Research paper

Title: Dissection of the early pollen-stigma interactions by live-cell imaging

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Supplementary videos.

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Highlight: A live imaging system coupled with self-incompatible Arabidopsis lines highlight the

role of stigmatic cells in controlling pollen hydration and in reacting to pollen tube intrusion by

remodeling actin cytoskeleton.

Abstract: Early events occurring at the surface of the female organ are critical for plant

reproduction, especially in species with a dry stigma. Following landing on the stigmatic papilla

cells, the pollen rehydrates, germinates a tube, which penetrates the cell wall and grows

towards the ovules to convey the male gametes to the embryo sac. In self-incompatible (SI)

species within the Brassicaceae, these processes are blocked when the stigma encounters an

incompatible pollen. Here, based on the generation of SI-Arabidopsis lines and by setting up a

live imaging system, we showed that control of pollen hydration has a central role in pollen

selectivity. The faster pollen pumps water from the papilla during an initial period of 10

minutes, the faster it germinates. Furthermore, we found that the SI barriers act to block the

proper hydration of incompatible pollen and when hydration is promoted by high humidity, an

additional control prevents pollen tube penetration into the stigmatic wall. In papilla cells, actin

bundles focalize at the contact site with the compatible pollen but not with the incompatible

one, raising the possibility that stigmatic cells react to the mechanical pressure applied by the

invading growing tube.

Keywords : actin, Arabidopsis, compatible and incompatible pollinations, hydration threshold,

mechanical pressure, pollen-stigma interaction.

Introduction

Flowers of Brassicaceae species have a dry stigma, highly discriminatory with early control of pollen capture following pollination (Dickinson, 1995). The stigma consists of a dome of flask-shaped epidermal cells (papillae) once pollen grains land on papillar cells, only those recognized as compatible are accepted, whereas undesirable pollen grains (i.e., from unrelated species or self-pollen in self-incompatible species) are rejected (reviewed in Doucet *et al.* 2016). Pollen grains need to hydrate on the stigma so as to permit the emergence of a pollen tube that penetrates the papilla cell wall and then grows within the pistil tissues (reviewed in Chapman and Goring 2010). *In vitro* assays showed that growing through the stigma is required for pollen tubes to efficiently target the ovules (Palanivelu and Preuss, 2006). Likewise, genetic ablation of the stigmatic papillae prevents normal pollen hydration or germination (Tung *et al.*, 2005). Early events of the pollen-stigma interaction are thus crucial steps for successful fertilization.

Most of the Brassicaceae species have a self-incompatibility (SI) system, which allows the stigma to reject self-pollen grains and hence to prevent self-fertilization (de Nettancourt, 2001). This self/non-self recognition mechanism is genetically controlled by a single multiallelic locus, the *S*-locus, and depends on a receptor-ligand interaction (Ivanov *et al.*, 2010). The ligand, the *S*-locus Cysteine Rich protein (SCR/SP11), is present in the material contained in the cavities of the pollen cell wall (Schopfer *et al.*, 1999; Takayama *et al.*, 2000), migrates to the papilla surface and interacts with the *S*-locus Receptor Kinase (SRK) (Stein *et al.*, 1991), localized to the plasma membrane of stigmatic papillae. This interaction induces SRK phosphorylation and activation of the signaling cascade leading to self-pollen rejection (Cabrillac *et al.*, 2001). Incompatible pollen grains fail to hydrate properly and do not germinate or only germinate a short pollen tube whose growth is arrested on papilla cells (Dickinson, 1995; Hiroi *et al.*, 2013). Although *Arabidopsis thaliana* is self-fertile, transgenic SI *A. thaliana* lines were generated by reintroducing SCR/SP11 and SRK gene pairs from its SI close relative *A. lyrata* (Nasrallah and Nasrallah, 2002; Nasrallah *et al.*, 2004). SI Arabidopsis lines have opened the way for thorough analysis of pollen-stigma recognition mechanisms through the use of the genetic tools and mutant collections available for this model plant species.

Although they have been studied for many years, the early steps leading to pollen acceptance or

rejection decision are still not clearly characterized. In this work, based on the generation of

new SI Arabidopsis lines, we revisited the cellular aspects of pollen-stigma interaction by setting

up a live imaging system to monitor pollen hydration and germination following compatible as

well as incompatible pollinations. We quantified the degree of pollen hydration required for

pollen activation and highlighted a late SI control restricting penetration of stigmatic cell wall by

the pollen tube. Furthermore, we monitored the dynamics of actin network during compatible

and incompatible pollination and found that remodeling of actin cables is triggered in stigmatic

cells only when pollen-stigma interaction is engaged in compatibility.

Materials and methods

Plant growth conditions

A. thaliana Col-0, C24, *A. lyrata ssp petraea* haplotype *S14* originating from the Czech Republic

(seeds kindly provided by Dr Pierre Saumitou-Laprade, Université de Lille F59655 Villeneuve

d'Ascq cedex, France) and all transgenic plants were grown in growth chambers under a long-

day cycle of 16-h light/8-h dark at 21°C/19°C with a relative humidity around 60 %. *A. lyrata*

plants were propagated by cuttings every 3 months.

***A. lyrata SCR14* and *SRK14* gene cloning, plasmid construction, plant transformation and gene**

expression

The *AlSRK14* genomic sequence spanning the coding region from the start to the stop codons

(3,620 kb) and a fragment of 4,081 kb containing the *AlSCR14* gene, 1,844 kb of the 5' upstream

region and 817 bp of the 3' downstream region were amplified from genomic DNA of *A. lyrata*

containing the *S14* locus. Subsequent clonage steps and transgenic lines produced in this work

are described in Supplementary protocol S1. Sequences of *AlSRK14* and *AlSCR14* transgenes

introduced in *A. thaliana* have been submitted to GENBANK (*pSLR1-gAlSRK14*: accession

number MH680585, *pgAlSCR14*: accession number MH680584).

AlSRK14 expression level in stigma of transgenic plants was determined as described in

Supplementary protocol S2.

Pollination assays

Flower buds at the end of developmental stage 12 (Smyth *et al.*, 1990) were emasculated and

18 hours later stigmas that had reached developmental stage 13 or Early 14 (14E) were

manually pollinated on plant with mature pollen. Six hours after pollination, stigmas were fixed

in acetic acid 10 %, ethanol 50 % (v/v) and stained with aniline Blue (Kho and Baër, 1968) for

pollen tube counting. In a second series of pollination assay, stage 12 flower buds were

emasculated and 42h (stage 15) or 66 h (stage 16) later, stigmas were pollinated with fresh

mature pollen followed by fixation and aniline blue staining. In a third experiment, stigmas were

pollinated at stage 13-14E and collected after six, 24, 48 or 72 hours followed by fixation and

aniline blue staining. Pollination assays were carried out on at least three stigmas and repeated

at least at two different dates. Pollination was considered as incompatible when less than five

pollen tubes were counted in the stigma (Kitashiba *et al.*, 2011).

Dual pollination: semi *in vivo* assay

Stage 12 flower bud was emasculated and 18 hours later (stage 13-14E), pistil was cut

transversally in the middle of the ovary and placed vertically in a half-cut, perforated PCR tube

whose base was introduced in a solid agar medium. Pollen was deposited by gently touching the

stigma with a mature anther. Incompatible pollen was deposited first, followed (within less than

1 min) by deposition of compatible pollen, which defined the timing starting point (T0) for

monitoring pollen behavior. A cover slip was delicately applied on the surface of the pollinated

stigma for confocal imaging. The system was maintained throughout the experiment at 21°C

and under 45 % relative humidity. To increase the relative humidity at the vicinity of the

pollinated stigma, pieces of solid agar medium were added around the mounted pistil. For cell

surface labelling, after 35 minutes in high humidity conditions, pollinated stigma was incubated

in FM™ 4-64 Dye (*N*-3-Triethylammoniumpropyl-4-6-4-Diethylamino Phenyl Hexatrienyl

Pyridinium Dibromide, Life Technologies T3166, 8.23 μM) for five minutes and subsequently

washed in 1/2 Murashige and Skoog basal medium containing 10 % (w/v) of sucrose, before

mounting between slide and coverslip in this medium.

Confocal Microscopy and Fluorescence quantification at the contact point with the

incompatible pollen

Images were acquired with a SP8 laser-scanning confocal microscope (Leica) using a 25x

objective (numeric aperture 0.95, water immersion). Detailed acquisition settings are provided

in Supplementary protocol S3. Fluorescence at the contact point with the incompatible pollen

was quantified as described in Supplementary protocol S3.

Measurement of pollen hydration rate

Because the increase of water content in pollen grain is correlated with change of its shape

from ellipsoid to spheroid (Zuberi and Dickinson, 1985; Hiroi *et al.*, 2013; Wang *et al.*, 2016), for

each pollen grain, we recorded every two minutes the ratio between the long and the wide axis

(L/W) to estimate the pollen hydration rate until germination. Slopes were determined by linear

regression of the hydration curve based on pollen ratio evolution during the first 10 minutes

period (5 data points), using the curve $f = ax + b$.

Seed set

Flower buds at stage 12 were emasculated and pollinated with mature pollen 18 h later. 21 days

after pollination, mature siliques were opened to count the number of seeds.

Statistic analysis

For each experiment (except the initial selection of SRK and SCR transgenic plants), at least two

independent biological replicates (performed at different dates) were carried out. After

checking that the mean and variability of the samples were homogenous between replicates,

data were pooled to apply a statistical test. Graph and statistics were obtained with R studio or

Excel softwares. We tested the sample distribution with a Shapiro-Wilk test and applied a

Student-test to compare the mean of two given data sets. To compare multiple samples with a

single test, we performed an ANOVA. In this study, p-values < 0.05 were considered statistically

significant.

Results

Generation of transgenic lines designed for live cell imaging

We generated transgenic plants for *AlSRK14* in Col-0 background as this accession is more

suitable for crossing with available fluorescent marker lines. We used the *Brassica oleracea SLR1*

(*S-locus-related gene 1*) promoter to express the *Al*SRK14 receptor in stigmatic cells. Among the

12 transgenic lines we generated, we isolated four independent lines possessing a unique

insertion and homozygous for *AlSRK14*. Stage 13-14E stigmas from these four lines rejected

pollen from the original *A. lyrata S14* plant (less than five pollen tubes/stigma) whereas *A. lyrata*

pollen produced numerous pollen tubes on Col-0 stigmas (Supplementary Fig S1A, B, C). We

quantified the expression level of the *AlSRK14* transgene in stage 13-14E stigmas of the two

strongest transgenic plants (lines #10 and #18, Supplementary protocol S2) and found that the

relative expression was two times lower than that detected in *A. lyrata S14* stigmas but still

sufficient to induce SI response (Supplementary Fig S1D). We selected the transgenic line #10

for further analysis and named it Col-0/*AlSRK14.* In spite of several attempts to introduce

AlSCR14 in Col-0, we did not succeed in generating transgenic pollen that could be rejected by

stigmas of Col-0/*AlSRK14*. As an alternative, we used the C24 accession, this accession exhibiting

a strong SI response when transformed with *A. lyrata SRK/SCR* genes (Nasrallah et al., 2004; Liu

et al., 2007). We first transformed C24 plants with *AlSRK14* to generate a female tester capable

of rejecting *A. lyrata S14* pollen grains (named C24/*AlSRK14* line #14; Supplementary Fig S1C).

Then, among the 18 transgenic lines transformed with *AlSCR14* in C24 background, we isolated

five independent lines with unique insertion and homozygous for *AlSCR14*. Pollen from each of

these lines was rejected on C24/*AlSRK14* line #14 mature stigmas (Supplementary Fig S1E). We

selected transgenic line #4 for further analysis, which was named C24/*AlSCR14.*

To facilitate live-cell monitoring of pollen tube growth on the stigma, we introduced Lifeact

fused to Venus to label stigma papillae of Col-0/*AlSRK14 (*Col-0/SRK14 + Act:Venus), TURQUOISE

protein to monitor compatible pollen of C24 (C24/TURQ) and RFP for incompatible pollen of

C24/*AlSCR14* (C24/SCR14 + RFP) (Fig. 1A). We found that the presence of fluorescent proteins

did not alter the compatibility (ANOVA test p-value = 0.23), as well as the SI response (T-test p-

value = 0.15) assessed by pollen tube counting (Fig. 1B). Despite the strong pollen rejection

response following incompatible cross (Col-0/SRK14 + Act:Venus x C24/SCR14 + RFP), some

seeds developed in siliques (Fig. 1C). A comparable number of seeds were counted in siliques

derived from an incompatible cross between non-labeled pollen and stigmas (mean values of

18.35 versus 19.04, T-test p-value = 0.82, Fig. 1C). However, the incompatible crosses exhibited

a significantly reduced seed set compared with the compatible ones (T-test p-value = 2.2E-16

between the four compatible crosses cumulated and the two incompatible crosses cumulated,

Fig. 1C). Together, our data show that we succeeded in restoring SI system in *A.thaliana* using a

new *A. lyrata* haplotype *S14* and that a mature stigma recognizes and rejects incompatible

pollen independently of the accession background. Futhermore, expressing a fluorescent

protein in addition to the SI determinant does not modify completion of the SI response.

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SI response is maintained for about two days and then partially breaks down

As some seeds could develop in siliques following incompatible crosses (Fig. 1C), we

investigated how persistent the SI response was during stigma development. To this end, we

first carried out pollination experiments using compatible (C24/TURQ) or incompatible

(C24/*AlSCR14*) pollen grains deposited on Col-0/SRK14 + Act:Venus stigmas at different pistil

developmental stages (Fig. 2A). When incompatible pollen grains were deposited on stage-15

stigmas, almost no pollen tube bypassed the stigmatic barrier (mean of 1.85 tube/stigma, graph

Fig. 2A), whereas some pollen tubes succeeded in penetrating stage-16 stigmas (mean of 13.2

tubes/stigma, graph Fig. 2A). By contrast, when compatible pollinations were performed on

stigmas at stages 15 or 16, pollen tubes abundantly grew in the stigma. In a second set of

experiments, we examined how long incompatible pollen grains deposited on stage 13-14E

stigmas could stay inhibited after 6, 24, 48 or 72 hours of contact with papilla cells (Fig. 2B). We

observed a breakdown of the SI barrier 48h and 72h after pollen deposition, when stigmas

reached stage 16 and stage 17, respectively. However, the number of pollen tubes overpassing

SI barrier (mean of 9.9 tubes/stigma and 7.3 tubes/stigma, respectively, graph Fig. 2B) was

much less than the massive invasion observed in compatible situations (on average more than

50 tubes/stigma, graphs Fig. 2A, B). Together, these experiments show that partial breakdown

of the SI response occurs late during pistil ageing and that a strong SI phenotype is maintained

during a large time-window of floral development, from stage 13 (anthesis) to stage 15 (stigma

extended above long anthers), that is to say slightly less than two days (Smyth *et al.*, 1990). Thus

the SI pollination partners we generated are suitable for developing a live-cell imaging to

monitore pollen behavior at the surface of mature stigmas (stage 13-14E) without risking

weakening of the SI barrier.

Design of a semi *in vivo* assay that allows live cell imaging of early pollination events

To study the very early cellular changes that occur following pollen-stigma interaction, we

designed a device that maintains stigma alive for at least one hour and allows cell-live imaging

under confocal microscopy (Fig 3A). In this system, compatible and incompatible pollen can be

separatly deposited on the same stigma and their behavior tracked in the same experimental

conditions (Fig 3B, Supplementary video S1). To test whether this device permitted the

maintenance of compatibility/incompatibility responses, we performed five independent

experiments where a Col0/SRK14+Act:Venus stigma was dual-pollinated with C24/SCR14+RFP

(incompatible) and C24/TURQ (compatible) pollen grains. We found that the percentage of

germination for compatible pollen varied from 58 % to 81 %, with a mean value of 74 % (n=106,

Fig. 3C). Emission of a pollen tube occurred on average 20 minutes after pollen deposition (Fig.

3C). On the contrary, germination of incompatible pollen was a rare event, occurring for only 1.3

% of the tracked grains (n=75, Fig. 3C). Thus, our semi *in vivo* system allows live cell imaging of

pollinated stigmas while preserving the highly regulated SI process.

Actin dynamics in stigmatic cells during pollination

Because remodeling of the actin cytoskeleton in the papilla cells has been reported following

pollination in Brassica (Iwano *et al.*, 2007), we decided to monitor actin dynamics over time.

Before pollination, we found the actin cytoskeleton network to be composed of bundles mainly

oriented along the longitudinal axis of the stigmatic cell (Fig. 4A). Upon compatible pollination, a

clear accumulation of actin that focalized at the contact site with the compatible pollen was

observed in 92 % of the pollinated papillae (22/24, Fig. 4B). For 25% the stigmatic cells (6/24),

actin fluorescence increased beneath the pollen grain just before appereance of a protusion at

the periphery of the grain corresponding to the pollen tube emergence site (deformation). For

17% of the stigmatic cells (4/24), actin accumulation appeared during pollen deformation. For

50% of the cell, actin focalized when a clear emergence of the tube (minimum 1 μm) was visible

(8%, 2/24) or when the tube started to grow on the stigma surface (42%, 10/24, Fig. 4C,

Supplementary video S2). At later stages of pollen tube progression, actin focalization was

observed all along the tube path in 83% (20/24) of the monitored papilla cells (Fig. 4D,

Supplementary video S3). Interestingly, when several pollen germinated on the same papilla,

actin focalization was observed below each tube (Fig.4E). By contrast, on the seven dual-

pollinated stigmas we tracked over time, we never detected any actin focalization beneath the

incompatible pollen grains (Supplementary video S4). All together, our live-cell imaging analysis

shows that the actin cytoskeleton polymerizes in the stigmatic cell following deposition of

compatible but not incompatible pollen grains. Actin accumulation starts at the pollen contact

site just before pollen deformation and goes on throughout the elongation of the pollen tube.

Kinetics of compatible pollen hydration is divided into two phases

Next, we compared the kinetics of pollen hydration and germination following dual pollination,

using the L/W ratio as a proxy for pollen hydration (Zuberi and Dickinson, 1985). At maturity,

the mean L/W ratio of pollen grains was close to two (Fig. 5A, Supplementary table S1). We

measured the pollen ratio every two minutes, starting two minutes after pollen deposition (Fig.

5B, Supplementary Fig S2). Among the 69 compatible pollen grains we tracked, 58 germinated in

the course of the experiment whereas 11 never did. We found that during the first 10 minutes

(preceding germination, Supplementary table S2), the mean pollen ratio dramatically decreased

indicating that grains were taking up water and got roundish (solid blue curve Fig. 5B). Water

uptake continued during the following 20 minutes, but at a much slower rate as the hydration

curve gets flatter. We found that germination started when the pollen ratio was below 1.4 (solid

blue curve Fig. 5B). Among the 58 pollen grains that germinated during the course of the

experiment, a huge majority (57/58) reached the 1.4 ratio before germination; only one

germinated pollen grain never reached this ratio. For the 11 compatible pollen grains that never

germinated (dashed blue curve Fig. 5B), the hydration curve shows no rapid hydration phase

during the first 10 minutes and the mean ratio never reached the value of 1.4. Taken together,

our results show that in Arabidopsis, water transport toward the pollen grain follows a bi-phasic

kinetics: first, an initial phase characterized by a high pollen hydration rate required to reach a

certain degree of water content in the pollen (ratio 1.4), followed by a second phase where the

hydration rate dramatically decreases and pollen germination occurs.

Variability in pollen germination time depends on the hydration rate during the early

interaction phase

In our experimental conditions, pollen germination was not synchronous, starting 12 minutes

after pollen contact with the stigma and spreading over the 32 min of the experiment

(Supplementary table S2). We suspected that different hydration rates of pollen grains might be

the cause of this variability. To test this hypothesis, we classified the 69 compatible pollen grains

according to their germination capability and categorized them into four classes: those that

germinated early (from 12 to 18 minutes, n = 19), with an intermediate time (from 20 to 24

minutes, n = 22), late (from 26 to 32 minutes, n = 17), and those that did not germinate (n = 11),

and we compared their hydration rate during the rapid hydration phase from two to 10 min

(Fig. 5C). At two min, no significant differences were found between the L/W ratios of pollen for

each classes (1.85/1.87/1.85/1.96, respectively; ANOVA test p-value = 0.13, Fig. 5C). At 10 min,

pollen that germinated late were significantly less hydrated (higher L/W ratio) than those that

germinated early or with an intermediate time (T-test p-value = 2.43E-04 and 1.64E-03,

respectively, Fig. 5C), though their hydration degree was significantly higher than non

germinated pollen (T-test p-value = 3.62E-02, Fig. 5C). We calculated the slopes of the hydration

curves by linear regression, as previously described (Wang *et al.*, 2016), and found that early

and intermediate germinating pollen grains had the highest hydration rates compared with late

and non germinating pollen grains (Fig 5C). Non germinating pollen exhibited a very slow

hydration rate (slope - 0.043) associated with a poor water uptake at 10 min, deduced from the

high pollen ratio (mean of 1.77). Our data show that most of the tracked compatible pollen

germinated within 32 minutes and that the germination time relates to the capacity of the

pollen to uptake water during an initial short period of 10 minutes. The faster the pollen takes

water from the stigma, the quicker it germinates.

Incompatible pollen does not fully hydrate and pollen tube does not penetrate the stigmatic

cell wall

Next, we examined the hydration rate of incompatible pollen on the dual-pollinated stigmas. Of

the 53 incompatible grains we monitored, none germinated during the time course of the

experiment. Futhermore, most of them (n = 43) never exhibited a L/W ratio below the threshold

value of 1.4 (solid red line, Fig. 6A) and only poorly hydrated compared with compatible grains

(solid blue curve, Fig. 6A). The mean hydration curve showed a constant slope during the 32

minutes of the experiment. By contrast, the 10 remaining incompatible grains had a L/W ratio

below 1.4 with a mean hydration curve (dashed red line, Fig. 6A) resembling that of compatible

pollen. In addition, their hydration rate within the first 10 minutes was similar to late

germinating compatible pollen (slope value of - 0.074 versus - 0.089, respectively, Fig. 6B), and

hence hydrated as efficiently as some compatible grains.

As high humidity can stimulate pollen hydration and promote incompatible pollen germination

(Carter and McNeilly, 1976; Ockendon, 1978; Zuberi and Dickinson, 1985), we checked the

effect of high humidity (100 %) on pollen behavior in a modified semi *in vivo* system

(Supplementary Fig S3). We found that compatible pollen germination was slightly stimulated

compared with standard conditions (88 % germination versus 74 % and mean germination time

of 18.55 minutes versus 20.38 minutes, respectively; Supplementary Fig S4). Moreover, high

humidity conditions did not dramatically affect actin reorganization as we detected a clear

focalization of actin beneath the pollen grain/tube in 75 % of the pollinated papillae (33/44)

(Fig. 7A, Supplementary Fig S4, Supplementary video S5). Following incompatible pollination, we

observed that germination of incompatible pollen was strongly stimulated, varying from 18 % to

58 % depending on the experiment (mean of 35 %, Supplementary Fig S5) compared with the

1.3 % of germination in standard conditions. In addition, among the 46 grains monitored, 46 %

reached a L/W ratio of 1.4 within 10 minutes (Supplementary table S3), whereas only 4 %

reached this value in standard conditions. However, it took more time for the incompatible

pollen tube to emerge (24.87 min versus 18.55 min, Supplementary Fig S5), and the tube

exhibited an enlarged tip and seemed blocked at the papilla surface, the pollen being detached

from the papilla (Fig. 7B, Supplementary video S6). The growth rate of incompatible tube was

1.05 µm/min, whereas a compatible tube extended much more rapidly in both standard and

high humidity conditions (2.41 µm/min and 1.91 µm/min, respectively, Fig. 7C). Growth kinetics

shows that during the first three minutes, elongation rate of both compatible and incompatible

tubes was comparable, but then compatible tubes extended rapidly whereas incompatible

tubes slowed down (Fig. 7C). These observations suggest that the incompatible tube may not be

able to penetrate the papilla cell wall. To test this hypothesis, we stained papilla cells with the

amphiphilic styryl dye FM4-64. Contrary to most plant cells where the dye labels the plasma

membrane (PM) and the vesicular network (Grebe *et al.*, 2003; Jaillais *et al.*, 2007; Jelínková *et*

al., 2010), we noticed that it remained at the surface of the papilla as it did not colocalize with

the actin or the PM canonical marker LTI6b (Supplementary Fig S6). This labelling is probably

due to the interaction of the dye with the hydrophobic cuticle layer of the stigmatic cell. While

the compatible pollen tube clearly penetrated the FM4-64-labeled layer and grew in close

contact with the papilla cytoplasm identified by the actin fluorescence (9 tubes/9, Fig 7D), the

incompatible tube was never observed under the FM4-64 layer and stayed outside the papilla

(11 tubes/11, Fig 7D). Additionally, at the contact site with the short abnormal incompatible

tube, we rarely observed focalization of actin in the papilla, contrary to the compatible situation

(Fig. 7B, Supplementary Fig S5 and video S6). Taken together, our results show that

incompatible grains generally fail to fully hydrate, and when pollen hydration and germination

are promoted by high relative humidity, the SI reaction efficiently blocks tube penetration into

the papilla cell wall, the tube remaining outside the papilla surface without triggering actin

focalization at the contact site with the stigmatic cell.

Discussion

Here, we set up a live imaging system with a fast-scanning confocal microscope to

simultaneously monitor compatible and incompatible Arabidopsis pollen behavior on the same

single stigma and provide a thorough analysis of the dynamics of the cellular events following

pollen perception.

AlSCR14 and AlSRK14 SI Arabidopsis lines

The two Arabidopsis lines we generated, one that expressed the female determinant (AlSRK14)

and the second the male determinant (AlSCR14) were self-fertile but exhibited a strong SI

response when crossed. This SI response was maintained during flower development for about

two days, only weakening at late stages of stigma development where few pollen tubes

developed in pistil tissues and ultimately leading to seed set. Nevertheless, the seed yield

remained much below the one reported for selfed Col-0 Arabidopsis (19 seeds per silique versus

62 seeds per silique). Thus, these SRK14 and SCR14 transformants almost fully recapitulate the

SI phenotype of the natural SI Brassicaceae, the strength of the response being however less

persistent compared with strictly SI lines. Previous work reported a strong SI phenotype,

although over a narrow window, in stigmas at stage 13 and early stage 14 in Col-0 lines

expressing the cognate _A. lyr_ata _SCRb-SRKb_ gene pair (the so-called Col-0/_AlSb_ line), whereas

older flowers fully accepted self-pollen (Nasrallah, 2002; Nasrallah _et al._, 2004). By contrast, in

another study, the same _SCRb-SRKb_ gene pair was shown to be unable to confer SI in Col-0,

even in stage-13 flowers, the transgenic plants being fully fertile with a seed set similar to selfed

Col-0 plants (Indriolo _et al._, 2014). In this latter study, a role for the E3-ubiquitin ligase ARC1 in

promoting SI was demonstrated as only Col-0 co-expressing the _A. lyrata_ or _B. oleracea_ ARC1

with the _SCRb-SRKb_ pair acquired the capacity to reject self-pollen. Interestingly, the Col-

0/_AlSRK14_ lines generated in our study express a strong SI response in mature stigmas without

the need of co-expressing _AlARC1_, the stigmas remaining partially self-incompatible at later

flower developmental stages. Earlier work showed that the variability of SI phenotypes

observed between Arabidopsis transformants was mainly due to _SRK_ transcript levels (Nasrallah

and Nasrallah, 2014). It has been reported that transient SI phenotype and self-fertility of Col-

0/_AlSb_ transformants were caused by modifier loci harbored in the Col-0 genome (Liu _et al._,

2007; Boggs *et al.*, 2009). One of these loci, *PUB8*, encoding an ARM-repeat and U-box protein,

regulates *SRK* transcript levels and is responsible for the pseudo-self compatibility observed in

old flowers of Col-0/*AlSb* (Liu *et al.*, 2007). Contrary to the Col-0/*AlSb* transformants mentioned

above, in our study, *AlSRK14* expression was driven by the *SLR1* promoter region that does not

contain the *SRK* 5' and 3' regulatory sequences. As a consequence, it is likely that transcription

of *AlSRK14* gene and/or stability of the transcripts escape the regulation of Col-0 SI modifiers,

leading to the accumulation of AlSRK14 protein to a level sufficient to maintain a partial pollen

rejection response during flower development. The weakening of SI response we observed in

late developmental stages was expected as it is known that *SLR1* promoter activity is

developmentally regulated, decreasing with flower ageing (Lalonde *et al.*, 1989), and hence

leading to lower abundance of *SRK14* transcript levels.

Though we attempted to transform Col-0 with *AlSCR14*, we failed to obtain transformants

whose pollen grains were rejected on *AlSRK14*-expressing stigmas. In SI Arabidopsis species, a

dominance hierarchy between *SCR* alleles has been reported, which is regulated by small RNAs

(sRNAs) (Durand *et al.*, 2014). We may propose that the inability to introduce a functional

AlSCR14 in Col-0 might reside in the presence of vestigial sRNAs targeting the recessive *AlSCR14*

allele, while these sRNAs would be absent in the C24 background.

Pollen behavior

We observed that around 20 minutes after interaction with the stigma papillae, the compatible

pollen germinates a tube, which is consistent with the germination time reported in Arabidopsis

after *in vivo* pollination (Kandasamy *et al.*, 1994; Iwano, 2004). Once emerged, the pollen tube

extends at a rate of 2.41 μm/min, which is significantly faster than tube elongation *in vitro*

(around 1 μm/min; Iwano *et al.*, 2004; Yang *et al.*, 2017) and consistent with growth rates

reported in other *in vivo* systems (Iwano, 2004; Cheung *et al.*, 2010). Futhermore, we found that

tube growth rate is not constant, exhibiting a slow growth phase whithin the first three minutes

after tube emergence, followed by a second phase of more rapid growth. A bi-phasic growth

kinetics was already reported for Arabidopsis pollen tube growing *in vitro*, except that the

timing was much longer; the transition from germination to a rapid growth phase requiring 30

minutes (Vogler *et al.*, 2015). While compatible pollen grains promptly achieve germination,

incompatible grains deposited on the same stigma, and in the close vicinity of compatible ones,

follow a complete different destiny. Indeed, incompatible pollen grains exhibit an extremely low

germination rate (1.3 %), which is in agreement with the few pollen tubes we detected after

aniline blue staining. Thus, our semi *in vivo* system recapitulates what happens in nature when

pollen from various origins lands on the same stigma, accepting compatible whereas rejecting

incompatible pollen grains.

We found that almost immediately after landing on the stigma, compatible pollen starts to

hydrate and within 10 minutes is almost fully hydrated. By contrast, during the same time

period, the L/W ratio of incompatible grains only poorly evolves. Thus, inhibition of the

incompatible pollen acts very early, within the first minutes following stigma contact, blocking

pollen hydration. As previously described, hydration appears as the first check point controlling

pollen rejection in SI species with dry stigma (Zuberi and Dickinson, 1985; Dickinson, 1995;

Samuel *et al.*, 2009; Hiroi *et al.*, 2013; Safavian and Goring, 2013; Wang *et al.*, 2016). In this

study, the hydration threshold required to trigger germination was found to correspond to a

pollen L/W ratio below 1.4. Pollen turgor pressure has been proposed to be the main driving

force for germination (Hiroi *et al.*, 2013; Vogler *et al.*, 2015; Wang *et al.*, 2016). Our result

indicates that the optimal pollen turgor pressure corresponds to a 1.4 L/W ratio which is

reached after 10 minutes of pollen deposition.

Although 19 % (10/53) of the incompatible grains exhibit hydration features similar to the

compatible ones, they, however, never germinate. Thus, a second check point acts to ensure

that undesirable pollen grains that escape the hydration control are properly inhibited, blocking

their germination. When hydration of incompatible pollen is artificially boosted in a saturated

humidity environment, a significant proportion of the grains bypasses the second checkpoint

and germinates. However, pollen tube growth is slow and does not reach the second phase of

rapid elongation observed with compatible tubes. Futhermore, tubes are abnormal, displaying

an enlarged extremity, and grow outside the papilla cell, unable to penetrate the cell wall.

Production of a short incompatible tube, whose growth is arrested in papilla cells, has been

described in some *S*-haplotypes of SI Brassica species (Elleman and Dickinson, 1994; Dickinson,

1995). Thus, our data highlight this late control of SI reaction that prevents penetration of the

stigmatic cell wall by incompatible tubes.

Actin cytoskeleton

In Brassica, remodeling of the actin cytoskeleton architecture has been described at the site of

pollen-stigma interaction (Iwano *et al.*, 2007). However, these results remain controversial, as a

previous work suggested that actin filaments do not show any rearrangement (Dearnaley *et al.*,

1999). Using an actin marker line, we show that a clear reorganization of actin occurs at the

contact site with compatible pollen. However, while actin bundles appear in Brassica papillae as

soon as pollen hydration starts and remain visible during the entire pollen hydration process

(Iwano *et al.*, 2007), in Arabidopsis, actin reorganization starts later, from the end of pollen

hydration and in most cases following pollen deformation or pollen tube emergence. One

explanation for these discrepancies could be that SI mechanism in Brassica and Arabidopsis

does not rely on rigorously similar cellular processes as previously proposed (Kitashiba *et al.*,

2011). Alternatively, these discrepancies could be due to technical reasons: (i) we used stable

transformed Arabidopis lines instead of transient expression in *Brassica* papillae, (ii) we

performed massive pollination of the stigmatic cells compared with deposition of a single

Brassica pollen by micromanipulation, and (iii) we used the Lifeact peptide instead of the mouse

Talin protein to label F-actin because this short peptide does not affect actin dynamics *in vivo*

(Era *et al.*, 2009). Nevertheless, whatever the species, actin focalization appears as a hallmark of

the compatible reaction as it is never detected in incompatible pollination. Interestingly,

Hardham et al. (2008) showed that touching the surface of the *A. thaliana* cotyledon epidermal

cells with a microneedle induced a rapid actin focalization around the contact point, leading the

authors to propose that actin reorganization is triggered by detection of mechanical pressure.

Likewise, reorganization of actin microfilaments was observed in many plant-pathogen

interactions, where actin cables accumulate at the contact site with the pathogen (Takemoto,

2004 and references therein). Altogether, we may hypothetize that reorganization of actin is

triggered in stigmatic cells that sense the mechanical pressure produced by the pollen

grain/tube at the site of cell wall penetration. In accordance with this, we generally did not

detect modification of the actin architecture at the contact site with incompatible pollen tubes

that were generated in high humidity conditions and that could not penetrate the stigmatic cell

wall. The focalization of actin at the pollen tube penetration site is also consistent with the well

characterized role of actin network in vesicular delivery to the plasma membrane (Szymanski

and Staiger, 2018). Indeed, the current SI model proposes that vesicular secretion is induced

upon compatible pollination to transport cargos required for stigmatic cell wall loosening and

pollen activation (reviewed in Jany *et al.*, 2019). Actin cables coud thus be involved in the

polarized secretion towards the pollen grain and the growing pollen tube.

Taking together, using fast scanning confocal microscopy, our observations underline the

suitability of our system to capture very dynamic events occurring within minutes. Notably, we

monitored the dynamics of actin network during compatible and incompatible responses and

found that focalization of actin cables was triggered when pollen-stigma interaction is engaged

in compatibility and elicited in response to mechanical pressure exerted by pollen grain/tube.

Supplementary data

Protocol S1-S3: supporting material

Figure S1: *AlSRK14* and *AlSCR14* Transgenic plant selection

Video S1: Dual pollination with compatible and incompatible pollen deposited on the same

stigma

Video S2: Actin rearrangement at the pollen contact site

Video S3: Actin rearrangement along the pollen tube path

Video S4: Actin behavior in stigmatic cells in contact with incompatible pollen

Table S1: L/W ratio of pollen grains coming out of mature anthers

Figure S2: Hydration kinetics of compatible and incompatible pollen in the semi *in vivo* system

Table S2: Germination of compatible pollen tracked during experiments described in figure 5

Figure S3: Standard and high humidity assays

Figure S4: Behavior of compatible pollen in high humidity conditions

Video S5: Compatible pollen germination and pollen tube growth in high humidity conditions

Figure S5: Behavior of incompatible pollen in high humidity conditions

Table S3: L/W ratio of incompatible pollen in high humidity conditions 10 minutes after pollen

deposition

Video S6: Incompatible pollen germination and pollen tube growth in high humidity conditions

Figure S6: FM4-64 labelling of stigmatic cells

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Figure Legends

Fig. 1. Generation of SI Arabidopsis lines. (A) The Col-0 transgenic line expressing *AlSRK14* was

transformed with the fusion protein Act:Venus under the SLR1 promoter to label stigmas (green

fluorescence), whereas wild-type C24 or transgenic C24 expressing *AlSCR14* were transformed

with the TURQUOISE protein (TURQ, blue fluorescence) or the RFP protein (red fluorescence)

under pollen promoters, respectively. Bar = 20 μm. (B) SI phenotype of generated lines. Stage

13-14E stigmas were pollinated with mature pollen and pollen tubes present in stigmas were

counted after aniline blue staining. (C) Seed set. Stage 13-14E stigmas were pollinated with

mature pollen, after 21 days silique were dissected and seeds counted. n = number of pollinated

stigmas. Mean (black diamond) of 3 independent experiments. Black dots are extreme values.

Experiments separated by a dashed line were performed at different dates. Error bars indicate

SEM.

Fig. 2. Dynamics of the SI response in Col-0 background. (A) SI phenotype following pollination

of stigmas at two developmental stages. Flower buds at the end of developmental stage 12

were emasculated and pollinated with mature pollen 42h (stigma stage 15) or 66h (stigma stage

16) after emasculation (upper panel) and pollen tubes in stigmas were counted 6h after

pollination. Pollen tube count after aniline blue staining of stigmas (bottom graph). (B)

Maintenance of SI reaction over time. Flower buds at the end of stage 12 were emasculated,

pollinated with mature pollen 18h later (stage13-14) and harvested 6, 24, 48 or 72 hours after

pollination (upper panel). Pollen tube count after aniline blue staining of stigmas (bottom

graph). Beyond 100 pollen tubes per stigma, exact number was not determined and given a

value of 100 (no mean, no error bar for compatible crosses). n = number of pollinated stigmas.

Blue dots correspond to individual pollinated stigma; when several stigmas have the same

value, the stigma number is indicated in bracket. Mean (black diamond) of two independent

experiments. Black dots are extreme values. Error bars indicate SEM.

Fig. 3. Set up of the semi *in vivo* assay. (A) Distal portion of the pistil was cut (white line) and stuck in a solid agar medium. To control humidity level, a small chamber made of a perforated PCR tube, was placed on the medium. Stigma was pollinated and a coverslip was gently applied for live imaging. Bar = 500 μm (B) Dual pollination on a single stigma. Stigma (Col-0/SRK14+Act:Venus, green fluorescence) was pollinated first with incompatible pollen (C24/SCR14+RFP, red fluorescence) and immediately after with compatible pollen (C24/TURQ, blue fluorescence), and pollen behavior monitored under confocal microscopy for 32 minutes. Image is a Z-projection (two minutes after pollen deposition). Bar = 50 μm. (C) Pollen germination features extracted from 5 dual-pollinated stigmas. Only one incompatible grain germinated (germination time = 28 min).

Fig. 4. Actin reorganization at the contact site with the compatible pollen grain and pollen tube. (A) Visualization of actin bundles in unpollinated stigmatic cells expressing the Act:Venus marker (Col-0/SRK14+Act:Venus, green fluorescence). Image is a Z-projection. (B) Dynamics of actin focalization following compatible pollination. Act:Venus stigmas were dual-pollinated in the semi *in vivo* system and a Z-stack was taken every minute during 32 minutes. Twenty four Papillae in contact with a compatible pollen grain (blue fluorescence) were selected on 14 stigmas and first appearance of actin fluorescence (focalization) was recoved. Timing of actin focalization was defined regarding the pollen development stage. (C) Actin reorganization in papillae concomitant with pollen deformation. (D) Actin reorganization in papillae during germination and pollen tube growth. Indicated time corresponds to time after pollen deposition. Images are Z-projections. (E) Mutiple pollen germination on a single papilla. Image is a Z-projection. Arrows show the focalization of actin fluorescence. Bar = 10 μm.

Fig. 5. Kinetics of compatible pollen hydration following dual pollination. (A) During hydration, pollen shape changes from an ovoid towards a round shape given by the ratio Length/Width (L/W). (B) Evolution of the L/W ratio during a compatible interaction. Among the 69 tracked pollen grains, 58 germinated during the experiment (solid blue line), whereas 11 failed to germinate (dashed blue line). (C) Kinetics of pollen hydration related to rate of germination.

Pollen grains were classified by their germination time in four categories: early, intermediate,

late and non germinated. Slopes were calculated by linear regression based on pollen hydration

curve during the first 10 minutes. n = number of pollen grains. Mean of five independent

experiments. Error bars indicate SEM.

Fig. 6. Kinetics of incompatible pollen hydration following dual pollination. (A) Evolution of the

L/W ratio during an incompatible interaction. Among the 53 tracked pollen grains, 43 exhibited

a L/W ratio that never reach the value of 1.4 (solid red line) whereas 10 had a ratio below 1.4

(dashed red line). The solid blue line that indicates hydration dynamics of compatibe pollen was

reproduced from Fig. 5B to facilitate the comparison.(B) hydration rates during the first 10

minutes of incompatible pollen with a L/W ratio >=1.4 (solid red line), incompatible pollen with

a L/W ratio <1.4 (dashed red line) and compatible pollen that lately germinated (solid blue line,

reproduced from Fig. 5C). Slopes were calculated by linear regression. n = number of pollen

grains. Mean of 5 independent experiments, error bars indicate SEM.

Fig. 7. Pollen germination in high humidity conditions. (A) Compatible pollen (blue fluorescence)

was deposited on an Act:Venus stigma and incubated in high humidity conditions. (B)

Incompatible pollen (red fluorescence) was deposited on an Act:Venus stigma and incubated in

high humidity conditions. A Z-stack was taken every minutes after pollen deposition. Images are

Z-projections. Bar = 10 μm. (C) Growth rate of pollen tubes in standard and high humidity

conditions. Pollen tube length was measured at each time point from germination (0 on the

horizontal axe) during 6 minutes, for compatible pollen developped in standard conditions (light

blue line), in high humidity conditions (dark blue line) or for incompatible pollen in high

humidity conditions (red line). n = number of tracked pollen grains on minimum 6 different

stigmas, error bars indicate SEM. (D) 35 minutes after incubation in high humidity conditions,

stigmas were stained with FM4-64 . A Z-stack was processed with image J to generate a 3D

projection. Compatible pollen tube (white star) was detected beneath the FM4-64 labelled layer

(red fluorescence surrounding the papilla cell), whereas incompatible tube (yellow star) was

outside. Bar = 10 μm.

Figure 1

Figure 2

Figure 3

A

water — cut pistil

coverslip

air — grease plug

slide

bottom of a PCR tube perforated — solid agar medium

B

C

	germination			pollen number
	%	time (min)	SEM	
compatible	74	20.38	0.55	106
incompatible	1.3	-	-	75

Figure 4

A

B

first appearance of actin focalization in papilla	number of papilla
before pollen deformation	6/24 (25%)
concomitant with pollen deformation	4/24 (17%)
concomitant with pollen tube emergence	2/24 (8%)
just after germination	10/24 (42%)
no actin focalization	2/24 (8%)

C 17 min | 18 min : deformation | 19 min : germination

E

D 19 min : germination | 22 min | 24 min

Figure 5

Figure 6

Figure 7

A germination   + 3 min   + 6 min   + 11 min

Compatible

B Incompatible

C

Mean pollen tube length (µm)

- incompatible pollen in humid conditions
- compatible pollen in standard conditions
- compatible pollen in humid conditions

n=14

tube growth: 2.41 µm/min

n=36

tube growth: 1.91 µm/min

n=14

tube growth: 1.05 µm/min

Time after pollen germination (min)

D

Compatible

Incompatible