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# Evolutionary genomics of sex-related chromosomes at the base of the green lineage

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**Keywords :** recombination suppression, mating-type loci, chlorophyta, GC content phylogenetic profiling

## Abstract

While sex is now accepted as a ubiquitous and ancestral feature of eukaryotes, direct observation of sex is still lacking in most unicellular eukaryotic lineages. Evidence of sex is frequently indirect and inferred from the identification of genes involved in meiosis from whole genome data and/or the detection of recombination signatures from genetic diversity in natural populations. In haploid unicellular eukaryotes, sex-related chromosomes are named mating-type (*MTs*) chromosomes and generally carry large genomic regions where recombination is suppressed. These regions have been characterized in Fungi and Chlorophyta and determine gamete compatibility and fusion. Two candidate *MT+* and *MT-* alleles, spanning 450-650 kb, have recently been described in *Ostreococcus tauri*, a marine phytoplanktonic alga from the Mamiellophyceae class, an early diverging branch in the green lineage.

Here, we investigate the architecture and evolution of these candidate *MT+* and *MT-* alleles. We analysed the phylogenetic profile and GC content of *MT* gene families in eight different species, whose divergence has been previously estimated at up to 640 million years, and found evidence that the divergence of the two *MTs* alleles predates speciation in the *Ostreococcus* genus. Phylogenetic profiles of *MT* trans-specific polymorphisms in gametologs disclosed candidate *MTs* in two additional species, and possibly a third. These Mamiellales *MT* candidates are likely to be the oldest mating-type loci described to date, which makes them fascinating models to investigate the evolutionary mechanisms of haploid sex determination in eukaryotes.

**keywords:** sex determining chromosome, recombination suppression, mating types, Chlorophyta, Mamiellophyceae

### Significance statement:

Direct evidence of sexual reproduction is difficult to observe in many unicellular eukaryotes, while indirect evidence relies on gene content or recombination signatures. Here we report the gene content of two candidate mating type loci in a unicellular phytoplanktonic eukaryote. Identification and phylogenetic analyses of the gametologs shared between the two mating types suggest signatures of trans-specific evolution, i.e. an ancient divergence, prior to the speciation events within the *Ostreococcus* lineage. The divergence between gametologs can be leveraged to assign strains from distantly related species to each of the two mating types. Thus, they are likely to be the oldest mating-type loci described to date, which makes them

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55 fascinating models to investigate the evolutionary mechanisms of haploid sex determination  
56 in eukaryotes.

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## 57 Introduction

58 Meiotic sex and its associated intra-chromosomal and inter-chromosomal  
59 recombination events are considered ubiquitous, ancestral features of eukaryotes (Speijer et al.  
60 2015). Across the eukaryotic tree of life, meiotic sex has been reported in many algal lineages  
61 (reviewed in Umen and Coelho 2019), such as chlorophytes (Sager and Granick 1954; Suda et  
62 al. 1989; Fučíková et al. 2015), bacillariophytes (Chepurnov et al. 2004), chlorarachniophytes  
63 (Beutlich and Schnetter 1993), cryptophytes (Hill and Wetherbee 1986; Kugrens and Lee 1988),  
64 cyanidiophytes (Malik et al. 2007), dinoflagellates (Pfiester 1989) and euglenoids (Ebenezer et  
65 al. 2019).

66 There have been intense efforts to study sex determining mechanisms and underlying  
67 genetic make-up in multicellular animals and plants (Bachtrog et al. 2014 for a review).  
68 However, less is known about sex-determining mechanisms in microbial eukaryotes. Ancestral  
69 sex-determining mechanisms have evolved in unicellular eukaryotes, so that “*it is clear that the*  
70 *evolution of different sexes in its most basic form is represented by the evolution of mating-*  
71 *types*” (Hoekstra 1987). Obviously, it is less straightforward to identify morphological  
72 differences between sexes in microorganisms than in macro-organisms. The term “mating type”  
73 describes different “sexual types” in unicellular eukaryotes, and was first coined by Tracy  
74 Sonneborn. He used this term to indicate that only certain lines (or “stocks”) of the ciliate  
75 *Paramecium aurelia* mated with each other, but never with themselves (Sonneborn 1937). He  
76 noted that the *Paramecium* mating system was “*strikingly similar to the sexual differences*  
77 *between gametes in some of the unicellular green alga*”. He referred to earlier work by Strehlow  
78 (1929) on *plus* and *minus* “sexes” reported in unicellular soil and freshwater green algae from  
79 the order Chlamydomonadales. In the Fungal kingdom, there has been a rapidly growing  
80 experimental evidence of mating types for many species (reviewed in Billiard et al. 2012; Wolfe  
81 and Butler 2017), initially in the yeasts *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* (Astell et al. 1981) and  
82 *Neurospora crassa* (Staben and Yanofsky 1990). Mating types were identified later in the green  
83 algal lineage, as in *Chlamydomonas reinhardtii* (Ferris et al. 2002), and across the eukaryotic  
84 tree of life (reviewed in Umen and Coelho 2019). Interestingly, the evolutionary link between  
85 mating types and male and female sexes has been unambiguously demonstrated in the volvocine  
86 green lineage (Nozaki et al. 2006)(Ferris et al. 2010)(Hamaji et al. 2018). However, the origin  
87 of mating-types remains unresolved. Three main hypotheses have been formulated for the  
88 origin and maintenance of this genetic setup, which requires outcrossing. First, it may mediate  
89 the prevention of genetic conflicts (Hurst and Hamilton 1992); second, the prevention of

haploid selfing, that is mating among clonal cells e.g. (Billiard et al. 2011)(Billiard et al. 2012). A third proximate hypothesis is that this genetic system has evolved from a cell signalling system for partner recognition and pairing by producing recognition/attraction molecules and their receptors, as initially suggested by Hoekstra (Hoekstra 1987) and expanded by Hadjivasiliou and Pomiankowski (2016). Common themes of mating-type loci were quickly noticed: they often come in two types (with notable exceptions in Fungi e.g. Billiard et al. (2011) for a review) with hardly any sequence conservation. While orthologous genes may be identified between the two mating-type regions, gametologs, mating type regions share little synteny as a consequence of rearrangements and insertion of repetitive DNA (Ferris and Goodenough 1994; Lengeler et al. 2002; Ferris et al. 2010; Badouin et al. 2015; Fontanillas et al. 2015; Hamaji et al. 2016; Geng et al. 2018). Moreover, mating-type loci may also experience recombination suppression both in diploid sexual system, as well as in haploid sexual systems and the UV sex chromosomes (Bachtrog et al. 2011)(Coelho et al. 2018). Recombination suppression may be stepwise and thus generate ‘evolutionary strata’ of differentiation between the two mating types (Hartmann et al. 2021 for a review in Fungi). The consequence of recombination suppression are manifold (Charlesworth and Charlesworth 2000) (Charlesworth 2016) and may include a higher probability of fixation of deleterious mutations, massive rearrangements, which may be associated to lower gene density (Yamamoto et al. 2021), GC composition changes, as well as differential gene expression. GC composition results from the balance between mutation biases, selection and GC biased gene conversion (Galtier et al. 2001), a molecular process linked to recombination. Therefore, regions with suppressed recombination are expected to display a significant lower GC content as compared to recombining regions, and a 4 to 10% lower GC content over the mating type locus has been reported in the mating type region of four species of volvocine algae (Hamaji et al. 2018).

The genomic features associated to mating type regions may thus guide the identification of candidate mating type loci in lineages in which genomic data is available, while the experimental conditions eliciting syngamy and meiosis have not yet been found, precluding experimental validation. While there is no direct evidence of sexual reproduction in the cosmopolitan marine picoeukaryote *Ostreococcus tauri* (Mamiellophyceae, Chlorophyta) there are three lines of indirect evidence for sexual reproduction (Grimsley et al. 2010). The first line of evidence comes from screening the whole genome sequence for genes encoding proteins involved in meiosis. These proteins have been described in all Mamiellophyceae species for which full genomes sequences are available, including *O. tauri* (Derelle et al. 2006), *O. lucimarinus* (Palenik et al. 2007), *Micromonas pusilla*, *M. commoda* (Worden et al. 2009), and

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3 124 in *Bathycoccus* spp. metagenomes from the Arctic (Joli et al. 2017). The second line of evidence  
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5 125 comes from population polymorphism data that indicate inter-chromosomal and intra-  
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7 126 chromosomal recombination (Grimsley et al. 2010). Indeed, when sequencing can be performed  
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9 127 in several strains from the same population, analyses of the polymorphism spectrum allow the  
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11 128 estimation of the frequency of sex in natural populations (Tsai et al. 2008; Grimsley et al. 2010;  
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13 129 Drott et al. 2020; Hasan and Ness 2020; Koufopanou et al. 2020). Finally, the third line of  
14  
15 130 evidence comes from a population genomic analysis that demonstrated the existence of a  
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17 131 candidate mating type loci (450 and 650 kb) in *O. tauri* (Grimsley et al. 2010). *Ostreococcus*  
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19 132 *tauri* RCC4221 was suggested to represent the candidate *minus* mating type (hereafter *MT-*)  
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21 133 together with *O. lucimarinus* CCE9901, because of the presence of a gene encoding for a plant-  
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23 134 specific transcription factor from the RWP-RK gene family (Worden et al. 2009). This gene  
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25 135 family includes the “sex determining gene” (minus dominance *MID*) of minus mating type loci  
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27 136 in Volvocales algae (Ferris and Goodenough 1997; Umen 2011). The candidate opposite mating  
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29 137 type (hereafter *MT+*) was identified from the genome analysis of 12 *O. tauri* strains lacking  
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31 138 sequence homology with *O. tauri* RCC4221 over the 650 kb region. These strains also lacked  
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33 139 a gene containing an RWP-RK domain (Blanc-Mathieu et al. 2017). Phylogenetic analysis of  
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35 140 five gametologs revealed that *O. tauri* *MT-* and *MT+* genes clustered with different  
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37 141 *Ostreococcus* species of the same mating type, respectively. This suggests that mating type  
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39 142 differentiation predates speciation within *Ostreococcus*, suggesting that *Ostreococcus* *MT+* and  
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41 143 *MT-* are remarkably ancient. However, the total number of gametologs, their synteny and  
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43 144 sequence conservation among Mamiellales and Mamiellophyceae remains unknown.

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45 145 Here, we investigated the architecture and phylogenetic profiles of the *MT+* and *MT-*  
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47 146 alleles to unfold their evolutionary history. We analyzed the gene set of the two candidate  
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49 147 mating type loci, and identified the complete set of gametologs between them. This allowed us  
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51 148 to define the set of orthologous genes located inside each of the available candidate *MT* loci in  
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53 149 Mamiellales. This dataset was then leveraged (i) to investigate the presence of evolutionary  
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55 150 strata, (ii) construct gene genealogies to search for trans-specific evolution signatures (iii)  
56  
57 151 identify the opposite mating types from additional Mamiellophyceae sequence data. This  
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59 152 allowed to trace back the age of the divergence of the *MT+* and *MT-* alleles in this early  
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61 153 diverging branch of the green lineage.

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## 155 **Results**

### 156 **Sorting out gene families in *O. tauri* MT according to their prevalence across species**

157 The GC content can be used as a predictor of recombination rates in genomes  
158 undergoing GC-biased gene conversion (e.g. Meunier and Duret 2004; Charlesworth et al.  
159 2020), and it was suggested that there is an inverse relationship between chromosome length  
160 and GC content, which is consistent with GC biased GC conversion in *Ostreococcus* (Jancek et  
161 al. 2008). The genome-wide spontaneous mutation rate is GC->AT biased, which is consistent  
162 with a mechanism like GC-biased gene conversion that could explain the difference between  
163 the observed 0.60 GC frequency in the genome and the expected equilibrium 0.36 GC frequency  
164 under mutation bias (Krasovec et al. 2017). The detection of the sharp (~9 to 17%) decrease in  
165 GC content on the big outlier chromosome was used to define *MT* boundaries in *O. tauri*  
166 RCC4221 (*MT*-), *O. tauri* RCC1115 (*MT*+), and six Mamiellales genomes (Figure 1,  
167 supplementary table S1, Supplementary Material online). Using OrthoFinder, we assigned  
168 genes from the *Ostreococcus* spp., *Bathycoccus prasinus*, *Micromonas commoda*, and  
169 *Micromonas pusilla* to gene families (GFs). Mating type gene families were defined as GFs  
170 with members located within the *MT* region of either *O. tauri* RCC4221 (*MT*-) or *O. tauri*  
171 RCC1115 (*MT*+). The presence/absence of the genes of these GFs in the lineage provides  
172 important information about *MT*+ and *MT*- specific GFs, as well as four additional distinct non-  
173 overlapping GF categories (table 1).

174 **Table 1:** Classification, description, and quantities of genes and gene families (GFs) in *O. tauri* RCC4221 (*MT*-)  
 175 and RCC1115 (*MT*+) strains.

Gene Family class	Features of included genes	RCC4221 ( <i>MT</i> -)	RCC1115 ( <i>MT</i> +)
<i>MT</i> specific GFs	Present in either all <i>Ostreococcus MT</i> - or all <i>Ostreococcus MT</i> +	6 genes in 6 GFs	2 genes in 2 GFs
Core <i>MT</i> GFs	Present in all Mamiellales genomes and located only in <i>MT</i> region	23 genes in 23 GFs	23 genes in 23 GFs
Shared <i>MT</i> GFs (non-core)	Present in both <i>Ostreococcus MT</i> loci, but not in all Mamiellales <i>MT</i> regions	75 genes in 69 GFs	79 genes in 69 GFs
GFs extending outside <i>MT</i>	Present in one <i>Ostreococcus MT</i> locus but with homologous genes in other regions in the opposite strain	28 genes in 27 GFs	8 genes in 4 GFs
GFs not retained for analysis	Present in only one <i>Ostreococcus MT</i> locus and Mamiellales genomes but absent from the genomes of the opposite strains/ <i>MT</i> ; divergent GFs or singletons	112 genes	128 genes
Total number of genes		244	240

176

177 The “*MT* specific” GF class contains genes that are shared only by *Ostreococcus*  
 178 genomes from the same *MT*. The *MT*-specific GFs contain the smallest number of genes: 6 and  
 179 2 genes for *MT*- and *MT*+, respectively. These GFs are expected to contain genes involved in  
 180 sex determination and functional control associated with each *MT*, as well as dispensable genes  
 181 trapped into this locus (Wilson et al. 2019 for a review in Ascomycetes). Functional annotation  
 182 revealed that most of these genes encode for hypothetical proteins or do not have any predicted  
 183 function. The *MT*- specific GFs contain a gene with an RWP-RK domain (ostta02g01710), as  
 184 previously reported (Worden et al. 2009), and a gene (ostta02g00990) that encodes for an SRP-  
 185 dependent co-translational protein involved in targeting proteins to the membrane. Within the  
 186 *MT*+-specific GFs, there are only 2 genes, which encode for hypothetical proteins annotated  
 187 with Gene Ontology terms linked to mismatch repair, protein binding, and transport  
 188 (supplementary table S2, Supplementary Material online).

189 The “core *MT*” GF class contains GFs exclusively composed of gametologs that are  
 190 located inside the boundaries of all candidate *MT* regions in all eight Mamiellales genomes  
 191 (supplementary table S1, Supplementary Material online). There are 23 “core *MT*” GF, which  
 192 make up less than 10% of genes of the *MT* (Table 1) and these likely belonged to the ancestral  
 193 locus which evolved into a *MT* in the lineage. Functional annotation indicates that these genes  
 194 have housekeeping functions, such as ATP and DNA binding, transcription, glycolipid  
 195 biosynthesis, protein transport, and RNA methylation, but no obvious link to mating  
 196 (supplementary table S3, Supplementary Material online).

197 The largest GF class (69 GFs) regroups gametologs that are shared by both  
 198 *Ostreococcus MT* loci, and that can be absent from the *MT* regions in some Mamiellales species

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3 199 (Shared *MT* GFs, non-core). A fourth class of GFs contains genes located within the *O. tauri*  
4 200 *MT* locus or on standard chromosomes (GF extending outside *MT*), and provides evidence of  
5 201 translocations between standard chromosomes and the *MT* loci. The remaining GFs are present  
6 202 in only one *O. tauri* *MT* locus and other Mamiellales genomes, or contain genes that are too  
7 203 divergent to generate phylogenies, as the alignments are too short. Therefore, they were  
8 204 excluded from further analyses, together with singleton genes (except the *MT*-specific GFs).

9  
10 205 While the core and specific GFs categories should contain the most ancient genes on  
11 206 the *MT*, the other GF categories likely reflect gain, loss, and translocation of genes in and out  
12 207 of the *MT*. This prompted us to undertake synteny and phylogenetic profiling of each GF to  
13 208 understand its evolutionary dynamics.

### 21 209 **Genomic architecture of *O. tauri* mating type regions**

22  
23 210 Syntenic regions outside the *MT* loci have been reported between species of the same  
24 211 genus : *O. tauri* and *O. lucimarinus* (Palenik et al. 2007), *M. pusilla* and *M. commoda* (Worden  
25 212 et al. 2009). Within *O. tauri*, regions outside the *MT* locus have been shown to be perfectly  
26 213 syntenic and share >99% nucleotide identity, in sharp contrast with the *MT* region (*O. tauri*  
27 214 Chromosome 2, fig. 1), which cannot be aligned at the nucleotide level between *MT*-  
28 215 (RCC4221) and *MT*+ (RCC1115) (Blanc-Mathieu et al. 2017). We further investigated the  
29 216 relative position of orthologous genes in the *MT*+ and *MT*- regions, but found no evidence for  
30 217 synteny in genes from shared and core GFs between both regions (fig. 2A): *MT* specific genes  
31 218 do not cluster but are interspersed throughout the *MT*+ and *MT*- loci.

32  
33 219 Ancient inversion events are a well-known trigger for suppression of recombination in  
34 220 genome evolution, but the relative position of orthologous genes in *MT*- and *MT*+ regions  
35 221 provide no evidence of a past inversion event. Instead, visual examination of the global pattern  
36 222 suggested a large translocation of the [b,c] segment in 5' followed by the [a,b] segment in 3'  
37 223 (fig. 2A). To investigate this hypothesis, we defined a simple statistic, *Sdist*, based on the  
38 224 relative distance between orthologous genes on the *MT*+ and *MT*-: *Sdist* is equal to 0 for perfect  
39 225 co-linearity (see methods). Random permutations of the gene orders enabled the estimation of  
40 226 the null distribution. The observed *Sdist* was not significantly different from the average *Sdist*  
41 227 for orthologous genes placed randomly on the two *MT*s (10,000 permutations,  $p > 0.10$ ).  
42 228 However, the translocation of the 5' extremity of *MT*- (segment [b,c]) to the start of *MT*- (arrow  
43 229 on fig. 2A) was associated with a significantly smaller *Sdist* than the random *Sdist* (100,000  
44 230 permutations  $p=0.0054$ ). This demonstrates that this translocation significantly improves the

231 overall co-linearity between  $MT^+$  and  $MT^-$ , supporting the idea of a past large-scale  
232 translocation in one of the  $MT$  loci.

233 To track gene translocation events between the  $MT$ s and the autosomal regions, we  
234 located the positions of 46 ( $MT^-$ ) and 30 ( $MT^+$ ) genes from GFs sharing genes inside and  
235 outside the  $MT$  regions. Genes of the same GFs as  $MT^-$  genes were located on diverse autosomes  
236 (fig. 2B). We also observed a similar patchy distribution for GFs of gene members extending  
237 outside the  $MT^+$  (fig. 2C). This provides evidence for past gene translocations between many  
238 autosomes and the  $MT$  regions.

239 To search for evidence of evolutionary strata, defined as discrete regions containing  
240 orthologous genes with similar substitution rates (Lahn and Page 1999), we computed the rate  
241 of synonymous substitutions (Ks) (Tzeng et al. 2004) of the genes belonging to the 69 shared  
242  $MT$  GFs on  $MT^-$  and  $MT^+$  in *O. tauri* (shared GFs). We were able to compute the number of  
243 non-synonymous substitutions (Ks) for only 22 gene pairs, given that for other gene pairs Ks  
244 values were close to saturation. From these 22, 19 had a Ks < 1, and only 2 were adjacent on  
245 both the  $MT^+$  and the  $MT^-$  (supplementary table S4, Supplementary Material online). This is  
246 consistent with a scenario of independent gene conversion events between the two  $MT$ s, except  
247 for one event spanning two genes. Interestingly, within these recently diverged genes, only 2  
248 pairs were adjacent in only one of the mating types ( $MT^+$ ). This suggests that the source or the  
249 destination of the conversion events between  $MT$ s tends to span several kb. These observations  
250 indicate an absence of evidence for strata throughout the large  $MT$  regions of *O. tauri*. However,  
251 this absence of evidence may be reconsidered in the future if additional genome data in novel  
252 species can be informative to infer the ancestral gene order on the mating type (Branco et al.  
253 2017).

#### 254 **Phylogenetic insights into evolutionary dynamics of mating types**

255 The topology of each GF phylogenetic tree is informative about the relative chronology  
256 of the speciation and the divergence events between the  $MT^+$  and  $MT^-$  alleles. We assessed  
257 whether the topology supported either of the two scenarios: (i) in the “*mating type allele*  
258 *diverged post speciation*” scenario: mating type alleles diverged after speciation events within  
259 *Ostreococcus* (no mating type alleles = Post); or (ii) in the “*mating type allele diverged ante*  
260 *speciation*” scenario: mating type alleles diverged prior to the speciation event (mating type  
261 allele separation = Ante). This later scenario has previously been coined as trans-specific  
262 evolution resulting from long term balancing selection (Richman 2000). Consequently, the  
263 variation within the genes following the “Ante” scenario may be named trans-specific

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3 264 polymorphisms (Devier et al. 2009). The number of GFs for each topology is displayed in fig.  
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5 265 3. Interestingly, this dual phylogenetic signal (mating type allele divergence ante versus post-  
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7 266 speciation) is mirrored by a GC3 content signature of the genes. Indeed, genes belonging to  
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9 267 GFs that support ancient mating type origin have a significantly lower GC3 content than genes  
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11 268 whose evolutionary history is concordant with the speciation history of the genus. For the 23  
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13 269 core *MT* GFs (listed in supplementary table S3, Supplementary Material online), the majority  
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15 270 of phylogenies (21 trees, supplementary fig. S1, Supplementary Material online) support the  
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17 271 “ancient mating type” evolutionary scenario that mating type region diverged before the  
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19 272 speciation events within *Ostreococcus*, whereas only two phylogenies support the scenario of  
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21 273 a mating type differentiation after the speciation events.

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23 274 Thus, most core and shared *MT* GFs support an ancient mating type origin (fig. 4A with  
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25 275 mating type separation and 3B without mating type separation). In contrast, the phylogenies of  
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27 276 most GFs containing paralogous genes outside the *MT* region are consistent with the speciation  
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29 277 tree, suggesting their translocation inside the *MT* locus occurred recently.

### 28 278 **Expanding the number of Mamiellales species with two mating type alleles**

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31 279 Since the core *MT* GFs allow *MT*<sup>+</sup> and *MT*<sup>-</sup> delineation in the Mamiellales, we used the  
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33 280 sequence data to screen 33 transcriptomes (MMETSP and 1KP datasets) from several  
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35 281 Mamiellophyceae species for homologous sequences (listed in supplementary table S5,  
36  
37 282 Supplementary Material online). The taxonomic affiliation of each transcriptome was inferred  
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39 283 from 18S rDNA sequences (supplementary table S6 and supplementary fig. S2, Supplementary  
40  
41 284 Material online). The phylogenetic range of the transcriptomes spanned from the early  
42  
43 285 divergent freshwater species, such as *Monomastix opisthostigma* (Monomastigales),  
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45 286 *Crustomastix*, and *Dolichomastix* (Dolichomastigales), to early Mamiellales, such as  
46  
47 287 *Mantoniella*. It also included several *Micromonas* strains from novel species, such as *M. bravo*  
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49 288 and *M. polaris*. In total, at least one homologous gene was recovered for each GF (with an  
50  
51 289 average of 11 GFs per transcriptome) in 28 of 33 transcriptomes (fig. 5).

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291 The most striking pattern came from *O. mediterraneus* MMETSP0929 (strain  
292 RCC2572) and *O. lucimarinus* MMETSP0939 (strain BCC118000) transcriptomes. While both  
293 datasets displayed hits for almost all core genes (17 out of 23), the taxonomic affiliation inferred  
294 for these genes by best blast hit (BBH) was not consistent with the 18S taxonomic affiliation.  
295 Instead, it suggested affiliation to a different species of the opposite mating type (supplementary  
296 fig. S3, Supplementary Material online). In *O. mediterraneus* MMETSP0929, 14 of 17 genes  
297 were affiliated to species from the opposite *MT* groups (*MT*-), such as *O. tauri* and *O.*  
298 *lucimarinus*, not to the reference genome *O. mediterraneus* RCC2590 *MT*+. Likewise, 15 of  
299 17 best blast hits of *O. lucimarinus* MMETSP0939 came from *MT*+ genomes, and not from the  
300 *MT*- *O. lucimarinus* reference genome. To confirm the taxonomic affiliation of these genes, we  
301 built maximum likelihood phylogenies, including homologs extracted from the transcriptomes  
302 (supplementary fig. S3, Supplementary Material online). From the 17 gene families with a best  
303 blast hit, 12 passed the alignment length and identity thresholds (see methods). Of these, 10  
304 phylogenies included both *O. mediterraneus* MMETSP0929 and *O. lucimarinus*  
305 MMETSP0939, and two phylogenies included only *O. lucimarinus* MMETSP0939. From  
306 these, 11 phylogenies were consistent with ancient *MT*+ and *MT*- divergence (example in fig.  
307 6A), while one phylogeny regrouped genes according to species (fig. 6B).

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309 These phylogenetic analyses confirmed the taxonomic affiliation inferred from amino-  
310 acid sequence conservation and support an ancient divergence of genes from two *MT* regions.  
311 This led us to conclude that *O. lucimarinus* strain RCC2572 and *O. mediterraneus* strain  
312 BCC118000 (MMETSP0929 and MMETSP0939, respectively) are of the opposite mating type  
313 to the strains for which the reference genome is available. This extends the evidence of the  
314 existence of two mating types in *O. tauri* to two additional *Ostreococcus* species.

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3 316 **Identification of candidate mating types based on gene genealogies in *Micromonas***  
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5 317 ***commoda***  
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8 318 *Micromonas* is the most represented Mamiellophyceae genus in the available  
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10 319 transcriptomic datasets, with 14 transcriptomes. Therefore, we further examined the individual  
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12 320 GF phylogenetic topologies and sequence similarities by using the core *MT* GF set (23 GFs) to  
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14 321 search for clustering that might suggest an ancient divergence of *MTs* in *Micromonas*. To this  
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16 322 end, we selected *Micromonas* transcriptomes with more than one positive hit with the GFs, and  
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18 323 the highest number of hits in the majority of transcriptomes (9 transcriptomes), together with  
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20 324 one outgroup from the genus (*Mantoniella* sp. MMETSP1468). Finally, we built individual GF  
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22 325 phylogenies from these sequences and the core genes GF dataset (supplementary fig. S4,  
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24 326 Supplementary Material online).

25 327 A consistent sub-clustering of strains within the *Micromonas commoda* group was observed.  
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27 328 MMETSP 1084, 1387, 1403, and 1400 clustered together in 11 of 13 phylogenies, while  
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29 329 MMETSP1404 and 1393 clustered with genes from the reference genome of *M. commoda*  
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31 330 RCC299 (fig. 7A and supplementary fig. S4, Supplementary Material online). In only two  
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33 331 phylogenies, there was no apparent sub-clustering (fig. 7C). Additionally, the branch lengths of  
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35 332 the 11 phylogenies displaying sub-clustering were longer and similar to the branch lengths  
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37 333 separating *M. polaris* from *M. bravo*, or *M. commoda* from *M. pusilla*. Consistent with this, the  
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39 334 average pairwise amino-acid identities between *M. commoda* genes from the two different sub-  
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41 335 clusters ranged from 65% to 89% (supplementary table S7, Supplementary Material online).  
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43 336 For comparison, we built phylogenies of the actin and  $\beta$ -tubulin genes (fig. 7B and 7D), which  
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45 337 are highly conserved, and their phylogenetic topology showed a species topology signature,  
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47 338 where these strains did not support two sub-clusters. Pairwise amino-acid identity for the latter  
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49 339 GFs between strains ranged from 98% to 99.4% (for actin and  $\beta$ -tubulin, respectively), as  
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51 340 expected for strains from the same species. This phylogenetic signal was similar to the  
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53 341 *Ostreococcus* core GF phylogenies, consistent with an ancient mating type separation (fig. 4A).  
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55 342 Despite the low number of genes (13 genes from 23 GFs), this sub-clustering suggests that there  
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57 343 are two *MTs* in *Micromonas commoda*: strains MMETSP1404, 1393, and *M. commoda*  
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59 344 RCC299 (the reference genome); and strains MMETSP 1084, 1387, 1400, and 1403,  
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345 representing the opposite *MT*. As Worden et al. (2009) suggested, *M. commoda* RCC299 would  
346 represent the *MT*<sup>-</sup>, given the presence of an RWP-RK motif gene in its candidate *MT* region.  
347 Thus, the strains MMETSP 1084, 1387, 1403, and 1400 would represent the *MT*<sup>+</sup> type. Taken

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3 348 together, phylogenetic analyses of GFs are consistent with an ancient gene divergence of *MT*  
4 349 gametologs in the *M. commoda* lineage, as expected under recombination suppression.

### 7 350 **Clues about earlier origin of Mating Type loci in Mamiellophyceae**

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10 351 As the phylogenetic signal may be lost over time as a consequence of the decay of  
11 352 similarity between orthologs (Jain et al. 2019), we investigated indirect signatures of *MTs*. *MTs*  
12 353 evolve without recombination, and this has been shown to decrease GC content. We therefore  
13 354 investigated whether a GC signature could be detected in homologous genes to the core GFs  
14 355 outside the Mamiellales (comprising *Ostreococcus*, *Bathycoccus* and *Micromonas*). Thus, we  
15 356 analysed the GC content of the synonymous third codon position (GC3) of core GF hits in  
16 357 several Mamiellophyceae species, and compared this to the GC3 content of genes from the  
17 358 background genome or transcriptome. Core *MT* GFs have significantly lower GC3 (around  
18 359 20%) than genes of the background genome (or transcriptome) in *Bathycoccus*, *Ostreococcus*  
19 360 and *Micromonas* (fig. 8 and supplementary table S8, Supplementary Material online).  
20 361 Interestingly, we found evidence of a similar difference in GC3 content between gene hits  
21 362 against the core *MT* GFs and the background transcriptome in *Mantoniella squamata* CCAP  
22 363 1965/1 and the uncultured Mamiellophyceae (uncultured eukaryote RCC2288), with ~10% and  
23 364 20% differences between genes from the GFs and genes from the background transcriptome,  
24 365 respectively. This suggested that genes that are homologous to the core GFs are also located in  
25 366 a low GC chromosome region in these Mamiellophyceae species (fig. 8 and supplementary  
26 367 table S8, Supplementary Material online). However, there is no evidence for a GC3 content  
27 368 difference between homologous genes to the core GFs and the genes from the background  
28 369 transcriptome in *Crustomastix* or *Monomastix* (fig. 8).

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## 371 Discussion

372 Direct evidence of meiosis is not available for most marine planktonic microbial  
373 eukaryotes. This is either due to the difficulty in culturing certain species, or because  
374 experimental studies are hampered by a lack of knowledge about sex determination and the  
375 conditions required to induce a sexual cycle. In the case of haploid green picoalgae (cell  
376 diameter  $< 2 \mu\text{m}$ ) of the Mamiellales lineage, population genomics data in one species allowed  
377 the identification of two candidate mating type alleles with suppressed recombination (Blanc-  
378 Mathieu et al. 2017). Here, comparative genomics of seven related species within the  
379 Mamiellales lineage unravelled different facets in the mode and tempo of evolution in this  
380 enigmatic locus.

381 First, while no *MT+* and *MT-* specific genes could be identified for all seven species,  
382 *MT+* and *MT-* specific genes could be identified within the *Ostreococcus* genus. *MT-* specific  
383 genes may be implicated in mating type differentiation, such as the previously identified gene  
384 encoding an RWP-RK domain (Worden et al. 2009). The two *MT+* specific genes that have  
385 been identified in *Ostreococcus* encode for unknown proteins. One of these proteins  
386 (gm1.767\_g) harbours WD40 repeats and is predicted to bind to other proteins. The second  
387 protein has a DNA binding domain, which is also found in DNA mismatch repair proteins  
388 (gm1.689\_g, PF00488). A WD40 protein has been shown to regulate mating in the fungus  
389 *Ustilago maydis* (Wang et al. 2011). Nevertheless, the functional range of WD40 proteins is  
390 too wide to confidently infer a role of the *Ostreococcus* protein to act as a *MT+* signal protein.

391 Second, comparative phylogenetics of core gametologs allowed the identification the  
392 opposite mating types in two additional species for which transcriptomes were available: the  
393 *MT-* in *O. mediterraneus* and the *MT+* in *O. lucimarinus*. This mating type profiling is made  
394 possible by the high divergence between the *MT+* and *MT-* regions, as gametologs cluster by  
395 *MT* and not by species. By screening available environmental data from the TARA Oceans  
396 project for the presence of these gametologs, we previously found that, in fact, both mating  
397 types of *O. lucimarinus* were present at the stations where this species had been detected  
398 (Leconte et al. 2020). Mating type profiling was also suggested between strains from *M.*  
399 *commoda*: phylogenies of the gametologs suggest two clusters of strains, in contrast with  
400 phylogenies of highly conserved housekeeping genes (actin,  $\beta$ -tubulin, and 18s rDNA) (fig. 7;  
401 supplementary table S7 and supplementary fig. S2, Supplementary Material online).

402 Third, analysing additional transcriptome data from early diverging branches of the  
403 Mamiellophyceae class, we could detect orthologous genes to the Mamiellales gametologs in

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3 404 eight additional transcriptomes. However, we could not detect any significant difference in GC3  
4 405 signatures in the earliest Mamiellophyceae, as would be expected under suppressed  
5 406 recombination; on the contrary, GC3 values appear to be higher in homologous genes in  
6 407 Dolichomastigales. This suggests the Mamiellales gametologs are not part of a lower GC region  
7 408 in earlier branching Mamiellophyceae. The conservation of 23 gametologs within the  
8 409 Mamiellales lineage prompted us to investigate the dynamic of these genes. The additional  
9 410 gametologs within the *Ostreococcus* lineage support an ancient large translocation event.  
10 411 Inversions have been previously suggested to trigger recombination suppression and have been  
11 412 recently reported in the origin of a young sex-determining chromosome (Natri et al. 2019).  
12 413 However, translocations are also expected to disrupt recombination (McKim et al. 1988).

13 414 One intriguing feature of sex determining chromosomes is their organization as multiple  
14 415 discrete regions, where genes can be clustered by genetic divergence (measured by the rate of  
15 416 non-synonyms substitutions), defined as “evolutionary strata”. In humans, strata were first  
16 417 described by Lahn and Page (1999), who suggested that suppression of recombination was  
17 418 initiated in one region (stratum) and later expanded in discrete steps, by strata. This could  
18 419 happen through additional chromosomal inversions, which are known to suppress  
19 420 recombination in mammalian chromosomes. Only a few X-Y sequence similarities persist, and  
20 421 these alleles are orderly stratified by age in the X chromosome and scrambled in the Y.  
21 422 Although strata have been observed in several vertebrates, plants, and fungi (Bachtrog et al.  
22 423 2014; Badouin et al. 2015; Coelho et al. 2018), they do not appear to be a common feature of  
23 424 algal mating types and sex chromosomes. Indeed, we found no evidence of evolutionary strata  
24 425 in *Ostreococcus* MTs, as neither ancient nor recent genes cluster in any of the MTs This may be  
25 426 due to their ancient divergence, associated with a limited more recent expansion dynamic, as  
26 427 suggested in the UV chromosomes of the brown algae *Ectocarpus* (Ahmed et al. 2014).  
27 428 Alternatively, it could also be due to the lack of information about the ancestral gene order on  
28 429 the mating type (Branco et al. 2017).

29 430 To counteract the effects of reduced recombination inside MTs, gene conversion  
30 431 between mating types has been suggested to act as a homogenizing force in *Chlamydomonas*  
31 432 (De Hoff et al. 2013). In fungal mating types, the suppression of recombination maintains  
32 433 linkage of mating-type genes within each locus, which is required for correct mating-type  
33 434 determination (Kües 2000; Branco et al. 2017). However, gene flow between mating type loci  
34 435 and gene conversion events have recently been reported in several species (Sun et al. 2012;  
35 436 Hartmann et al. 2020). This suggests an important difference in the evolutionary processes of

haploid sex determining systems versus diploid sex determining systems, where gene flow between sex determining regions is rare (Hartmann et al. 2020).

The diversification within Mamiellales is estimated to have occurred between 330 and 640 million years ago (Lang et al. 2010)(Blank 2013)(Parfrey et al. 2011), much earlier than the diversification within Volvocales where deep homology of mating type loci has been reported (Ferris et al. 2010), and with a higher upper limit to the estimated 370 million years divergence of the STE3-like pheromone receptors from basidiomycete fungi (Devier et al. 2009). Therefore, our data suggest the Mamiellales mating type sex-determining region to be among the oldest mating type reported.

In conclusion, we analysed the phylogenetic profiles of the gene families within the *Ostreococcus* mating types, and gained insights into the evolutionary history of this sex-determining region in one of the earliest diverging orders of Chlorophytes. The identification of strains from the two opposite mating types in three species will guide future experimental approaches for mating and strain crossing, since a highly efficient transformation protocol is now available in *Ostreococcus* (Sanchez et al. 2019). Complete genome sequences in additional Mamiellophyceae are now essential to investigate the early dynamics of the sex-determining regions in the green lineage.

## Materials and Methods

### Mating type gene family definition

The full set of predicted genes from eight Mamielliales genomes (supplementary table S1, Supplementary Material online) was loaded into a custom version of the pico-PLAZA framework (Proost et al. 2009; Vandepoele et al. 2013) to define and analyse gene families (GFs). Following an ‘all-against-all’ protein sequence similarity search, performed with BLASTP (version 2.6.0+, maximum E-value threshold 1e-4, keeping up to 2,500 hits), we delineated GFs using OrthoFinder version 2.1.2 (Emms and Kelly 2015).

The boundaries of the mating type (*MT*) region of *Ostreococcus tauri* RCC4221 and RCC1115 served as a starting point for defining candidate *MT* GFs (supplementary table S1, Supplementary Material online). All genes located within either *MT* region were extracted, based on the coordinates of their coding sequence (CDS). For each gene included in these two gene sets, the GF they were assigned to was subsequently retrieved, consisting of a validated homologous group of ortholog and paralog genes in eight available genomes. Based on the location of the GF members (chromosome or scaffold and coordinates), a ‘*MT* signal’ value

470 was then computed for every genome in which the GF was represented. This value corresponds  
 471 to the fraction of members located within the *MT* region (for the given genome-GF  
 472 combination), and was used to filter and classify the list of candidate GFs. The complete list of  
 473 *MT* GFs is reported in supplementary table S9, Supplementary Material online.

474 For every retained GF, protein sequences were aligned using MAFFT version 7.187  
 475 (Kato and Standley 2013) with the L-INS-i alignment method and a maximum of 1,000  
 476 iterative refinements. We edited the multiple sequence alignments (MSAs) using several filters  
 477 on both sequences and positions, implemented in the PLAZA framework and described by  
 478 Proost (Proost et al. 2009). Briefly, highly divergent and partial sequences were filtered out,  
 479 and positions containing gaps in minimum 10% of the sequences or containing potentially  
 480 misaligned amino acids removed. We also applied a minimum length cut-off to the edited MSA:  
 481 the edited MSA had to be 50-amino-acid-long at least, otherwise we ignored it. In case the  
 482 original unedited MSA was shorter, we used this length as a cut-off value instead. Finally, we  
 483 retained only MSAs that showed at least 50% alignment of amino-acid identity in half of the  
 484 sequences of the MSA. The circular plots depicting the location of homologous genes from GFs  
 485 having copies outside of the *O. tauri MT* loci (fig. 2B and 2C) were generated with the circlize  
 486 package in R (Gu et al. 2014; <https://r-project.org/>).

487 To test different gene order rearrangement scenarios between the *MT+* and *MT-* regions, we  
 488 defined  $S_{dist}$ , which is the absolute value of the difference of the position of orthologous genes  
 489 on the *MT+* and *MT-* regions. If there are  $n$  orthologous genes between the two loci with  $p_i-$   
 490 the position (in rank) of gene  $i$  on *MT-* and  $p_i+$  the position of its ortholog on *MT+*,  $S_{dist} =$   
 491  $\sum_{i=1}^n |p_i- - p_i+|$ .  $S_{dist}=0$  if all orthologs are perfectly collinear. The expected  $S_{dist}$  under  
 492 random position of orthologous genes in the two mating types was assessed by simulations. If  
 493 there has been an inversion of gene order between the two regions,  $S_{dist}$  is maximal,  $S_{dist}=z(2n-$   
 494  $2z)$ , with  $z=n/2$  if  $n$  is even, and  $z=(n-1)/2$  if  $z$  is odd.

### 495 Gene family clustering and phylogeny

496 For each GF MSA that passed our filtering criteria, we built a Maximum Likelihood  
 497 (ML) phylogenetic tree using IQ-TREE version 1.6.5 (Nguyen et al. 2015). Trees were built  
 498 under the best-fitting substitution model selected by ModelFinder (Kalyaanamoorthy et al.  
 499 2017), chosen among commonly used models (JTT, LG, WAG, Blosum62, VT, and Dayhoff).  
 500 Empirical amino-acid frequencies were calculated from the data, the FreeRate model (Yang  
 501 1995; Soubrier et al. 2012) was used to account for rate heterogeneity across sites, and branch

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3 502 supports were assessed using ultrafast bootstrap approximation (UFBoot) (Soubrier et al. 2012)  
4 503 with 1,000 bootstrap replicates.

5 504 We used similar alignment, MSA editing, and phylogenetic tree building procedures  
6 505 when considering sequences from external sources (e.g. transcripts from MMETSP samples).  
7 506 The divergent gene removal criterion was based on the results of the all-against-all protein  
8 507 sequence similarity search performed using data from the eight reference genomes only  
9 508 (supplementary table S1, Supplementary Material online). Therefore, it was not used to filter  
10 509 out these sequences from the MSAs. Phylogenetic trees were built for full alignments in case  
11 510 the editing was deemed too stringent, for instance discarding transcripts flagged as partial  
12 511 sequences. Finally, when investigating the molecular phylogeny of the 18S rDNA genes, we  
13 512 used IQ-TREE's ModelFinder Plus parameter to select the best DNA substitution model.

### 23 513 **Gene family phylogenetic tree classification**

24 514 We visualised and inspected the *MT* GF trees using FigTree version 1.4.4  
25 515 (<http://tree.bio.ed.ac.uk/software/figtree/>). We examined ultrafast bootstrap support values and  
26 516 topology type, and counted the number of times genes clustered by mating type or according to  
27 517 their taxonomic classification (by species).

### 33 518 **Searching for homologs in publicly available transcriptomes**

34 519 We used sequences of core *MT* GF members as queries to search for homologs in  
35 520 Mamiellophyceae transcriptomes (33 transcriptomes in total, listed in supplementary table S5,  
36 521 Supplementary Material online). Transcriptomes were retrieved from the MMETSP (Keeling  
37 522 et al. 2014; Johnson et al. 2019) and 1KP datasets (Matasci et al. 2014). Re-assembled  
38 523 MMETSP transcriptomes were downloaded from <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.251828>  
39 524 (version 1; January 2017) and 1KP transcriptomes via 1KP's R interface  
40 525 (<https://github.com/ropensci/onekp>). CDS from each Mamiellophyceae MMETSP  
41 526 transcriptome were predicted using TransDecoder (Haas et al. 2013) with default parameters.  
42 527 Sequence similarity searches were performed using tblastx (maximum E-value threshold 1e-4)  
43 528 and results were filtered to retain hits with alignment length > 50 and amino-acid identity >  
44 529 60%. In-depth phylogenetic analyses of individual hits from *O. mediterraneus* strain RCC2572  
45 530 (MMETSP0929), *O. lucimarinus* strain BCC118000 (MMETSP0939), *Micromonas* MMETSP  
46 531 transcriptomes (1084, 1327, 1387, 1393, 1400, 1401, 1402, 1403, 1404), and *Mantoniella*  
47 532 MMETSP transcriptomes (1106, 1468) were performed as previously described for the  
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3 533 reference genomes. The presence/absence matrix of each informative orthologous group against  
4 534 the transcriptomes was generated using the ggplot2 package in R) (Wickham 2011).

5 535 To validate and elucidate each MMETSP transcriptome's taxonomic affiliation, we  
6 536 downloaded Mamiellophyceae 18S rDNA sequences from reference genomes in GenBank, the  
7 537 SILVA database (Wickham 2011), and *Micromonas* spp. sequences provided in Simon et al.  
8 538 (2017) (supplementary table S6, Supplementary Material online). Transcripts matching selected  
9 539 18S sequences were extracted with blastn (maximum E-value 1e-5) and 18S rDNA sequences  
10 540 were subsequently predicted using RNAMmer (Lagesen et al. 2007). A ML phylogenetic tree  
11 541 was built using IQ-TREE and following each clustering of this Mamiellophyceae reference tree  
12 542 (rooted in *Monomastix* spp.), transcriptomes were tentatively classified according to a species  
13 543 clustering (supplementary fig. S2, Supplementary Material online). Phylogeny indicated that  
14 544 MMETSP transcriptomes matched their species classification, and transcriptomes from novel  
15 545 *Micromonas* species as *M. polaris* and *M. bravo* were designated using the data and new  
16 546 classification of (Simon et al. 2017).

### 27 547 **Compositional analysis (GC3) of gene families in Mamiellophyceae**

28 548 To evaluate compositional differences between third codon positions (GC3) of GF  
29 549 members and CDS from the overall genome or transcriptome (supplementary table S8,  
30 550 Supplementary Material online) we used a custom python script to perform GC3 calculations.  
31 551 We subsequently evaluated the results using Student's *t*-test as implemented in R.

### 32 552 **Synonymous and non-synonymous divergence of shared *MT* gene families**

33 553 We used homologous pairs of the 69 shared *MT* GFs to calculate sequence genetic  
34 554 divergence with the seqinr package v3.4-5 (kaks function) using (Li 1993) method (LWL85) in  
35 555 R.

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41 561 Mamiellophycean transcriptomes analysed in this study and the Genotoul Bioinformatic  
42 562 platform for providing computing and data storage resources.

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### 44 564 **Data availability statement**

45 565 All genomic and transcriptomic sequence data is available on GenBank under accession number  
46 566 CAID00000000.1 (*O. tauri*), PRJNA337288 (*O. lucimarinus*), PRJNA15676 (*M. commoda*),

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3 567 PRJNA15678 (*M. pusilla*), PRJNA394752 (*B. prasinus*), PRJNA248394 (MMESTP). The  
4 568 accession numbers of the 18S rDNA sequences are summarized in Supplemental Table S6.  
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3 801 **List of Figure Legends**  
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6 802 **Figure 1:** Size and GC content in the candidate mating type chromosomes (candidate mating  
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8 803 type locus positions as in Sup. Table S1) in the 8 Mamiellales genomes. Sequences of CH02 of  
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10 804 *O. lucimarinus* and *M. pusilla* have been reversed complemented to take colinearity of flanking  
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12 805 regions as described in (Palenik et al. 2007) and (Worden et al. 2009) into account. Node  
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14 806 divergence estimations are from (Slapeta et al. 2006) for *Micromonas* and (Parfrey et al. 2011)  
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16 807 for the basal node.  
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18  
19 809 **Figure 2:** Gene organization in the mating type region of *O. tauri* RCC4221 (*MT*<sup>-</sup>) and  
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21 810 RCC1115 (*MT*<sup>+</sup>). (A) Location of gene pairs from the 23 core gene families (GFs) and 57  
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23 811 shared GFs in the mating type region of *O. tauri* RCC4221 (*MT*<sup>-</sup>, blue rectangle) and RCC1115  
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25 812 (*MT*<sup>+</sup>, red rectangle). Genes from core and shared GFs are represented by bright and dark ticks,  
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27 813 respectively, and homologous gene pairs are connected by grey lines. Genes from *MT*<sup>+</sup> or *MT*<sup>-</sup>  
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29 814 specific GFs are also shown, represented by black ticks. Shared gene families having multiple  
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31 815 copies in either *O. tauri* RCC4221 (*MT*<sup>-</sup>) and RCC1115 (*MT*<sup>+</sup>) are not depicted. (B, C)  
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33 816 Location of homologous *MT* genes from GFs with copies outside of either *O. tauri* *MT* region  
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35 817 in Mamiellales genomes, for *O. tauri* RCC4221 (*MT*<sup>-</sup>, 39 GFs, B) and RCC1115 (*MT*<sup>+</sup>, 16 GFs,  
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37 818 C). Each peripheral segment represents a chromosome or scaffold of one of eight Mamiellales  
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39 819 genomes. The *MT* genes from *O. tauri* RCC4221 (*MT*<sup>-</sup>, B) or RCC1115 (*MT*<sup>+</sup>, C) are  
40  
41 820 connected to their homologs by grey lines. If a homolog is located within a *MT* locus, the link  
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43 821 is coloured in orange. The abbreviations are as follows: chromosome (CH), contig (CG), and  
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45 822 unitig (UG).

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47 823 **Figure 3:** Phylogenetic signal and GC3 content of gene family (GF) members in *O. tauri*  
48  
49 824 RCC4221 (*MT*<sup>-</sup>) and RCC1115 (*MT*<sup>+</sup>). ‘Post’ for GF genes with mating type separation after  
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51 825 speciation and ‘Ante’ for GF genes with mating type separation prior to speciation. Circle size  
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53 826 is proportional to the number of GF genes (numerical value within each circle), and circle colour  
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55 827 depicts the average GC3 content from low (yellow-golden) to high (green).  
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57  
58 829 **Figure 4:** Unrooted maximum-likelihood phylogenetic trees of representative core *MT* gene  
59  
60 830 families 000581 (A) and 000945 (B). Genes from *MT*<sup>-</sup> strains are coloured in blue, genes from  
831  
832 *MT*<sup>+</sup> strains are coloured in red. Ultrafast bootstrap support values are denoted on branches.  
Abbreviations: *O. tauri* RCC4221 (OT4221), *O. tauri* RCC1115 (OT1115), *O. lucimarinus*

833 (OL), *O. sp* RCC809 (O809), *O. mediterraneus* RCC2590 (OMED), *B. prasinus* RCC1105  
 834 (B1105), *M. commoda* RCC299 (MC299), and *M. pusilla* (MPU).

835

836 **Figure 5:** Presence-absence matrix of best BLAST hits (BBH) of core *MT* gene families in each  
 837 Mamiellophyceae transcriptome. Species' names of sequenced strains (left column) as inferred  
 838 from 18S rDNA sequence analysis extracted from the transcriptome (supplementary fig. S2,  
 839 Supplementary Material online). The colour of each rectangle indicates the taxonomic  
 840 affiliation of the BBH (colour key at the bottom). Transcriptomes containing genes with a BBH  
 841 affiliated to a different species are highlighted in grey.

842

843 **Figure 6:** Unrooted maximum-likelihood phylogenetic trees of representative core *MT* gene  
 844 families 001374 (A) and 003390 (B) including homologous sequences from *O. lucimarinus*  
 845 MMETSP0939 (strain BCC118000) and *O. mediterraneus* MMETSP0929 (strain RCC2572).  
 846 Candidate mating type genes *MT*<sup>+</sup> are in red, *MT*<sup>-</sup> in blue. Topology (A) clusters genes  
 847 according to mating type, whereas topology (B) corresponds to the species phylogeny. Ultrafast  
 848 bootstrap support values are indicated on branches. Abbreviations: *O. tauri* RCC4221  
 849 (OT4221), *O. tauri* RCC1115 (OT1115), *O. lucimarinus* (OL), *O. lucimarinus* BCC118000  
 850 (OLMMETSP0939), *O. sp* RCC809 (O809), *O. mediterraneus* RCC2590 (OMED), *O.*  
 851 *mediterraneus* RCC2572 (OMMMETSP0929), *B. prasinus* RCC1105 (B1105), *M. commoda*  
 852 RCC299 (MC299), and *M. pusilla* (MPU).

853

854 **Figure 7:** Phylogenetic trees of representative core *MT* gene families 001102 (A) and 003908  
 855 (C), and actin (B) and  $\beta$ -tubulin (D) genes, for *M. commoda* and *M. pusilla* reference genomes  
 856 and homologous genes retrieved from diverse *Micromonas* spp. transcriptomes. In the  
 857 phylogeny "A", two *M. commoda* sub-clusters are highlighted in dark green (MMETSP1403,  
 858 1400, 1084, 1387) and light green (MMETSP1393, 1404, and the reference *M. commoda*  
 859 RCC299). In phylogeny "C", there is no "A type" sub-clustering. In the actin and  $\beta$ -tubulin  
 860 trees, sub-clusters are absent and branch lengths are shorter than "A", but parallel with  
 861 phylogeny "C".

862

863 **Figure 8:** GC3 content comparison between genes from core *MT* gene families (dark green)  
 864 and overall genome or transcriptome (light green) in Mamiellophyceae species. Phylogenetic  
 865 relationships are inferred from 18S rDNA phylogeny. An asterisk (\*) indicates a significant  
 866 GC3 content difference (Student's *t*-test *p*-value < 0.05). Abbreviations: *O. tauri* RCC4221

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3 867 (*Ostreococcus*), *B. prasinus* RCC1105 (*Bathycoccus*), *M. pusilla* CCMP1545 (*Micromonas*),  
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5 868 *M. squamata* strain CCMP1436 - MMETSP1468 (*Mantoniella squamata*), *M. squamata* strain  
6  
7 869 CCCAP 1965/1 - QXSZ (*M. squamata*), *M. antarctica* strain SL-175 - MMETSP1106  
8  
9 870 (*Mantoniella antarctica*), Uncultured eukaryote RCC2288 - MMETSP1326 (Uncult.  
10  
11 871 Mamiellophyceae), *C. stigmatica* CCMP3273 - MMETSP0803 (*Crustomastix*), *D. tenuilepis*  
12  
13 872 CCMP3274 - MMETSP0033 (*Dolichomastix*), *D. tenuilepis* strain M1680 - XOAL (*D.*  
14  
15 873 *tenuilepis*), and *M. opisthostigma* CCAC 0206 - BTFM (*Monomastix*).  
16  
17 874

## 17 875 **List of Tables**

18  
19 876 **Table 1:** Classification, description, and quantities of genes and gene families (GFs) in *O. tauri*  
20  
21 877 RCC4221 (*MT-*) and RCC1115 (*MT+*) strains.  
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879 **Table 1:** Classification, description, and quantities of genes and gene families (GFs) in *O. tauri* RCC4221 (*MT*-)  
 880 and RCC1115 (*MT*+) strains.

Gene Family class	Features of included genes	RCC4221 ( <i>MT</i> -)	RCC1115 ( <i>MT</i> +)
<i>MT</i> specific GFs	Present in either all <i>Ostreococcus MT</i> - or all <i>Ostreococcus MT</i> +	6 genes in 6 GFs	2 genes in 2 GFs
Core <i>MT</i> GFs	Present in all Mamiellales genomes and located only in <i>MT</i> region	23 genes in 23 GFs	23 genes in 23 GFs
Shared <i>MT</i> GFs (non-core)	Present in both <i>Ostreococcus MT</i> loci, but not in all Mamiellales <i>MT</i> regions	75 genes in 69 GFs	79 genes in 69 GFs
GFs extending outside <i>MT</i>	Present in one <i>Ostreococcus MT</i> locus but with homologous genes in other regions in the opposite strain	28 genes in 27 GFs	8 genes in 4 GFs
GFs not retained for analysis	Present in only one <i>Ostreococcus MT</i> locus and Mamiellales genomes but absent from the genomes of the opposite strains/ <i>MT</i> ; divergent GFs or singletons	112 genes	128 genes
Total number of genes		244	240

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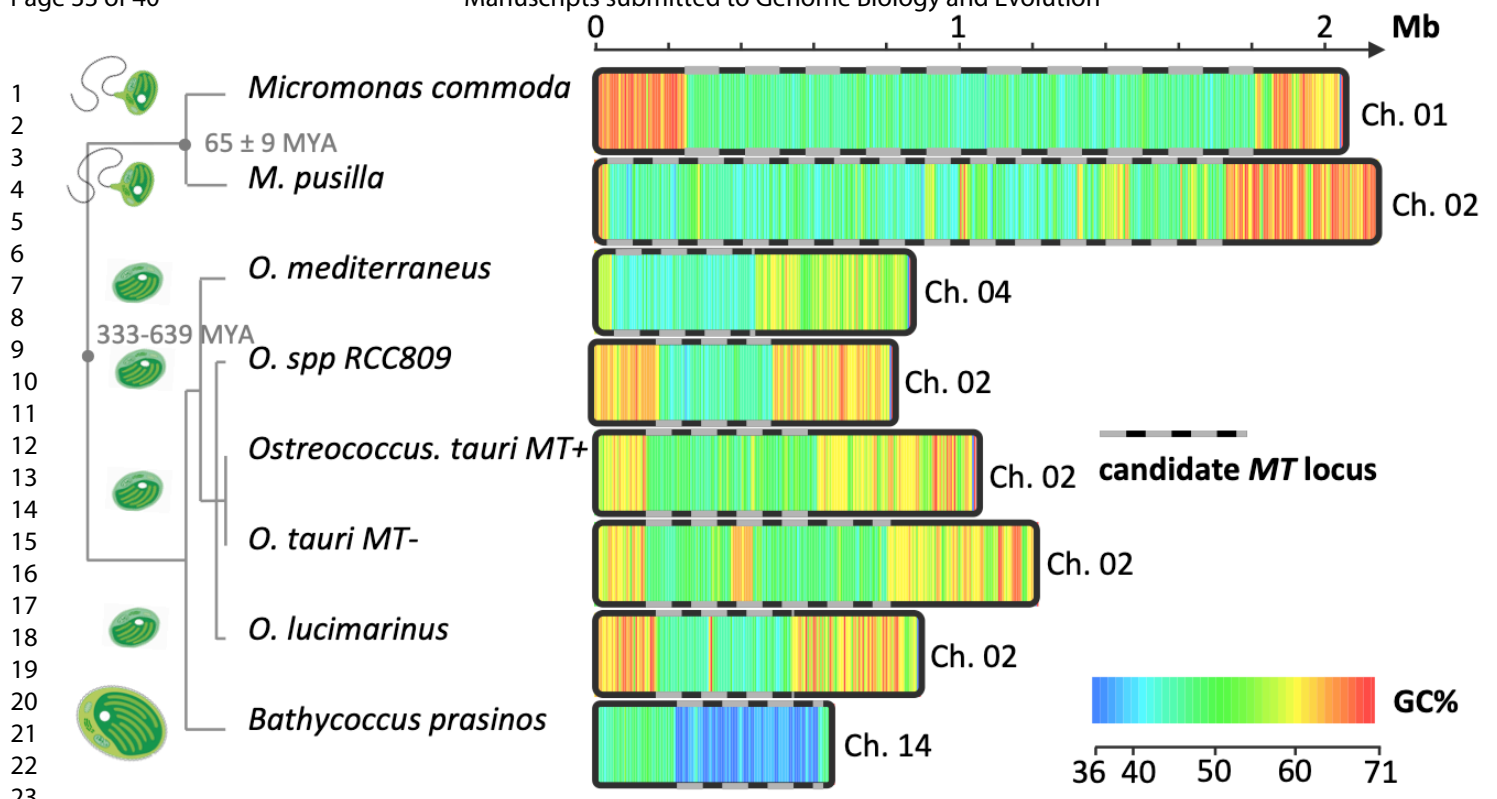
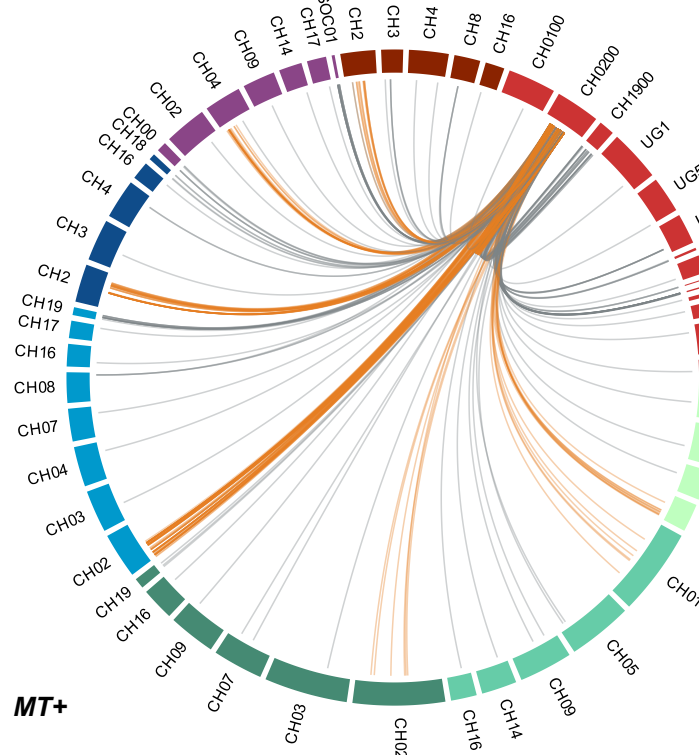
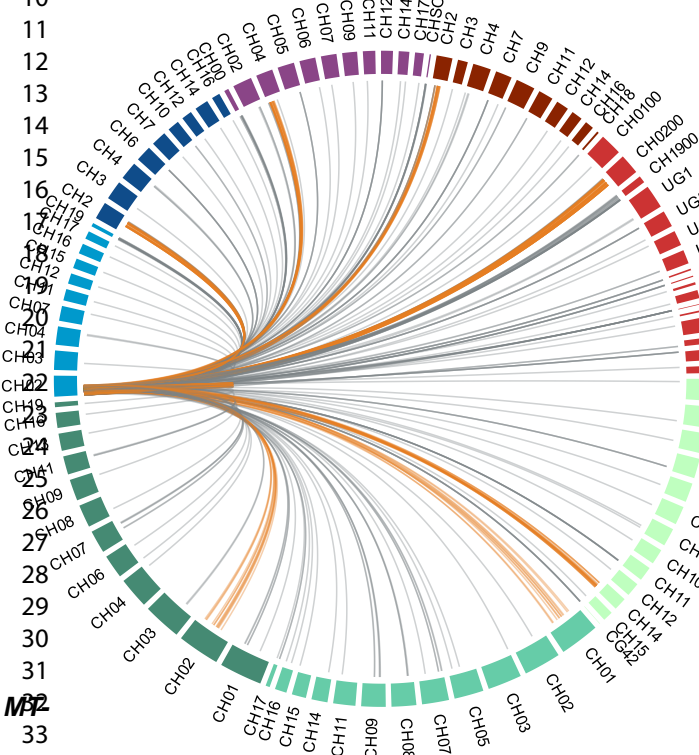
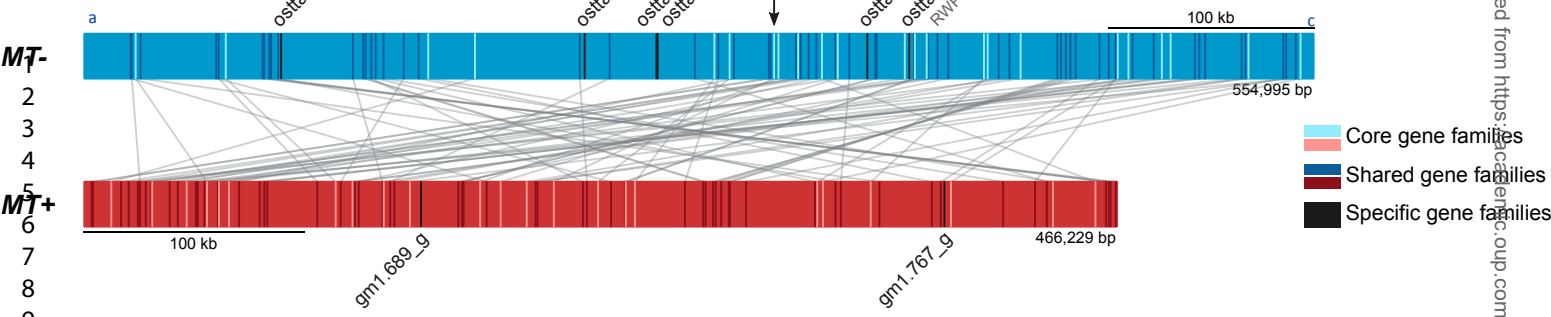


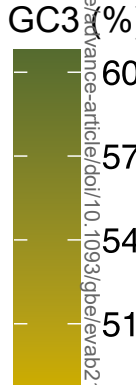
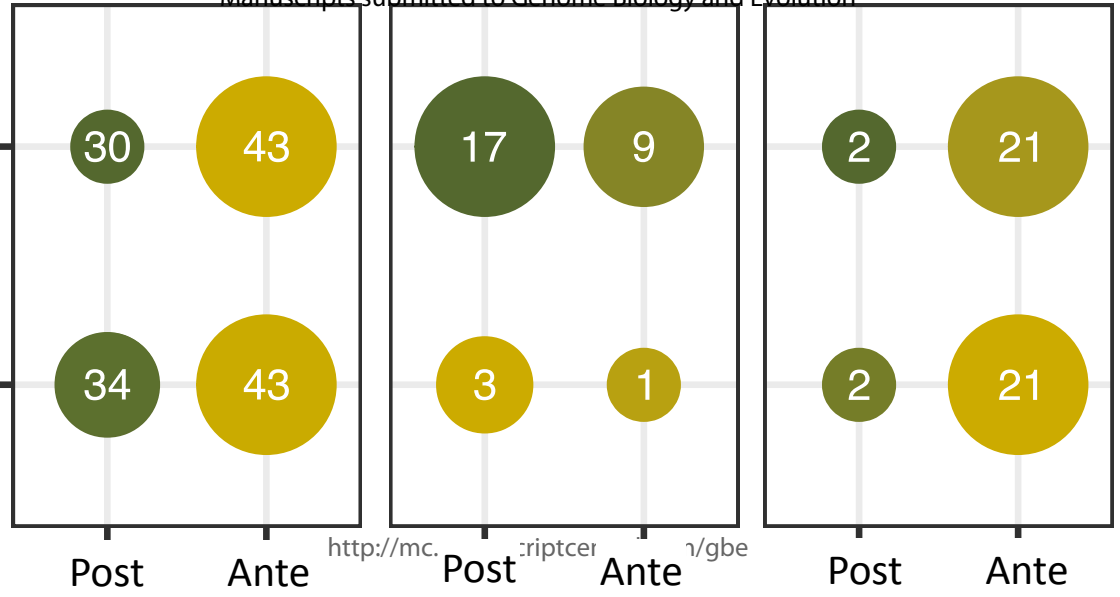
Figure 1. "Big Outlier Chromosome" size and GC content in eight completely sequences Mamiellales strains.



Shared Extending outside Core

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3 *O. tauri* MT-  
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10 *O. tauri* MT+  
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Mating type separation relative to speciation

