly in all tissue types and signifies the presence of a functional clock at the tissue level. However, we do observe some core clock transcription factors (TFs) like *PRR5* and *LUX* exhibiting cyclical expression in only subsets of clusters identified as photosynthesizing, mesophyll, and epidermal for both, and in vascular cluster for *LUX*.

To be confident in the set of genes defined as rhythmic in our clusters we used WGCNA [56] to group genes with similar temporal expression patterns. We generated 26 network modules which were further grouped into five clades. All five-clades had distinct expression patterns and captured major phases of circadian rhythmic expression pattern throughout the day. Clades 5 and 3 capture the phase of morning expressed genes, clade 2 and 1 consist of genes that have midday expression patterns and clade 4 with evening expressed genes. Both *CCA1* and *LHY* were found in clade 3 and 5, consistent with their known dawn/morning phase of expression [18,73]. Similarly, *PRR9* and *PRR7* in 2/3, *PRR5* in clade 2/1, and *TOC1* in clade 4/1. The PRRs are a five-member family of proteins and are expressed sequentially from morning to night with the following order *PRR9*, *PRR7*, *PRR5*, *PRR3* and *TOC1 [74]*.

The GO enrichment of our temporal clades further validates previously known circadian regulation of physiological processes. Early morning clades were enriched for auxin response coinciding with previous findings that auxin responses are clock gated and the amplitude of expression of auxin response genes decline from morning to dusk and then are upregulated from dusk to dawn [75,76]. Similarly, the clock plays an important role in regulating ABA and stomatal responses [77]. We found enrichment of these responses particularly in the late night clade (Fig 3A). We also identified enrichment of salicylic acid (SA) mediated signalling pathways in our morning clade in accordance with previous findings that SA peaks in the middle of night and prepares plants for the immune response at dawn when plants are highly vulnerable to pathogen infection [78–80].

In our analysis, we identified genes cycling across multiple clusters that were segregated into two or more clades, suggesting altered circadian regulation of the same gene across tissues. Our

approach to scGRN construction was to develop individual networks for each cluster using only cycling gene expression (Fig. 4A). This allowed us to temporarily mask the influence of cell type specific regulation during network construction, and then regain it through comparison of cluster-resolved networks. We observed that many of the edges for CCA1 and PRR7 overlapped with ChIP-seq predicted targets for each TF, supporting that we have captured biologically relevant interactions in our networks (Fig. 5A). Interestingly, when comparing genes that were regulated across multiple clusters to genes regulated only in a single cluster, we identified broad regulation by CCA1 on light harvesting components, compared to more limited regulation by CCA1 on photosystem II repair components. One possible explanation is that the distinct mesophyll clusters we have identified are being clustered at least in part by their photosynthetic status; however, GO enrichment on cluster biomarker sets identified a significant enrichment for PSII repair terms in only one of five mesophyll clusters (cluster 1, Table S1).

Direct links tying the circadian clock to steady state PSII repair cycles are largely missing; however, endogenous cycling of phosphorylation status of repair components has been documented, with the key phosphorylation status regulators *STATE TRANSITION8 (STT8), STT8 HOMOLOG7 (STN7),* and *psbO* all showing circadian expression patterns [71,81,82]. Additionally, clock gating of PSII repair components has been described in response to stress conditions, including gating of SIGMA FACTOR5 (SIG5), a key regulator of the psbDC operon that is involved in D protein cycling [83–85]. The nuclear encoded protease *DEGRADATION OF PERIPLASMIC PROTEINS8 (DEG8)* is also involved in D protein cycling, was identified as a CCA1 target through scGRN predictions, and is supported by previously published CCA1 ChIP-

seq binding. Further examination of the relationship between CCA1 and DEG8 could solidify a regulatory link between the clock and steady state PSII repair cycles.

Alongside a significant role in optimizing the timing of expression of photosynthetic genes, the circadian clock is also intimately linked with auxin, having been shown to gate the biosynthesis, transport, and sensitivity of auxin within the plant [76,86]. This relationship between the clock and auxin occurs across many cell types, but details of cell type-specific clock regulation of auxin signalling remains largely unknown. A recent study examined circadian gene expression in Arabidopsis seedlings at the single nucleus resolution, identifying a subset of six *SAUR* genes cycling exclusively in the shoot epidermis [43]. Our scGRN-based approach identified 64 auxin-associated CCA1 targets across all clusters, including a subset of 21 genes previously identified as potential CCA1 targets through bulk ChIP-seq. Many of these genes robustly cycle in multiple clusters, yet lack predicted CCA1 regulation outside of a single cluster, suggesting a cell type-specific regulatory function that has been missed in bulk analyses. One example matching these criteria is *SMALL AUXIN UPREGULATED 15* (*SAUR15*), a ChIP-seq validated CCA1 target that is predicted to be CCA1 regulated in Photosynthetic c1, but not in Vascular c5 or Phloem Companion Cells c6. Similarly, *FLAVODOXIN-LIKE QUINONE REDUCTASE 1* (*FQR1*) is a ChIP-seq validated CCA1 target, and edges between the two were predicted in Photosynthetic c0 and Mesophyll c4, but not in Vascular c5 or Guard Cell c14. These interactions capture potential CCA1 regulation of target genes in a cell type specific manner, and begin to describe the multifaceted ways in which the clock coordinates auxin signaling across the mature Arabidopsis leaf.

Conclusion

This study provides a comprehensive cell type resolved view of circadian gene regulation in mature Arabidopsis leaves. Through snRNA-seq profiling across a full 24-hour time course, we reveal widespread circadian regulation across all major tissue types, uncovering over 7,000 genes with rhythmic expression and demonstrating that core oscillator components are active and cycling in nearly all clusters. By integrating coexpression-based phase assignment and constructing cluster-specific gene regulatory networks, we identified both broadly shared and cell type–restricted transcriptional programs. In particular, we show that key clock regulators such as CCA1 exhibit distinct regulatory wiring across tissues, targeting photosynthesis- and auxin-associated genes in a cell type specific manner. Ultimately, our work highlights the importance of cell type context in shaping circadian outputs and lays a foundation for future efforts to manipulate temporal regulation in a tissue-targeted manner.

Material and Methods

Plant Growth and Sampling

Arabidopsis Col seeds were surface sterilized for four hours by vapor phase sterilization (Clough and Bent, 1998). Water was added to sterilized seeds so that they were imbibed. Seeds were plated on half strength MS agar with 1% sucrose, pH 5.7. Seeds were then stratified at 4°C for two days in complete darkness. Following stratification plates were placed in a chamber with 12L/12D photoperiod (light intensity 130 μmol s⁻¹) at 22°C. Seedlings were entrained by 12L/12D conditions for 11 days. On the 11th day, starting at subjective dawn, seedlings were grown in constant light for 48 hours before the start of the time course. Leaf samples of 180-250 seedlings were harvested

by cutting across the root-shoot junction in replicates for single-nuclei RNA-seq every 4 hours over a 24-hour period starting at the subjective dawn of the 13th day.

Nuclei Isolation

Leaf tissue was collected in a petri plate containing 5 ml of pre chilled NIB (10mM Tris-HCL-pH 7.4, 10 mM NaCl, 3 mM MgCl, 0.5mM Spermidine, 0.2 mM Spermine, 0.5% BSA with PI and 0.03 U/µl of RNAse inhibitor but without detergents). Leaf samples were chopped at 4°C for 3 min with a razor blade. Finely chopped leaf samples were then shifted to 50 ml falcon tubes, ~ 15 ml of NIB was added to make the final volume of sample 20 ml. Samples were incubated on a rotating platform for 5 min to facilitate release of cells. After the first incubation, samples were filtered via 70 µm and 40 µm cell strainers to remove leaf debris. Triton X-100 and NP-40 were added to final concentration of 0.05% and extracts were incubated on a rotating platform at 4°C for 10 min. The nuclei suspension was then centrifuged at 500 x g for 5 min at 4°C. The nuclei pellet was then resuspended in 5 ml of NIB without detergents and was again pelted at 500 x g for 5 min at 4°C. The pellet was resuspended in 750 µl of resuspension buffer. Nuclei suspension was then shifted to the Nuclei Isolation column and collection tube of the Chromium nuclei isolation kit (PN-10000494, 10X Genomics, Pleasanton CA). Samples were then centrifuged at 16000 x g for 40 seconds. Pelleted nuclei were finally resuspended in 500 µl of resuspension buffer. Nuclei were counted manually with a hemocytometer. The 32k nuclei were loaded onto the 10x Genomics Chip M, which was then processed with 10x Genomics Chromium X controller, and sequencing libraries were constructed following manufacturer's instructions (PN-1000268 number for the kit, 10X Genomics, Pleasanton CA). Total time from leaf harvest to loading was between 30-40 min.

Data Availability

All code used to process and analyze the reported data is available at https://github.com/GreenhamLab. Raw sequencing data and processed Seurat objects are available upon publication through SRA.

Data Analysis

Cell Ranger (v7.0.1) was used to generate gene by cell matrices from Demultiplexed FASTQ files by aligning with Arabidopsis TAIR10 genome. Downstream analyses were performed with Seurat (v5.1.0). Cells with low numbers of UMIs, plastid contamination, or potential doublets identified through scDblFinder version 1.2 [87], were removed using Median Absolute Deviation filtering.

After initial filtering and discarding low quality cells, the data was normalized by using the "LogNormalize" global scaling method. Following normalization, highly variable features were computed for cells of the dataset. Then we used Principal Component Analysis for linear transformation and linear dimensionality reduction. After identifying the significant PCs, we implemented a graph-based clustering algorithm. Cells were embedded in a K-nearest neighbor graph structure, with cells with similar expression patterns having edges drawn to connect them followed by partitioning into communities. To cluster the cells, Louvain algorithm is applied based on 30 top PCs.

Pseudo bulk samples were generated by aggregating the raw counts from each cell of samples at sample and cluster level to identify oscillating gene expression. We used DeSeq2 to generate the normalized count matrix. For detecting expression of genes that oscillate throughout the time course we used METACYCLE [88]. METACYCLE uses three different cycling detection

algorithms i.e. meta2d: integrated ARSE, JTK-CYCLE and LS. We utilized JTK-CYCLE output to identify genes whose expression oscillates by setting cut-off Adj p-value < 0.05. Number of oscillating genes that were either specific to a cluster or shared between different clusters were illustrated by UpSet plots using the package UpSetR implemented under the *R* environment [89]. JTK-CYCLE accurately measures the phase, period, and amplitude. We used phase information for each gene and calculated phase difference of genes that were shared between different clusters to identify genes that were oscillating with different phases in between different clusters. To validate the phase difference observed, we used the WGCNA package to analyze genes for all clutters together with cluster identifiers. Gene with similar expression patterns were clustered together in the same module, whereas those with different phases segregated out into different modules.

scGRN Construction

Single cell GRNs were built with SCENIC implementation of GENIE3 [90,91] by subsetting the single nucleus dataset into individual clusters and proceeding only with data from cycling genes. Several steps of the scGRN construction were adapted from the scPlant R package [92]. To identify an appropriate weight threshold for each network, we shuffled our gene expression matrix and identified the weight value corresponding to the 95th percentile for each cluster individually. This weight was used as a cutoff for our unshuffled networks. Networks were visualized and annotated in Cytoscape [93].

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Figure Legends

Figure 1. Major cell and tissue types can be resolved in the mature Arabidopsis leaf over a circadian time course. (**A**) Growth and sampling schematic used to generate the snRNA-seq dataset. (**B**) The proportion of cell type marker genes identified that are under circadian regulation. (**C**) UMAP projection of the fully integrated, cycling-masked snRNA-seq dataset (top), and the number of nuclei identified in each cluster (bottom). (**D**) UMAP projection, highlighting broader tissue types alongside more specialized cell types (top), and the violin plots describing the distribution of genes expressed in each group (bottom). (**E**) Scaled expression heatmap of a suite of previously identified cell type specific genes across the snRNA-seq time course. (**F**) Gene Ontology biological process enrichments of cluster biomarkers support expected cell type specific activities. (**G-H**) Expression feature plots for *FAMA* (FMA, AT3G24140) and *NUCLEAR-ENRICHED PHLOEM COMPANION CELL GENE 6* (NPCC6, AT5G02600), significant cluster biomarkers for guard cells (cluster 14) and phloem companion cells (cluster 6) respectively. D,

Dividing; E, Epidermis; GC, Guard Cell; M, Mesophyll; M/E, Mesophyll/Epidermis; P, Photosynthesizing; PCC, Phloem Companion Cell; PP, Phloem Parenchyma; R, Root; RH, Root Hair; T/E, Trichome/Epidermis; V, Vascular; X, Xylem.

Figure 2. Single nucleus RNA-sequencing captures circadian gene expression across diverse cell types of the mature Arabidopsis leaf. (**A**) Pseudo-bulk expression levels of key clock components and outputs over a circadian day. (**B**) Cluster-resolved expression of *CCA1* (top left), *TOC1* (bottom left), , and *LUX* (top center), *GI* (bottom center), *ELF3* (top right), and *PRR5* (bottom right) over a circadian day. Asterisks indicate a significant cycling call in the associated cluster. (**C**) Number of cycling genes identified through CycleJTK in each cluster. (**D**) Distribution of genes based on how many clusters in which they were called cycling. The presence of key clock TFs are indicated above the relevant groups.

Figure 3. Identification of temporal expression patterns across cell types through WGCNA and characterization of cell type specific phase changes in circadian expression. (**A**) Hierarchical clustering of WGCNA modules identified five major temporal clades. The average zScore for genes in each clade was plotted to get the representative expression pattern across clades. The ribbon represents the standard deviation. A selection of significantly GO enriched terms is included below each clade. (**B**) Proportional distribution of clades across clusters. (**C**) The circos plot shows the genes with a change in phase across two clusters resulting in placement in two different clades. The width of the ribbon signifies the number of genes with a phase change. Grey ribbon shows shifts to the adjacent clades, while the yellow ribbon represents shifts across clades (**D**) Expression pattern differences of sets of genes found cycling across

different tissue types. The average zScore of the genes within each cluster is shown to highlight the phase difference. Ribbons represent standard deviation.

Figure 4. Construction and evaluation of circadian, cluster-resolved single cell gene regulatory networks (scGRNs). (**A**) Schematic detailing the steps used to generate and filter scGRNs. (**B**) Number of scGRN edges where the TF and target are assigned to the same or different WGCNA clades. (**C**) Gene ontology biological process enrichment, showing the top 5 most enriched categories for each cluster. Photo, Photosynthetic; Meso, Mesophyll; Epi, Epidermis; GC, Guard Cell; Div, Dividing; Vasc, Vascular; PCC, Phloem Companion Cell; PP, Phloem Parenchyma. (**D**) Jaccard Index similarity matrix between pairs of clusters, using all significant edges identified. (**E**) Jaccard Index similarity matrix between pairs of clusters, restricted to significant CCA1-centered networks.

Figure 5. Examination of TF-resolved scGRNs for CCA1 and PRR7. (**A**) Overlap between scGRN edges identified in this study, and targets of CCA1 (left) or PRR7 (right) in previously published ChIP-seq experiments. (**B-E**) Node color indicates how many clusters an edge was identified in. Red edges and borders indicate support for an interaction through previously published ChIP-seq data. (**B**) CCA1-centered network built from all significant edges associated with the Photosynthesis GO:0015979 category. (**C**) CCA1-centered network built from all significant edges associated with the Response to Auxin GO:0009733 category. (**D**) PRR7-centered network built from all significant edges associated with the Response to Red Light GO:0010114 category. (**E**) PRR7-centered network built from all significant edges associated with the Response to Abscisic Acid GO:0009737 category.

Figure S1. Top cluster biomarkers for all identified clusters. Expression feature plots (top) and cluster-based expression violin plots (bottom) for two genes with the highest average expression fold change between clusters.

Figure S2. Distribution of root hair cells inadvertently captured across each library. These cell types were not specifically targeted during collection and are expected in low abundance.

Figure S3. Distribution of peak expression for cycling genes in each cluster. LAG represents peak expression or phase across the circadian day, as determined through CycleJTK.

Figure S4. Overlap in cycling gene identification across studies. (A) Overlap of pseudobulk-resolved cycling genes in our study with genes identified as cycling in Romanowski et al. (B) Overlap of cluster-resolved cycling genes in our study with genes identified as cycling in both the 24- and 48-hour Qin et al datasets.

Figure S5. Jaccard similarity indices for several circadian clock components. Similarity indices were calculated between all pairs of clusters for *LNK2, PRR7, TOC1, LNK3*, and *ELF3*, with darker blue indicating more similar scGRNs.

Figure S6. Cluster-resolved expression for genes identified as *CCA1* targets through scGRN prediction and supported by previously published ChIP-seq binding data. Genes are displayed as rows, with time points as columns. Red shading indicates clusters where a gene was

cycling and predicted to be *CCA1*-regulated, while blue shading indicates clusters where a gene was cycling but not predicted to be *CCA1*-regulated.

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