Large-Scale Biology article

The systems architecture of molecular memory in poplar after abiotic stress

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Title: The systems architecture of molecular memory in poplar after abiotic stress

Short title: Systems architecture of molecular memory

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ABSTRACT

Throughout the temperate zones, plants face combined drought and heat spells in increasing frequency and intensity. We compared periodic (intermittent, i.e. high-frequency) versus chronic (continuous, i.e. high-intensity) drought-heat stress scenarios in Gray poplar (*Populus* x *canescens*) plants for phenotypic and transcriptomic effects during stress and recovery. Post-recovery photosynthetic productivity after stress exceeded the performance of poplar trees without stress experience. We analyzed the molecular basis of this stress-related memory phenotype and investigated gene expression responses across five major tree compartments including organs and wood tissues. For each of these tissue samples, transcriptomic changes induced by the two stress scenarios were highly similar during the stress phase but strikingly divergent after recovery. Characteristic molecular response patterns were found across tissues but involved different genes in each tissue. Only a small fraction of genes showed similar stress and recovery expression profiles across all tissues, among them protein phosphatases of type 2C, the LATE EMBRYOGENESIS ABUNDANT PROTEIN 4-5 genes and orthologs to the *Arabidopsis thaliana* transcription factor HOMEOBOX LEUCINE-ZIPPER PROTEIN 7. Predicted transcription factor regulatory networks for these genes suggest that a complex interplay of common and tissue-specific components contributes to the coordination of post-recovery responses to stress in woody plants.

INTRODUCTION

Climate change increases the frequency and intensity of extreme events such as heat waves and drought (IPCC, 2014). Plants, as sessile organisms, and in particular long-living trees, have evolved flexible mechanisms to cope with environmental stresses (Harfouche et al., 2014). Poplar is a widely used model in tree research that combines moderate genome size, a complete genome reference, fast growth, rapid maturation and wide geographic distribution with economic relevance in wood and biomass production (Taylor, 2002; Tuskan et al., 2006). It is also suitable for transcriptome studies across a variety of tissues. For instance, co-expression patterns underlying cambial growth and wood formation have been investigated by sampling multiple sections across tree trunks (Sundell et al., 2017). Various physiological

changes have been observed in plants in response to abiotic stresses. Drought limits the root water uptake and results in a reduction of transpiration and photosynthesis, which can have severe effects on growth and yield (Aroca et al., 2012; Osakabe et al., 2014). These processes are mediated by well-known molecular responses of cells to drought, frequently triggered by the plant hormone abscisic acid (ABA) (Osakabe et al., 2014; Shinozaki and Yamaguchi-Shinozaki, 2007). In addition to ABA-responsive element-binding (AREB/ABF) transcription factors, members of the no apical meristem, Arabidopsis transcription activation factor and cup-shaped cotyledon (NAC) and dehydration-responsive element-binding (DREB) transcription factor families orchestrate pronounced gene expression changes upon drought stress, as demonstrated in Arabidopsis and crop species (Nakashima et al., 2014).

Stress exposure alters gene expression also beyond the duration of the stress phase, forming a molecular "memory" (Crisp et al., 2016; Fleta-Soriano and Munne-Bosch, 2016). A well-studied effect of stress-related memory is enhanced tolerance towards subsequent stress events, reflected by response differences between the first and subsequent stress challenges (Ding et al., 2012; Ding et al., 2013; Liu et al., 2016). This "primed response" is characterized by gene expression changes inducing damage protection, growth regulation, osmotic readjustment and coordination of hormone crosstalk (Ding et al., 2013). Such an expression memory can also involve chromatin remodeling through histone modifications (Lämke et al., 2016; Sani et al., 2013). Phenotypically, plants primed by drought stress have shown a higher photosynthesis rate during subsequent stress periods than non-primed plants (Wang et al., 2014). Even in the absence of a further stress challenge, plant performance can have signs of a stress-related memory after successful stress recovery, significantly differing from untreated control plants (Hagedorn et al., 2016; Xu et al., 2010). The molecular basis of this post-recovery phenotype is still largely unexplored. The present study focuses on gene expression changes during stress and after recovery in a woody plant species. In particular, we investigated expression characteristics of stress-related memory, which we define in the context of this work as a post-recovery steady state in stress-treated trees that is distinct from non-treated trees. Our analysis not only contrasts stress scenarios that differ in frequency and intensity but also compares responses in different tissues of poplar trees.

Simulating predicted regional climate conditions (IPCC, 2014) by applying simultaneous drought and heat spells at elevated atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO_2) concentrations expected in 2050, we explored how Gray poplars (*Populus* x *canescens*) that have recovered

from drought-heat stress differ from non-treated plants. We characterized the stress response and the stress-related post-recovery memory regarding leaf photosynthesis phenotypes and transcriptional responses of young ("sink") and mature ("source") leaves (Vanzo et al., 2015), phloem-bark, developing xylem and roots. Two stress scenarios of equal total duration were compared to contrast periodic, intermittent stress (PS) with chronic, continuous stress (CS).

The post-recovery effects of abiotic stress we observed at the transcriptome level extend the so far established concept of a molecular memory after stress exposure. While previous work has analyzed gene expression changes in response to recurrent versus initial stress challenges, our analysis additionally investigates stress-induced shifts in steady state after recovery, i.e., before a new stress challenge. Still, the aspect of recurrent versus one-time stress is covered by the two stress scenarios, which are compared to control scenarios not only at the end of the stress phase but also after recovery. The multifactorial study sheds new light on the regulatory architecture of memory-related gene expression networks after different climatic challenges and across multiple tree organs and tissues.

RESULTS

Impact of drought-heat stress periods on post-recovery photosynthetic performance

To get a systems level view on stress response and recovery in a woody plant species, we subjected groups of Gray poplar (*Populus* x *canescens*) trees to one of four climate scenarios and collected transcriptome samples from five tree compartments (organs and wood tissues) at two subsequent time points (Fig. 1). In addition, phenotypic measurements of leaf photosynthesis were recorded on attached leaves (Fig. 1A). The experiment was performed in climate chambers under highly controlled conditions, including a chronic drought and heat stress scenario at elevated CO_2 levels (CS scenario), a periodic drought and heat stress scenario at elevated CO_2 levels with two intermediate recovery periods (PS scenario), a control scenario at elevated CO_2 levels (EC scenario) and a control scenario at ambient CO_2 levels (AC scenario) (Vanzo et al., 2015). AC represents the current temperate climate as a reference point, which allowed us to estimate the effects of predicted future climate scenarios (EC, CS and PS). The stress phase of 22 days was followed by a recovery period of one

week at irrigation and temperature conditions that were equal to those for control plants (Methods). Phenotypic photosynthetic performance of mature leaves was assessed using gas exchange measurements (Jud et al., 2016; Vanzo et al., 2015). During the stress phase, the net CO_2 assimilation rate of leaves was significantly decreased for CS-treated poplar trees compared to the corresponding EC control trees (p.adj=0.0347). PS-treated trees showed intermediate levels (Fig. 1B). The same response pattern was found for the transpiration rate (Fig. 1C) and stomatal conductance (Fig. 1D). For all three physiological parameters, AC and EC controls were not significantly different. At the end of the recovery phase, the leaf transpiration rate and stomatal conductance of stress-treated trees reached similar levels as for the control trees, suggesting that the trees indeed had recovered from the combined drought and heat spells (Fig. 1C-D). The recovery of the physiological phenotype is also confirmed by the clear separation between stress phase and recovery measurements for each stress treatment and physiological parameter (Fig. 1B-D). Remarkably, the leaf net CO_2 assimilation rate of PS- and CS-treated trees was not only recovered but significantly higher than in AC trees (p.adj=0.0089 and p.adj=0.0388, respectively), with intermediate levels for EC trees (Fig. 1B). Evaluating continuous net ecosystem exchange measurements throughout the entire experiment (Vanzo et al., 2015), both PS- and CS-treatments led to a significant increase of the daily rates of canopy level C gain from photosynthesis during the second half of the recovery phase (days 26 to 29), in comparison with the control scenarios (Fig. 1E).

Shared effects between transcriptomic and phenotypic data

We integrated photosynthetic gas exchange data with RNA-seq data of mature leaves by regularized canonical correlation analysis (Le Cao et al., 2009) (Methods). RNA-seq reads were mapped to the *Populus trichocarpa* reference genome (Sundell et al., 2017; Tuskan et al., 2006). Both data types shared major stress and recovery effects, reflected by the first and second correlated component, respectively (Fig. 1F). For component one, the most representative phenotypic variable is the ratio between net CO_2 assimilation rate and stomatal conductance (Pearson correlation -0.96). The leaf transpiration rate showed a correlation of 0.95 with component one, consistent with the stomatal closure upon drought stress (Osakabe et al., 2014). The dominating genes for component one also have known stress response

functions. Among the top ten genes up-regulated in stress (correlation < -0.95), six genes were annotated as heat shock proteins (Potri.012G022400, Potri.010G195700, Potri.013G089200, Potri.017G130700, Potri.010G088600, Potri.010G053400), potentially acting as chaperones in protein folding. This could indicate a response to elevated leaf temperature caused by heat and lack of transpiration cooling (Kotak et al., 2007). Indeed, the mean temperature of mature leaves in the experiment increased to more than 35°C during PS and CS, whereas it ranged between 27°C and 30°C after recovery and for controls (see Fig. S4 of Vanzo et al., 2015). Considering all 589 genes that were up-regulated under PS and CS in mature leaves (log_2(fold change)>1, p.adj<0.05; Table S1), protein folding is also the top enriched Gene Ontology (GO) category (p.adj=5.64e-9; Table S2). At the same time, the top down-regulated variables associated with component one included a MYB (myeloblastosis) transcription factor (Potri.002G260000), a peroxidase (Potri.016G132666) and a glutaredoxin gene (Potri.014G134300), indicating changes in transcriptional regulation and stress signaling. Oxidoreductase, peroxidase and transcription factor activity functions were also significantly enriched among the genes down-regulated in mature leaves by both stresses, and along with them many other processes including protein phosphorylation, cell wall modification, proteolysis, transmembrane transport, cell division and defense response (Table S3). The recovery phase mature leaf samples are indistinguishable from control samples with respect to component one, suggesting the disappearance of major stress characteristics and thus successful recovery.

The second component linking phenotypic and gene expression data points to differences between recovery phase samples and untreated samples (Fig. 1F). Component two is characterized by an increased mean net CO_2 assimilation rate in the recovery samples (Pearson correlation 0.77), consistent with the phenotypic data analysis (Fig. 1B). Individual genes did not correlate significantly with component two, and the up-regulated genes shared by both stress treatments after recovery were not enriched for specific functions (Table S4). Nucleotide binding and ATPase activity for transmembrane movement were enriched among the down-regulated genes of both stress treatments but much more pronounced for CS (Table S5). PS-specific up-regulation was enriched for stress response genes (e.g. the heat shock protein Potri.004G073600, Table S4). Many genes were up-regulated only for one stress treatment type, for instance the putatively photosynthesis-associated plastocyanin-like domain gene Potri.001G332200 was only up-regulated for PS (Table S1, Fig. 2). This

indicates that post-recovery transcriptomes of PS and CS in mature leaves share more subtle, multivariate effects.

Systemic and tissue-specific stress responses

In addition to the mature leaf data described so far, we also obtained RNA-seq measurements from young leaves, phloem-bark, developing xylem and fine roots. This provides a comprehensive systems-level view on the transcriptional responses occurring during stress application and after recovery (Fig. 2). To simplify figure keys and description, the term "tissue" hereafter refers to exactly this set of organs and tissues. The predominant gene expression variation across biological samples was attributable to distinct tissue characteristics (Fig. 2A). Whole-tree gene expression profiles concatenating profiles of tissue samples from the same tree clearly separate PS and CS stress phase trees from controls and recovery phase trees (Fig. 2B). In all tissues, PS and CS evoked very similar transcriptomic responses relative to EC. Both for up- and down-regulated genes (abs(log_2 fold change)>1, p.adj<0.05), the observed overlap between the stress types was always larger than one or both of the stress type-specific fractions, suggesting that both scenarios evoke similar molecular stress responses in the tree (Fig. 2C, top panel). Among all tissues, the largest overlap between the two stress types was found in the developing xylem, indicating pronounced changes in the upward transport system of the plant. Significantly enriched GO functions (p.adj<0.05) among the up-regulated genes that overlap between PS and CS xylem samples include oxidoreductase activity, transcription factor activity, transporter activity and response to stress. In the root, genes encoding recognition proteins (e.g. lectin, glycoprotein) and ATPases were activated by both stress types, whereas common stress responses in phloem-bark and leaves were dominated by protein folding processes (Table S2). In total three genes were found to be up-regulated for each stress scenario in each tissue: Potri.T044100 (one of two co-orthologs of the TCP (TEOSINTE BRANCHED 1, CYCLOIDEA, PCF) family transcription factors AT5G41030 and AT3G27010), Potri.008G133200 (one of two co-orthologs of the O-glycosyl hydrolase AT2G01630) and Potri.001G293000 (not annotated).

Regarding the down-regulated genes in both stress types, the developing xylem showed many enriched processes, such as translation, microtubule-based movement, DNA

replication, carbohydrate metabolic process, cell wall, electron transfer activity and transmembrane transport, suggesting a down-regulation of cell division and growth (Table S3). Similarly, roots showed significant down-regulation of nucleosome, cell wall, electron transfer activity and carbohydrate metabolic process genes. For phloem-bark we also observed a significant transcriptional decrease of cell wall modification, microtubule-based movement and carbohydrate metabolic process. In addition, a strong reduction of proteolysis and response to oxidative stress was found in this tissue. The same was observed for down-regulated genes in young leaves, with an additional enrichment in fatty acid biosynthetic process, transmembrane transport, DNA replication and response to auxin. Along with the observations in mature leaves (see above), we can conclude that both stress treatments, CS as well as PS, had similar effects, leading to down-regulation of growth-related processes across all tissues.

However, we also found differences between PS and CS. In leaf and root tissues, PS induced more gene expression changes than CS, whereas the CS response was more pronounced than the PS response in xylem and phloem-bark tissues. The PS-specific up-regulated genes detected in root are enriched for ATPases acting as transporters. This up-regulation might be at least partially attributable to priming effects, since PS plants had experienced their third stress phase whereas CS plants were still in their first stress challenge at d22 (Fig. 1A). CS-specific up-regulated genes in developing xylem are enriched for ATPase activity and photosystem II functions. This gene expression up-regulation is consistent with previous observations that stem photosynthesis using internal CO_2 from respiration may play a role in young poplar plants especially during drought stress (Bloemen et al., 2016), although light penetration through the bark is limited (Pfanz et al., 2002). The CS-specific up-regulation of photosystem genes may reflect the slightly more severe water deficiency during CS (shoot midday water potential (ψ_{md}) -1.52±0.10 MPa) relative to PS (ψ_{md} -1.27±0.05 MPa) and controls (EC: ψ_{md} -0.97±0.07 MPa, AC: -0.97±0.04 MPa), increasing the need for C assimilation via a pathway that does not lead to further dehydration promoted by open stomata. CS-specific down-regulated genes in developing xylem are enriched for endoplasmatic reticulum and intracellular protein transport (Table S3). The gene regulations in the developing xylem illustrate the tissue specificity of stress responses, with a high similarity between periodic and chronic stress as well as stress-specific enhancement of processes.

Post-recovery characteristics of stress-treated trees

After one week of recovery from the periodic or chronic stress, respectively, the total number of differentially regulated genes relative to the EC control plants was lower than at the end of the stress phase across all poplar tissues (Fig. 2C). This suggests that the transcriptomes had left the stress state and approached the state of control plants again. The stress recovery was physiologically confirmed by measurements of gas exchange (Fig. 1C-D) and shoot water potentials, which had recovered to -0.72±0.10 MPa and -0.93±0.07 MPa in PS and CS, respectively (compare previous paragraph, Methods). In contrast to the stress phase observations, fewer differentially expressed genes were shared between PS and CS than were specifically up- or down-regulated in one of the two stress scenarios (Fig. 2C, bottom panel). This divergence between stress types during the recovery phase indicates that most stress-activated genes are no longer induced and that the recurrence or the duration of drought-heat stress alter the post-recovery processes of plants. In all tissues except mature leaves PS induced more recovery-phase up-regulated genes than CS.

The largest number of PS up-regulated genes occurred in young (sink) leaves (Vanzo et al., 2015), followed by mature (source) leaves. In young leaves, the gene expression up-regulation at recovery from PS was dominated by oxidation-reduction, coenzyme binding, hexosyl transferase and carbohydrate metabolic process GO terms (Table S4). The re-induction of carbohydrate metabolism gene expression after its decrease during stress (see above) indicates the reactivation of growth processes in young leaves. CS-specific expression patterns were characterized by a down-regulation of genes involved in unfolded protein binding, protein folding and response to stress for young leaves and down-regulation of oxidoreductase activity for phloem, indicative of stress recovery (Table S5). In contrast, for post-recovery mature leaves, PS-specific enrichment indicated continued activity of several stress response genes, e.g. with functions as heat shock protein (Potri.004G073600) or drought-related late embryogenesis abundant protein (Potri.010G012100). Also transcription factors showed a PS-specific transcriptional up-regulation in post-recovery mature leaves, e.g. Potri.006G221500, one of six poplar co-orthologs of Arabidopsis MYB123 involved in anthocyanin and pro-anthocyanidin biosynthesis. In agreement with that, anthocyanin levels of poplar leaves at the post-recovery time point were higher for PS than for EC and CS

(Vanzo et al., 2015). Transporter activity tended to be up-regulated in young leaves (p.adj=0.06) including many aquaporin genes (Potri.001G235300, Potri.009G005400, Potri.009G013900, Potri.009G027200), some of which were also up-regulated in other post-recovery tissues (phloem, mature leaves) of PS or CS trees and could be an indication of drought decline (Table S1).

Biochemical data that monitored the antioxidative system in mature leaves also confirm the recovery from the stressed state (Table S6), matching the gene expression response profiles (Fig. 2C). Leaves of PS-treated trees exhibited a significant decrease of relative reduced ascorbate content during the stress phase (p.adj=0.0347), indicating increased scavenging of reactive oxygen species (AbdElgawad et al., 2016). In contrast, all stress-treated and control trees displayed similar leaf levels of relative reduced ascorbate at the end of the recovery phase (Fig. 2D). In addition, we compared the treatment-related expression responses between post-recovery and stress-phase tissue samples to assess how much the molecular processes in each tissue differ between the two phases. Interestingly, the fraction of post-recovery up-regulated genes that already showed up-regulation during the stress phase varied widely among tissues, ranging from 58% in xylem to 7% in young leaves for PS and from 69% in xylem to 6% in mature leaves for CS (Fig. 2E). This suggests that for some tissues molecular processes after recovery resemble molecular processes during stress, whereas for other tissues post-recovery and stress responses are largely different. For instance, ATPases and transport functions played a major role in developing xylem during both phases, whereas for young leaves carbohydrate metabolism was down-regulated during stress (both PS and CS) and up-regulated after recovery.

Among different tissues, gene expression response patterns showed only little overlap (Fig. 3). During the recovery phase, we did not find any differentially expressed gene that responded across all tissues, neither in PS nor in CS. Nevertheless, the five tissues shared similar characteristic stress and post-recovery expression profiles that involved distinct co-expression modules in each tissue (Fig. 4, Methods, Table S7). Interestingly, more than half of these characteristic profiles exhibited a pronounced difference between stress-exposed plants and non-treated plants at the end of the recovery phase, indicative of stress-related memory (Fig. 4, bottom). For example, young and mature leaf modules in the memory community C12 contained the glutathione-S-transferase Potri.019G130566, which protects against oxidative damage, and the esterase Potri.017G062300 with highest similarity to an

Arabidopsis gene involved in maintaining the integrity of photosynthetic membranes during abiotic stress (Lippold et al., 2012). Only for a small fraction of genes, PS and CS showed similar cross-tissue memory response patterns (Fig. 5A, Fig. 2C). Among the different tissues, the most pronounced agreement was found for young and mature leaves. The observed divergence between PS and CS was not due to the fold change threshold (abs(log_2 fold change)>1); there were very few genes that satisfied the significance threshold (p.adj<0.05) but not the fold change threshold (Fig. S1). Differences between PS and CS expression levels were consistent with the control-based comparisons (Fig. 5B).

The co-analysis of spatially apart tissues allowed insights into the complexity of coordinated whole-plant long-term responses to periodically occurring stress. Strikingly, the stress and recovery profiles of individual genes along the different trees were not conserved across tissues (Fig. 6). Only for 0.2% of the genes, the expression of the same gene correlated well across all tissues (Fig. 6A). The largest number of self-correlated genes was found between young and mature leaves, reflecting functional similarity of these compartments (Fig. 6B). Furthermore, 995 genes were self-correlated between phloem and xylem. Among them, functions in oxidation-reduction processes, carbohydrate and protein metabolic processes as well as transmembrane transport and microtubule-based processes were abundant. The genes with the strongest self-correlation across all tissues included a large proportion of genes that exhibited a significant post-recovery memory pattern in PS (Fig. 6A, Table S1). The top five genes among them were the transcription factors *HOMEOBOX-LEUCINE ZIPPER PROTEIN 7 (HB7) co-ortholog 1(of4)* (Potri.014G103000) and *HB7 co-ortholog 3(of4)* (Potri.001G083700) as well as *GLUTAREDOXIN C1 co-ortholog 2(of2)* (Potri.012G082800) and two clade A protein phosphatases of the 2C family (PP2Cs), the *HIGHLY ABA-INDUCED 1* (*HAI1*) ortholog (Potri.009G037300) and Potri.001G092100. In *Arabidopsis thaliana*, HB7 is transcriptionally induced by ABA and positively regulates PP2C gene expression (Valdés et al., 2012).

Transcription factors associated with stress-related memory

Transcription factors (TFs) are key regulators at the top level of the molecular hierarchy. Since several memory genes showed similar stress and post-recovery responses across all tissues (Fig. 6A), we were interested whether there exist common regulatory mechanisms

among different tissues that may play a role in stress-related memory. We used our gene expression data from each tissue to infer regulatory relationships between known TFs (Berardini et al., 2015; Jin et al., 2014) and these 17 self-correlated memory genes, resulting in a gene regulatory network for each tissue (Fig. 7, Methods). Each of these tissue-specific networks has one main connected component or forms a single connected component, indicating that the self-correlated memory genes (Fig. 7A, gray nodes) share common top candidates of regulatory TFs (which were computationally inferred for each gene by choosing the top five expression predictors, Methods). The majority of candidate TFs were tissue-specific (Fig. 7A, white nodes), but a considerable fraction co-occurred across two up to four tissues. In particular, young and mature leaves shared ten candidate TFs. Edges also were shared across tissues, meaning that a specific TF was found in several tissues among the top five candidate regulators for a specific memory gene (Fig. 7A, colored edges; Fig. 7B). A relationship between *HB7 co-ortholog 1(of4)* (Potri.014G103000) and *HB7 co-ortholog 3(of4)* (Potri.001G083700) was predicted in all tissues except mature leaves. In the co-expression analysis, both of them fell into the tissue-specific co-expression modules of community C2, which was characterized by pronounced stress response during PS and CS (Fig. 4, Table S7). After recovery, a significant 20-fold PS up-regulation of *HB7 co-ortholog 3(of4)* gene expression was observed for both xylem and mature leaves as well as a 200-fold PS up-regulation of the *HB7 co-ortholog 1(of4)* gene for the xylem. In contrast, CS trees did not show significant changes in the expression of these genes relative to control trees (Table S1). The two *HB7* TFs were also central in the sense that together they covered all putative targets (non-TF memory genes) of their subnetwork and their removal would disconnect the network into several parts (Fig. 7B). The HB7 TFs are members of the homeodomain leucine zipper (HDZIP) family. In Arabidopsis, HB7 has been associated with drought stress response as well as reduced cell elongation in leaves and in the inflorescence stem (Hjellström et al., 2003; Söderman et al., 1996). *HB7* has also been identified as a drought stress memory gene that showed a stronger up-regulation at the third stress experience than after a single incidence (Ding et al., 2013). Under non-stress conditions, HB7 overexpression has been related to an increase in chlorophyll content and photosynthesis rate (Re et al., 2014), consistent with our physiological observations at the recovery phase.

The expression of the *HB7 co-ortholog 1(of4)* (Potri.014G103000) gene itself is putatively related to the expression of the TFs Potri.006G138900, which was found to be a co-predictor

with Potri.001G083700 for several putative target genes, and Potri.002G125400 (Fig. 7B). Potri.002G125400 is annotated as *ABSCISIC ACID RESPONSIVE ELEMENTS-BINDING FACTOR 2 (ABF2) co-ortholog 1(of2)*. Arabidopsis ABF2 is known to enhance drought tolerance (Nakashima et al., 2014). Potri.006G138900 is a member of the ethylene response factor/ APETALA2 (ERF/AP2) TF family. The closest Arabidopsis ortholog in its evolutionary family, PTHR31985:SF77 (Mi et al., 2017), is AT5G21960, which belongs to the DREB subfamily A-5 with established functions in drought stress response (Singh and Laxmi, 2015). In poplar, the Potri.006G138900 gene has been reported to be induced by four different types of osmotic stresses (Yao et al., 2017). In our data, significant up-regulation of this gene was only observed for PS and not for CS. In Arabidopsis*, RELATED TO AP2 1* (*RAP2.1*), a prominent member of the DREB gene subfamily A-5, is also more induced after repeated application of dehydration stress (Ding et al., 2013). RAP2.1 acts as a negative regulator of *RD/COR* (*RESPONSIVE TO DESICCATION/ COLD-REGULATED*) genes (Dong and Liu, 2010). Poplar *RAP2.1* Potri.014G025200 and the other poplar DREB TF having Arabidopsis RAP2.1 as the closest match were significantly up-regulated in xylem both during PS and CS. Consistently, the *COR413* gene Potri.007G033801 was significantly down-regulated under these conditions.

A relationship between two (TEOSINTE BRANCHED 1, CYCLODEA, PROLIFERATING CELL FACTORS (TCP) family TFs was inferred in young and mature leaves (Fig. 7B, Table S8). Both TFs, Potri.013G119400 and Potri.019G091300, are most similar to the Arabidopsis TF TCP4. Gene expression of Potri.013G119400 was significantly down-regulated after recovery from PS both in young and mature leaves compared with untreated controls. During PS and CS, both TFs were transcriptionally down-regulated in young and mature leaves (Table S1). In the remaining tissues, the expression patterns of the two TFs diverged from each other. For the developing xylem, Potri.013G119400 was down-regulated but Potri.019G091300 was up-regulated. The putative leaf target, Potri.010G230366, does not have a known function, but expression was also strongly up-regulated in the developing xylem for PS and CS, and more than 50-fold after recovery from PS. Potri.013G119400 gene expression was also down-regulated in phloem and roots, whereas there was no change for Potri.019G091300. TCP4 has been associated with cell elongation in hypocotyls and leaf morphogenesis (Challa et al., 2016). The differential regulation across tissues during stress and recovery in Gray poplar may reflect different cell growth dynamics. While water deficiency

generally suppresses growth in above-ground poplar tissues, xylem structure and secondary cell wall formation play a central role in avoiding drought damage and are highly regulated (Paul et al., 2018; Sun et al., 2017).

Common and tissue-specific processes in stress-related memory

To further elucidate and compare stress-related memory processes taking place in individual poplar tissues, we investigated the regulatory networks for mature leaves and developing xylem (Fig. 8). These were the two tissues where the HB7 TFs, the top correlated genes within and across tissues (Fig. 7B, Fig. 6A), showed the strongest post-recovery memory response (Table S1). For each tissue network, we specifically focused on TFs that were computationally associated with more than one putative target as predictor of gene expression (Fig. 8A). Among the targets that were included in the core networks of both mature leaves and developing xylem, we found two *PP2C*s (the *HAI1* ortholog (Potri.009G037300) and an *HAI3*-related *PP2C*, Potri.001G092100), the two *LATE EMBRYOGENESIS ABUNDANT PROTEIN 4-5* (*LEA 4-5*) co-orthologs and a gene of unknown function with an almost 100-fold up-regulation in PS and a more than 150-fold up-regulation after PS recovery in mature leaves (Potri.004G044300), whose closest Arabidopsis match has been reported to be induced by ABA in guard cells (Leonhardt et al., 2004). Also the two PP2Cs and the *LEA 4-5* co-orthologs were up-regulated both in PS and after PS recovery for mature leaves (Fig. 8A). Poplar LEA4-5 protein levels have been observed to be highly increased for osmoprotection in drought stress conditions (Abraham et al., 2018). In Arabidopsis, *LEA4-5* transcript and protein levels showed the largest response to ABA and salt stress within the LEA4 group (Olvera-Carrillo et al., 2010).

PP2Cs act as negative regulators of ABA signaling and hamper stomatal closure, as demonstrated for example by protein interactions of the PP2C HYPERSENSITIVE TO ABA 1 (HAB1) in *Populus euphratica* and the PP2C ABA-INSENSITIVE 1 (ABI1) in *Populus trichocarpa* as well as transgenic overexpression in Arabidopsis (Chen et al., 2015; Yu et al., 2016). In Arabidopsis, the PP2C HAI1 (SAG113; AT5G59220) prevents stomatal closure during leaf senescence and its promoter is directly targeted by a NAC TF (NAC029, AtNAP; AT1G69490) (Zhang and Gan, 2012). In the mature leaf regulatory network inferred from our data, expression of the *HAI1* ortholog (Potri.009G037300) was not only associated with

expression of the *HB7* TFs (Potri.014G103000, Potri.001G083700) but also with expression of the NAC TF Potri.011G123300 and the MYB family TFs Potri.010G193000 and Potri.003G100100, which belong to different ortholog groups (Fig. 8A). The association between the latter three genes and the *HAI1* ortholog was not detected in developing xylem. In fact, the Pearson correlation coefficients in developing xylem were 0.61, 0.30 and 0.26, respectively, in contrast to the highly significant values in mature leaves (0.94, 0.91 and 0.93). The gene Potri.011G123300 belongs to the NAC TF family due to its NAM (no apical meristem) domain; it is a member of the NAC019-related subfamily of orthologs, PTHR31719:SF82 (Mi et al., 2017). NAC TFs, and in particular the three Arabidopsis members of that subfamily, NAC019, NAC055 and NAC072, are known to be of central importance in drought signal transduction via the ABA-dependent pathway (Singh and Laxmi, 2015; Tran et al., 2004). Gene expression of the MYB TF Potri.010G193000 is negatively correlated with the wood saccharification potential in poplar, which decreases with drought (Wildhagen et al., 2018). Consistent with this observation, our expression data showed an up-regulation of Potri.010G193000 gene expression under stress. The same pattern was observed for mature leaves and in the case of PS even persisted after recovery. Furthermore, Potri.010G193000 is in general co-expressed with Potri.007G085700, the TF gene *TGACG SEQUENCE-SPECIFIC BINDING PROTEIN 1 (TGA1)* (Wildhagen et al., 2018). Interestingly, several Arabidopsis orthologs of inferred regulators of HAI1 in mature poplar leaves were connected via experimental and literature-curated protein-protein interaction data (Arabidopsis Interactome Mapping Consortium, 2011; Berardini et al., 2015; Yazaki et al., 2016), including TGA1 (Fig. 8B). The *TCP4* orthologs discussed above (Potri.019G091300, Potri.013G119400) were strongly transcriptionally anti-correlated with the *HB7* co-ortholog Potri.001G083700, which was found as a central predictor for the two *PP2C*s and both *LEA4-5* orthologs in mature leaves.

In developing xylem, the *HB7* co-ortholog Potri.001G083700 was also associated with these *PP2C*s and *LEA4-5* orthologs, which have known physiological functions related to drought. In both tissues, Potri.001G083700 gene expression continued to be up-regulated after PS recovery. In addition, the core networks of xylem and mature leaves shared the putative target *GLUTAREDOXIN C1 (GRXC1) co-ortholog 2(of2)* (Potri.012G082800), showing post-recovery PS up-regulation in both tissues. With respect to abiotic stress, GRXC1 has roles in signaling and oxidative stress tolerance (Li, 2014). Another shared putative target was

Potri.002G117800, one of two *NADH DEHYDROGENASE (UBIQUINONE) FE-S PROTEIN 4 (NDUFS4)* genes that are involved in the mitochondrial electron transfer chain and have been associated with thermotolerance in Arabidopsis (Kim et al., 2012). With respect to additional TFs, the xylem network showed several differences to the network from mature leaves (Fig. 8A). The ERF/AP2 DREB TF Potri.006G138900 (see also previous section) was a large hub in addition to the HB7 TF Potri.001G083700, which formed a central hub in both tissues. The BHLH18-related TF Potri.009G081400 (BASIC HELIX-LOOP-HELIX 18) was unique to the xylem network, associated with *GRX1*, *LEA4-5* and both *PP2C*s and still significantly up-regulated after PS recovery. A xylem-specific putative regulator of both HB7 TFs was the BHLH TF Potri.014G111400, one of three *PHYTOCHROME-INTERACTING FACTOR 3 (PIF3)* genes. Arabidopsis PIF3 promotes hypocotyl elongation (Soy et al., 2012; Zhong et al., 2012). In summary, our data suggest that common TFs such as HB7, in particular the central hub gene Potri.001G083700, work together with tissue-specific TFs to coordinate stress and post-recovery processes in different tissues.

DISCUSSION

Although drought stress is one of the major threats to plant growth, it is well-known that plants having endured stress can show better photosynthetic performance than non-exposed plants both under subsequent stress (Wang et al., 2014) and under well-watered conditions (Hagedorn et al., 2016), which may even lead to over-compensating plant growth (Xu et al., 2010). We investigated Gray poplar trees that had experienced three weeks of drought-heat stress. After one week of recovery, we observed not only a complete reconstitution of transpiration and photosynthetic capacity along with a relaxation of water potentials but also an increased rate of carbon gain compared to non-stressed controls, both for a periodic and a chronic stress scenario. Transcriptomic analyses across five different organs and tissues revealed cellular processes occurring in response to combined drought and heat stress and after recovery. Post-recovery expression patterns showed significant differences to non-treated poplar trees and also between the two stress scenarios, although the PS and CS responses had been highly similar at the end of the stress phase. This observation substantiates the hypothesis that stress exposure influences the physiological state of a plant even after recovery and that this long-term response varies according to the frequency or

duration of stress intervals. This memory phenomenon of trees occurring already a few days after the stress ceased hints at powerful molecular mechanisms, which potentially could also make a difference in plant fitness across multiple successive years. Such a life-cycle investigation was outside the scope of the current study. However, the results show that such a long-term investigation might be highly valuable when carefully designed.

Similar expression patterns in response to stress and after recovery were found throughout the tree. However, they were implemented by distinct genes in each tissue. Only a small number of genes showed a consistent response profile across all tissues. Apart from genes encoding signaling components and enzymes like PP2Cs and GRXC1 or proteins with structural function like the LEA4-5 hydrophilins (Battaglia et al., 2008), this set of genes with putatively ubiquitous function contained several TFs, most prominently two HB7 TFs that also showed a PS-related post-recovery up-regulation. HB7 contains a homeodomain and a leucine zipper motif. This protein architecture indicates that the TF forms dimers (Ariel et al., 2007). TF homo- or heterodimerization as well as multimerization allow for a high degree of regulatory fine-tuning in gene expression. We therefore speculate that TF complexes might play a role in shaping stress and post-recovery regulation of gene expression in the tissue-specific context (Fig. 8B). Protein-protein interaction data from the model system *Arabidopsis thaliana* suggest that HB7 and some TFs from the NAC019 and MYB TF families with leaf-specific responses in poplar (best Arabidopsis matches AT4G27410 and AT5G05790, respectively) may all associate with TGA1 and a set of ZHD (zinc-finger homeodomain) TFs, which were expressed in all poplar tissues according to our dataset. Another putative interactor of TGA1, the only HEAT STRESS TRANSCRIPTION FACTOR C-1 (HSFC1) TF in poplar (Potri.T137400), was predicted as a regulator of the *HB7* co-ortholog Potri.001G083700 and the two *PP2C*s in phloem-bark (Table S8). The family of ZHD TFs has been shown to act as heterodimers playing a crucial role in floral development (Tan and Irish, 2006) as well as ABA response (Wang et al., 2011) in Arabidopsis. Co-expression of the NAC019 family gene AT4G27410 and ZHD11 strongly induces the expression of *EARLY RESPONSIVE TO DEHYDRATION STRESS 1*, which is up-regulated by drought through the ABA-independent pathway (Tran et al., 2007).

Combined action of several TFs putatively regulates the expression of target genes. The up-regulation of *PP2C*s in mature poplar leaves observed in our study is consistent with the positive regulatory role of HB7 in *PP2C* expression reported for Arabidopsis (Valdés et al.,

2012). Furthermore, NAC TFs regulate the *PP2C HAI1* (Zhang and Gan, 2012) and other drought tolerance genes (Singh and Laxmi, 2015; Tran et al., 2004). PP2Cs inactivate SNF1-related protein kinases of type 2 (SnRK2s) that are positive regulators of ABA signaling, stomatal closure and chlorophyll degradation (Fujii et al., 2011; Gao et al., 2016; Kulik et al., 2011; Nakashima et al., 2009; Valdés et al., 2012). Consistently, HB7 overexpression leads to an increased chlorophyll content and a higher photosynthesis rate (Re et al., 2014). Moreover, different PP2Cs interact with the photosynthetic machinery (Fuchs et al., 2013; Samol et al., 2012), and photosynthesis genes are up-regulated in *snrk2* triple mutants (Nakashima et al., 2009), proposing a relationship between PP2Cs and photosynthesis. Translating these findings to poplar, the model would explain an improved photosynthesis of recovered poplar trees after periodic stress (Fig. 8C). Chlorophyll content estimates did not show differences to the controls (Vanzo et al., 2015) but were done non-invasively in contrast to the Arabidopsis studies (Gao et al., 2016; Re et al., 2014). The increase of ABA levels during drought stress inhibits enzyme activity of clade A PP2Cs like HAI1 and HAI3 via interacting ABA receptors (Dupeux et al., 2011; Tischer et al., 2017). Due to this mechanism, leaf stomata can close during drought to prevent excessive water loss (Fig. 8C). For poplar, stress-induced stomatal closure was confirmed by our measurements of transpiration and stomatal conductance. Protein-protein interactions of PP2Cs with a SnRK2 kinase and pyrabactin resistance-like ABA receptors and their effect on leaf stomatal closure in transgenic plants have been shown for several poplar species (Chen et al., 2015; Yu et al., 2016), yielding evidence on the potential role of PP2Cs in poplar leaves during and after stress. Apart from that, PP2Cs may also be involved in chromatin remodeling and the establishment of an epigenetic memory after stress (Asensi-Fabado et al., 2017).

The system-wide gene expression rearrangement after stress recovery might also contribute to the improved tolerance against future stresses described previously (Crisp et al., 2016; Hilker et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2014). In Arabidopsis, HB7 and LEA4-5, prominent memory-related genes from our study, are more strongly induced at repeated dehydration stress challenges than at the first stress challenge (Ding et al., 2013). Complementing such studies on recurrence-dependent changes in stress responses, our data provide a comprehensive view on stress-related molecular memory under non-stress, post-recovery conditions. The increased base levels of HB7 and LEA4-5 gene expression after stress recovery could potentially explain the higher levels at subsequent stress challenges. Consistent with such a

model, the periodic stress response was greater than the chronic stress response in leaves and the post-recovery base level increase was only significant for periodic stress and not for chronic stress, suggesting a gradual base level increase along with several stress experiences. The same trend was observed in the photosynthesis data. A better understanding of the molecular changes, their timing and their impact on the performance of plants is instrumental in providing guidelines for resource-efficient agroforestry water management and in breeding of crop and tree cultivars that are genetically equipped for climate change scenarios. The present evaluation indicates that transcription factors as central switches of a molecular memory may be important mediators of plant fitness in persistent adaptation to recurrent abiotic stress. The biological hypotheses generated by our comprehensive data acquisition and integration pave the way for detailed mechanistic studies that will provide deeper insights into memory-related molecular processes in plants.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Plant material

The experiments were performed with wild-type plants of Gray poplar (*Populus* x *canescens* [INRA clone 7171-B4]; syn. *Populus tremula* x *Populus alba*). Plantlets were amplified by micro-propagation under sterile conditions (Leple et al., 1992) and raised for five weeks in 2.2-L pots on a sandy soil (1:1 [v/v] silica sand and Fruhstorfer Einheitserde, initially mixed with slow-release fertilizers: Triabon [Compo] and Osmocote [Scotts Miracle-Gro], 1:1, 10 g L^{-1} soil; every two weeks fertilized with 0.1% [w/v] Hakaphos Grün [Compo]) in the greenhouse (16/8 h photoperiodicity with supplemental lighting, 200-240 µmol photons m^{-2} s^{-1} at the canopy level, photosynthetically active radiation [PAR]; day/ night temperature 22 °C/ 18 °C; and an ambient mean CO_2 concentration of 380 µL L^{-1}). Then the plants were moved to phytotron chambers to simulate specific climate scenarios. Within each chamber, 12 plants were cultivated together in a gas-tight sub-chamber made of acrylic glass (about 1 m^3), which enabled online analysis of canopy gas exchange (Vanzo et al., 2015).

606 **Simulated climate conditions and harvesting schedule**

607 The future climate scenarios simulated in our experiments comprised elevated CO_2 (EC) and
608 two abiotic stress scenarios under elevated CO_2, periodic drought-heat stress (PS) and
609 chronic drought-heat stress (CS). Before starting the abiotic stress scenarios, plants were
610 cultivated for 25 days in the phytotron chambers at control conditions (daily maximum air
611 temperature of 27°C, 50% relative air humidity) with either ambient (380 µL L^{-1}) or elevated
612 (500 µL L^{-1}) CO_2. The CO_2 concentrations in all scenarios followed natural occurring diurnal
613 variations. The elevated CO_2 environment in the EC, PS and CS scenarios was created by
614 injection of pure CO_2 (+ 120 µL L^{-1}) into the air stream of the ambient CO_2. In the chronic
615 stress treatment, irrigation was gradually reduced for 22 days, down to 70% reduction
616 compared with the controls. The periodic stress treatment included three cycles of reduced
617 irrigation (50%, 60% and 70% reduction compared to controls), each one lasting for six days;
618 between the cycles, there were recovery periods lasting two days. In both stress scenarios,
619 the daily maximum air temperature was set to 33°C during periods with reduced irrigation.
620 Non-invasive gas exchange measurements were made continuously; destructive harvests of
621 six plants per chamber were performed at the end of the stress phase and after one week of
622 recovery (Vanzo et al., 2015). Mid-day shoot water potentials (ψ_{md}) were determined at each
623 sampling date (n=6 plants per treatment, mean ± se) using a Scholander pressure chamber
624 (Scholander et al., 1965). In chronically and periodically stress-treated plants ψ_{md} was more
625 negative (-1.52±0.10 and -1.27±0.05 MPa, respectively) compared to a ψ_{md} of -0.97±0.04
626 MPa in AC and of -0.97±0.07 MPa in EC shoots. At recovery ψ_{md} went back to -0.72±0.10
627 and -0.93±0.07 MPa in PS and CS, respectively, reaching comparable values as the
628 untreated controls in AC (-0.77±0.07 MPa) and EC (-0.90±0.06 MPa).

629

630 **Gas exchange measurements**

631 Leaf-level gas exchange measurements were performed using two GFS-3000 instruments
632 (Walz, Germany) with an 8 cm^2 clip-on-type cuvette on attached leaves (no. 9 from the apex)
633 of four biological replicates under standard conditions (30°C, 1000 µmol photons m^{-2} s^{-1}, and
634 air humidity of 10,000 µL L^{-1}). The cuvette was flushed with synthetic air having the CO_2
635 concentration of the respective growth condition. For each climate chamber, CO_2 and water
636 concentrations in the ambient air were measured every 20 min with two infrared gas

analyzers (Rosemount 100/4P, Walz, Germany) from the outlet of the gas-tight sub-chamber with the plants. Inlet air was also measured every 20 min. From the difference between the outlet and inlet concentrations of each sub-chamber, the whole plant (canopy) net CO_2 exchange and evapotranspiration were calculated according to the equation of von Caemmerer and Farquhar (von Caemmerer and Farquhar, 1981). These fluxes of CO_2 and water were then normalized using the canopy leaf area estimation of every given day (Jud et al., 2016; Vanzo et al., 2015).

Organ and tissue sampling

Plants were harvested at noon at the last day of stress treatment and seven days later at the end of the recovery period. Leaves (young leaves n. 4-6, mature leaves n. 9-12 counting from the apex, respectively) were immediately frozen in liquid N_2. A stem segment of 10 cm was cut 10 cm above the stem base and immediately frozen in liquid N_2. The roots were washed three times in water, carefully dabbed with filter paper and then also frozen in liquid N_2. All material was stored at -80 °C until homogenization. Homogenization of plant materials was performed under liquid N_2 with mortar and pestle. The bark containing the phloem tissue was removed from the stem section with a scalpel. Young developing xylem tissue was obtained by scraping off the first 1-2 mm of the hardwood section. The homogenized material of mature leaves was used both for biochemical analysis and RNA extraction, all other material only for RNA extraction. Although leaf and root samples are mixtures of several tissues, the different plant materials are referred to as tissues throughout this work.

Biochemical measurements of the antioxidative system

Enzyme activities and molecular antioxidant levels from four biological replicates were determined as previously described (AbdElgawad et al., 2016). Molecular antioxidants were quantified by HPLC, after extraction of frozen plant material in hexane (tocopherols) or in ice-cold meta-phosphoric acid (ascorbate, glutathione). Enzyme activities for superoxide dismutase, peroxidase, catalase, ascorbate peroxidase, glutathione peroxidase, glutathione reductase, dehydroascorbate reductase, and monodehydroascorbate reductase were

666 determined using a micro-plate reader after extraction of frozen plant material in potassium
667 phosphate buffer supplemented with protease inhibitors.

668

669 **RNA-seq analysis**

670 RNA extraction was performed as described by Bi et al. (Bi et al., 2015). Total RNA was
671 extracted from 50 mg frozen tissue using the Aurum Total RNA Mini kit (Bio-Rad, Germany)
672 following the manufacturer's instructions. The RNA concentration was quantified using a
673 NanoDrop 1000 photometer (NanoDrop, Peqlab GmbH, Erlangen, Germany). The 260/230
674 and 260/280 ratios were in the range of 1.90 to 2.67 (mean 2.21) and 1.94 to 2.45 (mean
675 2.12), respectively. RNA integrity was confirmed by an Agilent Bioanalyzer 2100 (Agilent
676 Technologies, USA). For each specific combination of environmental condition, time point and
677 tissue, RNA samples from three biological replicates were analyzed by Illumina sequencing
678 (100 bp single reads, HiSeq 2500, Illumina, Inc., San Diego, CA, USA) of mRNA libraries
679 (NEBNext Ultra directional RNA library prep Kit Illumina, New England Biolabs, Inc., Ipswich,
680 MA, USA), yielding RNA-seq reads for 120 samples in total. The biological replicates are
681 samples from different individual trees grown under the same condition and harvested at the
682 same time. For each tree, samples from all five tissues were sequenced, except for two cases
683 where RNA extraction from the initial sample failed (260/230 ratio 0.42 and 1.4, respectively)
684 and samples from additional trees had to be taken as replacement: AC recovery root sample
685 replicate 1 and PS stress xylem sample replicate 3 (Table S9). RNA-seq reads were aligned
686 against the repeat-masked version of the *Populus trichocarpa* reference genome (assembly
687 version v3.0) (Tuskan et al., 2006) using TopHat2 (Kim et al., 2013). To account for the
688 evolutionary distance between Gray poplar and the used reference genome, different
689 alignment stringency levels were tested. For that purpose, three different sequencing libraries
690 were randomly selected and RNA-seq reads mapped against the reference genome allowing
691 from two up to six mapping errors per read (Fig. S2). About 70% of the RNA-seq reads were
692 aligned when allowing a maximum of five errors in the read alignments, which is relatively
693 similar to RNA-seq analysis in other plants (International Barley Genome Sequencing
694 Consortium et al., 2012). Due to the relatively constant proportion of uniquely mapped reads
695 for the considered error levels (Fig. S2B), we continued the analysis with the maximum
696 threshold of five errors (Fig. S3).

Based on the read alignments and the *P. trichocarpa* annotation version v3.1 at the Phytozome platform (Goodstein et al., 2012; Tuskan et al., 2006), TPM gene expression levels were calculated using StringTie version 1.3.4 (Pertea et al., 2015). The biological replicates showed high Pearson correlation coefficients (computed by the cor function in R version 3.5.0 (R Core Team, 2018)) except for one single case (Fig. S4), which was excluded from further analysis. Differentially expressed genes between PS or CS and EC groups were identified by the R package DESeq2 version 1.20.0 (Love et al., 2014) using the script provided at http://ccb.jhu.edu/software/stringtie/dl/prepDE.py. Gene annotation including functional description and Gene Ontology (GO) terms were retrieved from the *Populus trichocarpa* reference annotation version v3.1 at the Phytozome platform (Goodstein et al., 2012; Tuskan et al., 2006). GO enrichment analysis for categories with at least fifty genes was performed in R version 3.5.0 (R Core Team, 2018) using fisher.test and multiple testing correction by p.adjust using the false discovery rate (FDR) method.

Co-expression network analysis

The co-expression network analysis focused on the environmental conditions with elevated CO_2 levels, omitting the AC (ambient CO_2) condition. For each tissue, $\log_2$(TPM+1)-transformed gene expression levels were averaged for each condition and time point and genes were filtered for a minimum coefficient of variation of 0.3 (Fig. S5). Individual co-expression modules for each tissue were determined using the R packages WGCNA version 1.64-1, flashClust version 1.01-2 and dynamicTreeCut version 1.63-1 (Langfelder and Horvath, 2008, 2012; Langfelder et al., 2008). The parameters were set to "hybrid signed" network, "average" agglomeration, split sensitivity 1 and a minimum cluster size of 50. Then the module eigengenes (Langfelder and Horvath, 2007), characteristic expression profiles of modules, were clustered across all tissues into communities, according to their correlation. This step was performed using again flashClust and dynamicTreeCut ("average" agglomeration, deep split set to true and a minimum cluster size of 2). Communities that contain modules from all five tissues were visualized with the tkplot and plot functions in the R package igraph version 1.2.2 (Csardi and Nepusz, 2006). The corresponding heatmaps were plotted using the R packages pheatmap version 1.0.10, gridExtra version 2.3 and ggplot2 version 2.2.1 (Auguie, 2017; Kolde, 2018; Wickham, 2009).

Between-tissue correlations and gene regulatory network analysis

To investigate tissue-specific regulation of universally responding genes, we first determined individual genes that behaved similarly in all the tissues and then predicted their regulation by transcription factors (TFs) using the RNA-seq data. In the first step, gene-gene correlations across individual trees from all treatment groups were computed using the cor function in R version 3.5.0 on the $\log_2$(TPM+1)-transformed gene expression data (R Core Team, 2018). In particular, correlation values of the same gene across all pairs of tissues were recorded and the 17 genes with a median greater than 0.8 and significant post-recovery difference to controls in at least one tissue (abs($\log_2$ fold change)>1 and p.adj<0.05 according to the DESeq2 analysis) were selected as query genes for further analysis. Since observations for these genes were quite complete (less than twenty values with expression level zero in the whole dataset with 119 samples), we focused the regulatory network analysis on genes with at most twenty zero values. TF family annotation for *Populus trichocarpa* and *Arabidopsis thaliana* was downloaded from PlantTFDB (Jin et al., 2014) on 03.09.2018. Poplar genes were included as candidate TFs in the analysis if they themselves as well as their best Arabidopsis match according to the Phytozome annotation v3.1 (Goodstein et al., 2012; Tuskan et al., 2006) were both classified as TFs, resulting in 1346 candidates. For each query gene, the top regulatory candidates were determined from the gene expression data of each tissue separately using the R package GENIE3 version 1.2.1 (Aibar et al., 2017; Huynh-Thu et al., 2010). Networks were drawn with the R package igraph version 1.2.2 (Csardi and Nepusz, 2006). For visualization purposes, the top five candidates are shown for each query gene.

Protein-protein interaction analysis

Experimental and literature-curated protein-protein interaction data for *Arabidopsis thaliana* were obtained from datasets of interactome publications and from the TairProteinInteraction file (time stamp: 2011-08-23) at The Arabidopsis Information Resource (Arabidopsis Interactome Mapping Consortium., 2011; Berardini et al., 2015; Yazaki et al., 2016) and compiled into a single network. The network was visualized with Graphviz version 2.36

(Gansner and North, 2000). Due to the prominent transcriptional stress-related memory response observed for the HB7 TF Potri.001G083700 and its predicted target, the HAI1 ortholog Potri.009G037300, combined with the known physiological role of HAI1 in *Arabidopsis thaliana* leaves and the dimerization motif of HB7, we investigated the interactomes of Arabidopsis orthologs for all TFs that were predicted to regulate Potri.009G037300 in mature leaves and showed a significant differential expression in PS vs. EC after recovery. The subnetwork connecting AT2G46680 (HB7) and AT4G27410 (closest match from the NAC019 orthology group) was evident from visual inspection of the network, and the connection to the MYB TF AT5G05790 was found computationally by neighborhood intersection. All three TFs did not have any other interactions than the ones shown in the subnetwork (Fig. 8B).

Further statistical analysis

Treatment group comparisons for the gas exchange and antioxidant data were performed using the R package dunn.test with the FDR method "bh" as a post-hoc Dunn's test after application of the Kruskal-Wallis test using kruskal.test in R version 3.5.0 (R Core Team, 2018). Dimension reduction for data visualization was also done in R. To show common variation between the gas exchange data (eight parameters) and the $\log_2$(TPM+1)-transformed gene expression data in mature leaves, we selected the hundred most varying genes and applied regularized canonical correlation analysis using the rcc function from the mixOmics package version 6.3.2 (Gonzalez et al., 2011; Le Cao et al., 2009) and an analytical estimate of the regularization parameter (Schäfer and Strimmer, 2005). Principal component analysis of the whole gene expression dataset was performed with the prcomp function in R version 3.5.0 (R Core Team, 2018). Ellipses for 75% confidence levels were constructed from the expression data using the dataEllipse function of the R package car version 3.0-2 (Fox and Weisberg, 2011). Venn diagrams for differentially expressed genes (abs($\log_2$ fold change)>1 and p.adj<0.05 according to the DESeq2 analysis) were created with the R package venn version 1.7 (Dusa, 2018), and the gene-wise expression heatmap was generated with the heatmap.2 function of the gplots R package version 3.0.1 (Warnes et al., 2016).

Accession numbers

The RNA-seq data have been deposited in the ArrayExpress database at EMBL-EBI (https://www.ebi.ac.uk/arrayexpress/experiments/E-MTAB-6121). R scripts for the data analysis are available at https://github.com/georgii-helmholtz/samm.

Supplemental Data

SupplementalFigures.pdf (includes legends for Supp. Tables)

SuppTableS1.xlsx

SuppTableS2.xlsx

SuppTableS3.xlsx

SuppTableS4.xlsx

SuppTableS5.xlsx

SuppTableS6.xlsx

SuppTableS7.xlsx

SuppTableS8.xlsx

SuppTableS9.xlsx

Acknowledgements

The work was financially supported by the European Science Foundation (ESF) Eurocores programme 'EuroVOL' within the joint research project 'MOMEVIP', the European Plant Phenotyping Network (EPPN) funded by the EU FP7 Research Infrastructures Programme [no. 284443], the German Ministry of Education and Research projects 'PROBIOPA' [no. 0315412] and German Plant Phenotyping Network (DPPN) [no. 031A053C], the Belgian Fund for Scientific Research [no. GA13511N] and by the Austrian Science Funds [no. I655-B16].

The authors thank Pascal Falter-Braun, Daniel Lang and Georg Haberer for helpful comments.

Author contributions

J.-P.S., K.F.X.M., K.P., H.A. and A.H. designed the research. E.V., M.A.D., W.J. and R.R. performed the experiments. E.G., K.K., M.P., K.B., H.AE. and M.S. analyzed the data. E.G. wrote the paper with contributions of J.-P.S., K.F.X.M., K.K., K.P., A.R.S. and M.S.; all authors checked and revised the manuscript.

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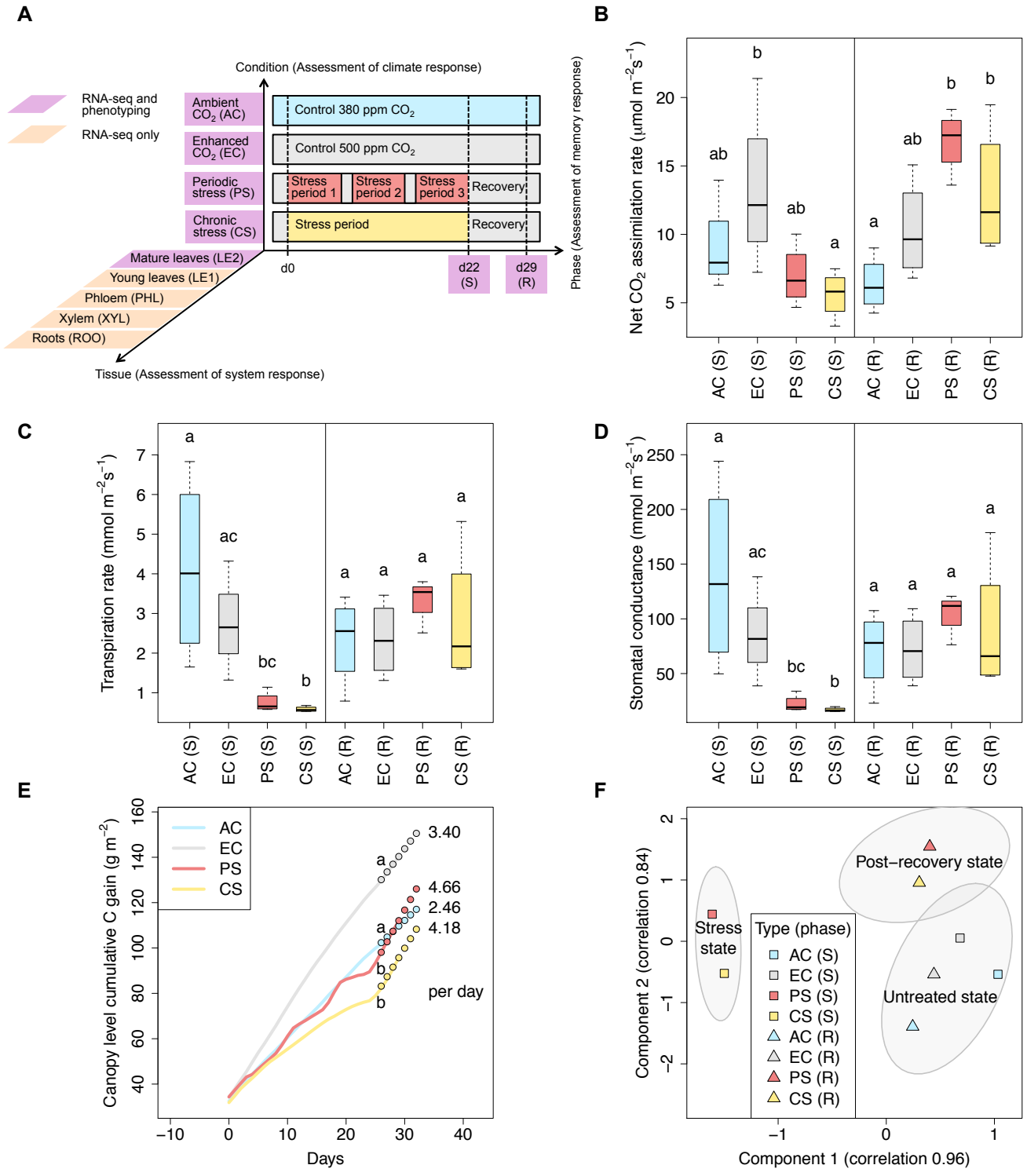
A
Condition (Assessment of climate response)
RNA-seq and phenotyping
RNA-seq only
Ambient CO2 (AC)
Enhanced CO2 (EC)
Periodic stress (PS)
Chronic stress (CS)
Control 380 ppm CO2
Control 500 ppm CO2
Stress period 1
Stress period 2
Stress period 3
Recovery
Stress period
Recovery
d0
d22 (S)
d29 (R)
Phase (Assessment of memory response)
Mature leaves (LE2)
Young leaves (LE1)
Phloem (PHL)
Xylem (XYL)
Roots (ROO)
Tissue (Assessment of system response)
B
Net CO2 assimilation rate (µmol m−2s−1)
AC (S)
EC (S)
PS (S)
CS (S)
AC (R)
EC (R)
PS (R)
CS (R)
C
Transpiration rate (mmol m−2s−1)
D
Stomatal conductance (mmol m−2s−1)
E
Canopy level cumulative C gain (g m−2)
AC
EC
PS
CS
3.40
4.66
2.46
4.18
per day
Days
F
Component 2 (correlation 0.84)
Component 1 (correlation 0.96)
Stress state
Post−recovery state
Untreated state
Type (phase)
AC (S)
EC (S)
PS (S)
CS (S)
AC (R)
EC (R)
PS (R)
CS (R)

Figure 1. Effect of climatic stress on post-recovery photosynthetic performance of poplar trees. (**A**) The 3D experimental design to investigate climate response of *P.* × *canescens* trees regarding memory aspects and systemic effects. Plants from four environmental conditions including ambient CO_2 control (AC), enhanced CO_2 control (EC), periodic drought-heat stress (PS) and chronic drought-heat stress (CS) are examined both at the end of a 22-day stress phase (S) and after one week of recovery (R). At the day of the stress treatment start (d0), plants are 8.5 weeks old and already 25 days under AC and EC control climates. For fully developed leaves, both phenotypic and transcriptomic measurements are available, the four other tissues are covered only by transcriptomic data. (**B**-**D**) Comparison of leaf-level gas exchange rates (leaf no. 9 from the apex) across environmental conditions (Kruskal-Wallis test with posthoc Dunn's test, Benjamini-Hochberg adjustment, p.adj<0.05). (**E**) Carbon gain determined by online gas exchange analysis for the gas-tight sub-chamber of each environmental condition. The slope (shown by circles) is estimated from the last four measurements (day 26 to day 29; Kruskal-Wallis test with posthoc Dunn's test, Benjamini-Hochberg adjustment, p.adj<0.05). (**F**) Projection on the top two components from canonical correlation analysis between gas exchange data and $\log_2$(TPM+1)-transformed per-gene RNA-seq data of the hundred most varying genes in mature leaves across the four conditions and two treatment phases. Each data point represents the mean of biological replicates for the given group; due to destructive harvesting, stress phase RNA-seq measurements were obtained from different biological samples than the continuous gas exchange measurements. Ellipses mark 0.75 confidence levels estimated from the replicates.

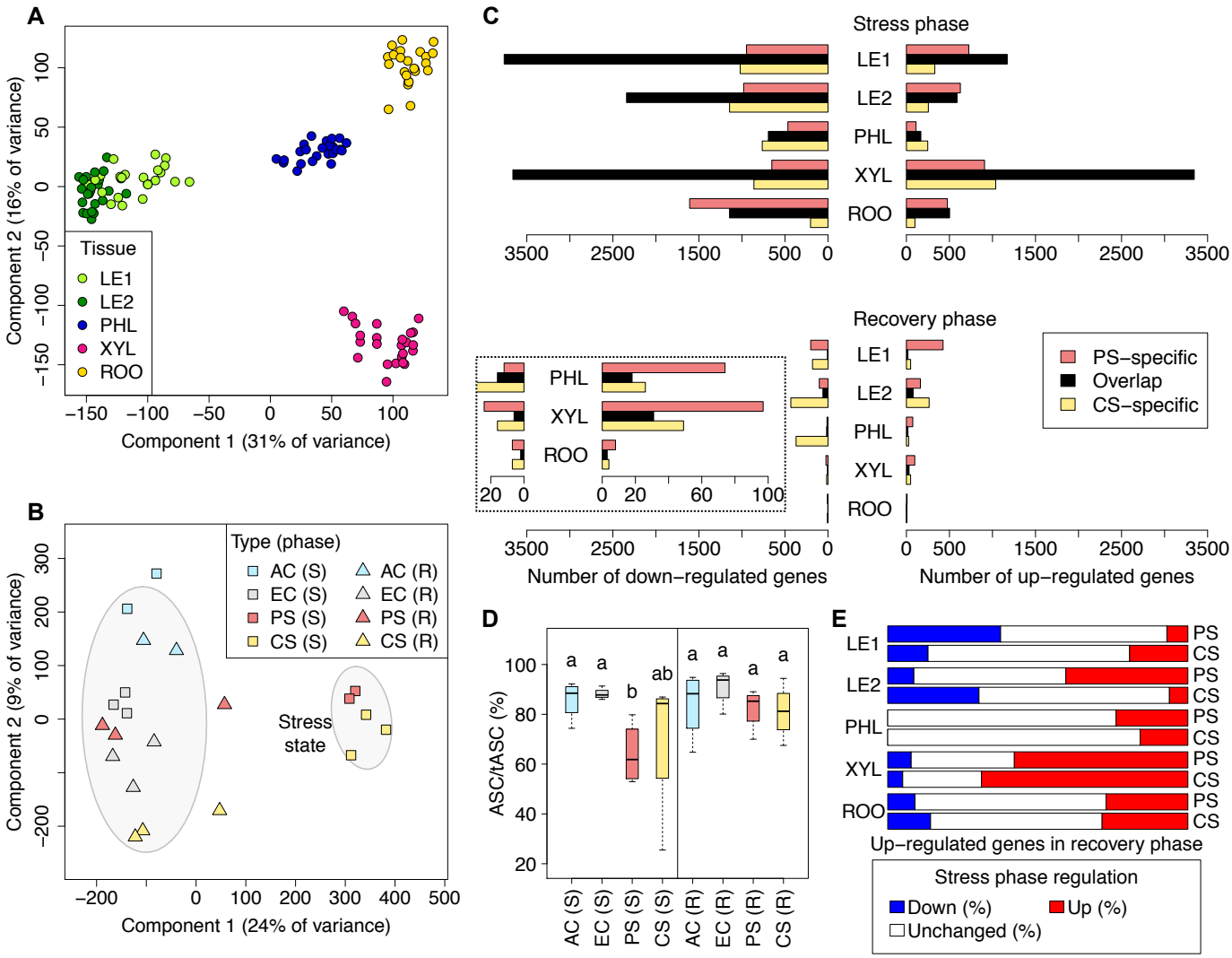

Figure 2. System-wide comparison of poplar gene expression at stress, recovery and control conditions. (**A**) Projection on top two components from principal component analysis of $\log_2$(TPM+1)-transformed per-gene RNA-seq data from all samples across four climate conditions, two treatment phases, five different tissues and three biological replicates per group. Data points are colored by tissue (LE1: young leaves, LE2: mature leaves, PHL: phloem, XYL: xylem, ROO: root). (**B**) Principal component analysis of poplar trees with complete RNA-seq measurements from all five tissues, concatenating all tissue measurements from the same tree (Methods). Ellipses mark the 0.75 confidence contour for stressed trees and all other trees (AC: ambient CO_2, EC: enhanced CO_2, PS: periodic stress, CS: chronic stress; S: stress phase, R: recovery phase). (**C**) Differentially expressed genes overlapping between periodic (PS) and chronic stress treatment (CS) or unique to each stress type. Differential expression was determined relative to untreated EC controls, for each tissue and treatment phase separately (fold change > 2, p.adj < 0.05). The dashed box shows a zoom-in for the three bottommost groups. (**D**) Comparison of antioxidant levels in mature leaves across environmental conditions (Kruskal-Wallis test with posthoc Dunn's test, Benjamini-Hochberg adjustment, p.adj<0.05). The y axis gives the percentage of functional, reduced ascorbate relative to total ascorbate (oxidized and reduced forms). (**E**) Stress-recovery overlap of up-regulated genes. For each tissue, the percentage of stress phase down- or up-regulation of genes up-regulated in the recovery phase relative to control plants is given (fold change > 2, p.adj < 0.05).

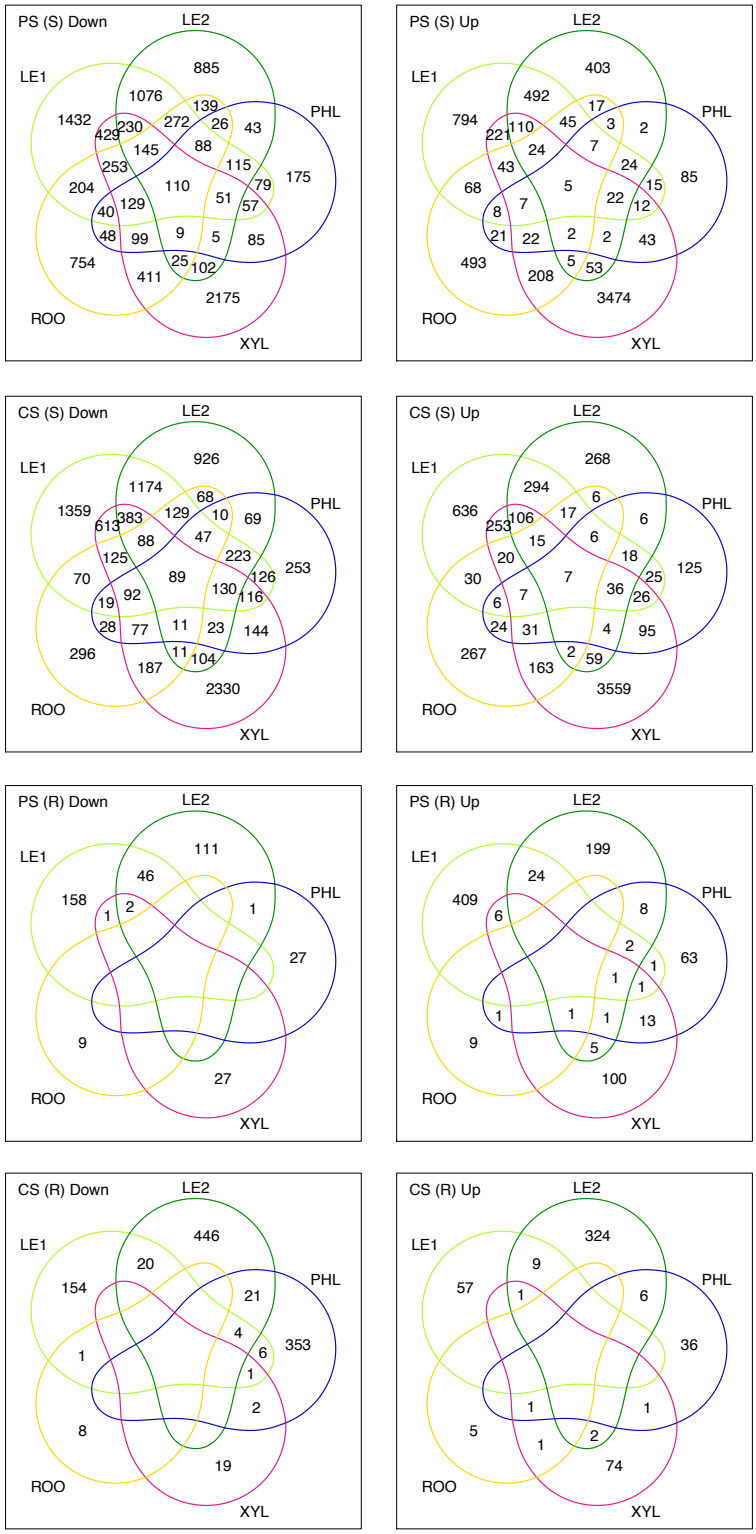

Figure 3. Tissue overlap of differentially expressed poplar genes during stress and recovery phases. Each Venn diagram gives the number of up- or down-regulated genes for a specific treatment type and a specific phase in comparison to untreated controls (LE1: young leaves, LE2: mature leaves, PHL: phloem, XYL: xylem, ROO: root; PS: periodic stress, CS: chronic stress; S: stress phase, R: recovery phase).

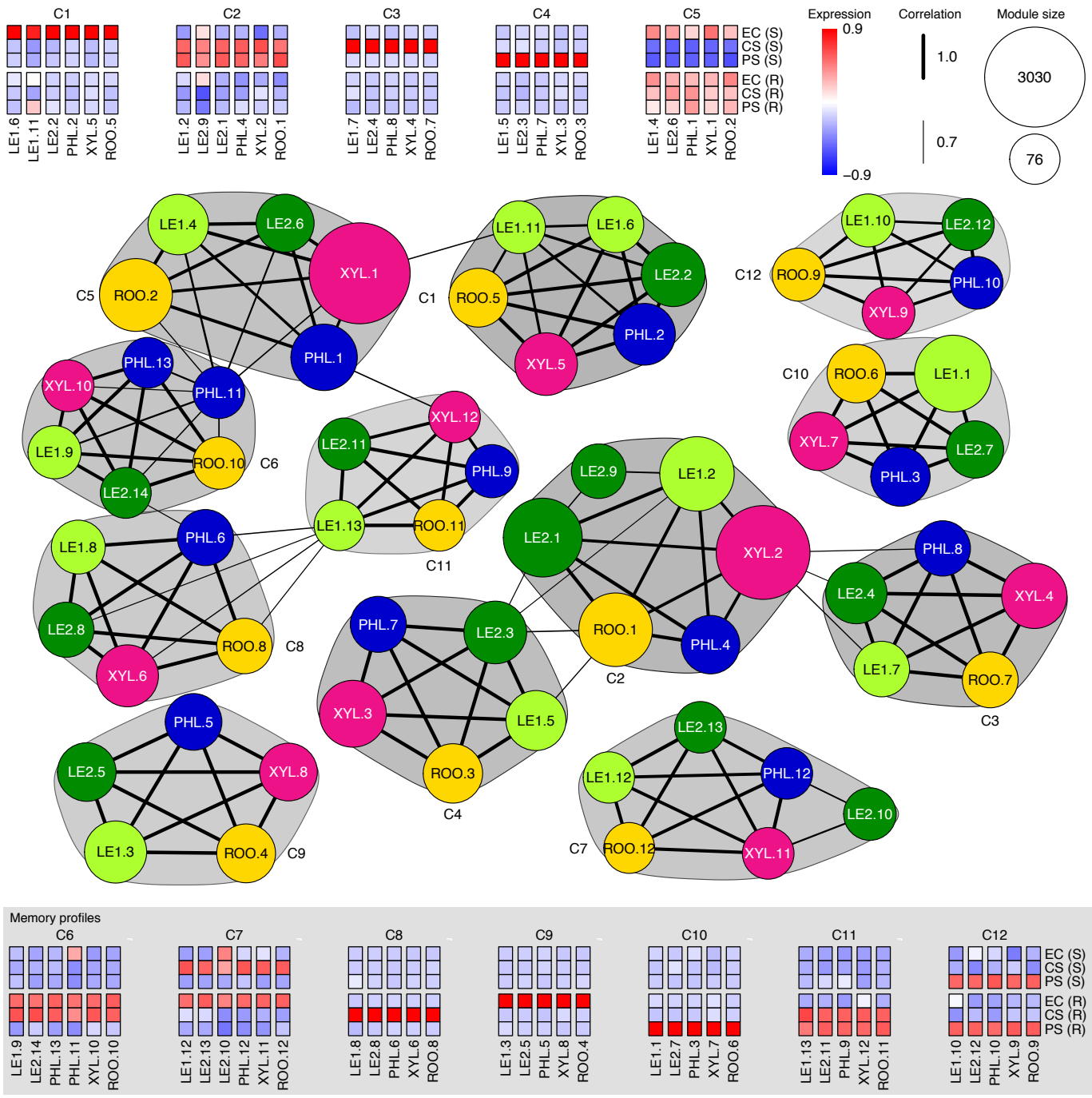

Figure 4. Characteristic poplar gene expression profiles across stress, recovery and control conditions shared by all tissues. Each network node represents a co-expression module of a specific tissue (Methods) indicated by the respective node color (identical code to Fig. 2A) and the prefix of the node label (LE1: young leaves, LE2: mature leaves, PHL: phloem, XYL: xylem, ROO: root). Subsequent numbers in the node label identify the module within each tissue in decreasing order of the module size, which is indicated by node size. Each module is represented by its eigengene profile, which is the first principal component oriented according to average expression. The correlation of module eigengenes was used to cluster modules into communities (Methods). The figure shows all communities that contain modules from all five tissues together with heatmaps of the corresponding eigengenes. Communities are marked by gray polygons and C identifiers (decreasing shades of gray with increasing identifier numbers). For correlation values > 0.7, edges are depicted between module nodes and the edge width represents the correlation strength. The heatmaps with background shading exhibit a pronounced difference between stress-exposed plants and non-treated plants at the end of the recovery phase for at least one stress type, indicative of stress-related memory (EC: elevated CO_2 control, CS: chronic stress, PS: periodic stress; S: stress phase, R: recovery phase). Community C9 putatively represents age-related changes that only occur in non-stressed plants.

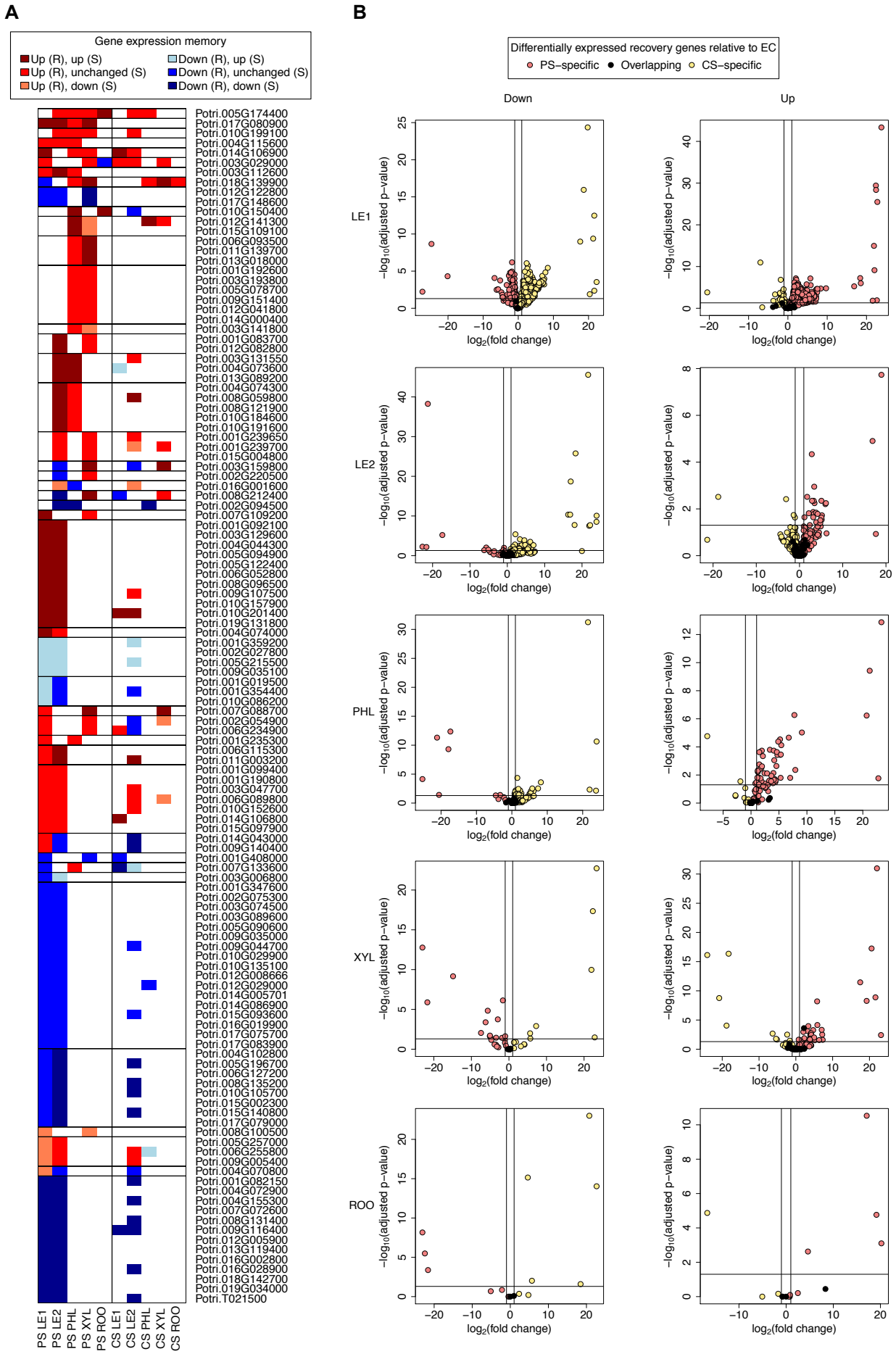
A
Gene expression memory
Up (R), up (S)
Up (R), unchanged (S)
Up (R), down (S)
Down (R), up (S)
Down (R), unchanged (S)
Down (R), down (S)
PS LE1
PS LE2
PS PHL
PS XYL
PS ROO
CS LE1
CS LE2
CS PHL
CS XYL
CS ROO
B
Differentially expressed recovery genes relative to EC
PS−specific
Overlapping
CS−specific
Down
Up
LE1
LE2
PHL
XYL
ROO
−log10(adjusted p−value)
log2(fold change)

Figure 5. Gene expression memory after recovery from periodic vs. chronic stress. (**A**) Poplar genes with cross-tissue memory responses, i.e. transcriptional up- or down-regulation in post-recovery stress relative to enhanced CO_2 (EC) control samples. The heatmap shows periodic stress (PS) and chronic stress (CS) expression patterns of all genes with PS memory response in at least two tissues (LE1: young leaves, LE2: mature leaves, PHL: phloem, XYL: xylem, ROO: root, R: recovery phase, S: stress phase). (**B**) Direct PS (R) vs. CS (R) comparison of differentially expressed recovery genes determined relative to EC control (see A and Fig. 2C). For each tissue, volcano plots show the distribution of overlapping and stress type-specific differential genes (left: down-regulation, right: up-regulation), taking adjusted p-values and fold changes from the direct comparison. Volcano plots for the respective PS vs. EC and CS vs. EC comparisons are available in Fig. S1.

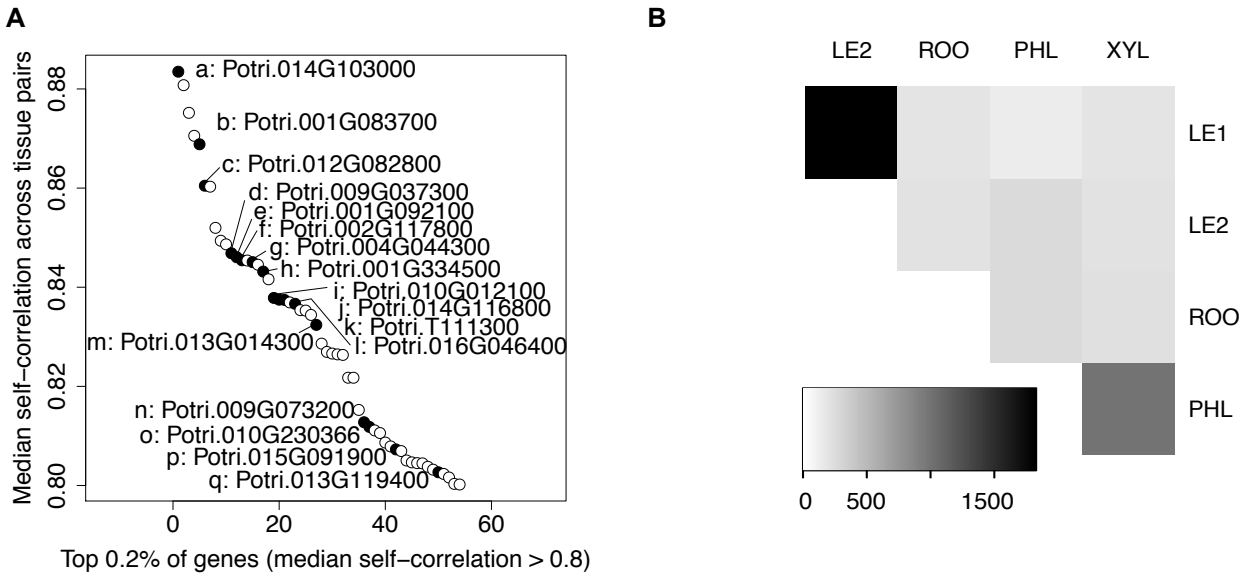

Figure 6. Expression self-correlation of genes across tissues based on fully sampled individual trees. (**A**) The genes with the strongest self-correlation across all tissues. Among them are many genes with periodic stress memory expression pattern in at least one tissue, marked in black and annotated from top to bottom (letters a-q). (**B**) Heatmap showing the number of genes with self-correlation > 0.8 between individual tissues (LE1: young leaves, LE2: mature leaves, PHL: phloem, XYL: xylem, ROO: root).

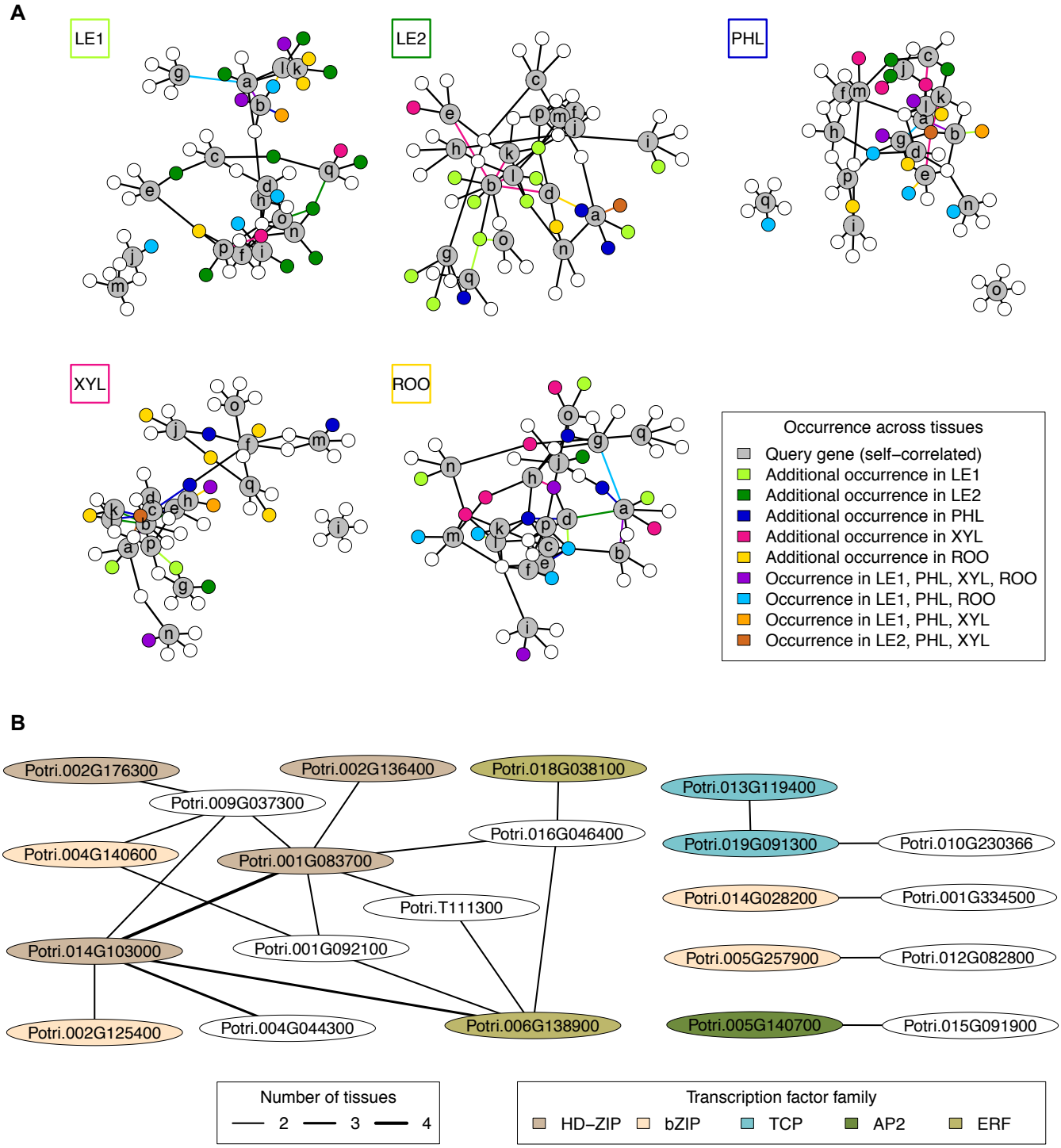

Figure 7. Gene regulatory networks of stress-related multi-tissue memory genes. (**A**) Tissue-specific transcription factor networks around self-correlated genes (gray nodes, labeled by letter code from Fig. 6A). For each tissue network, colored nodes and edges indicate their co-occurrence across several tissue networks (see color key). If nodes or edges occur only in one additional tissue (except the currently considered tissue indicated in the box at the top left of each network), they have the characteristic color of that additional tissue. For example, ten transcription factors occur only in the networks of both young and mature leaves (dark green and light green nodes in the first and second network, respectively). Likewise, nodes q and o are connected to the same transcription factor in these networks (dark green and light green edges in the first and second network, respectively). (**B**) Regulatory relationships co-occuring across tissues. The edge width is proportional to the number of tissues where a specific regulatory relationship was found. Transcription factor nodes are colored according to their transcription factor family.

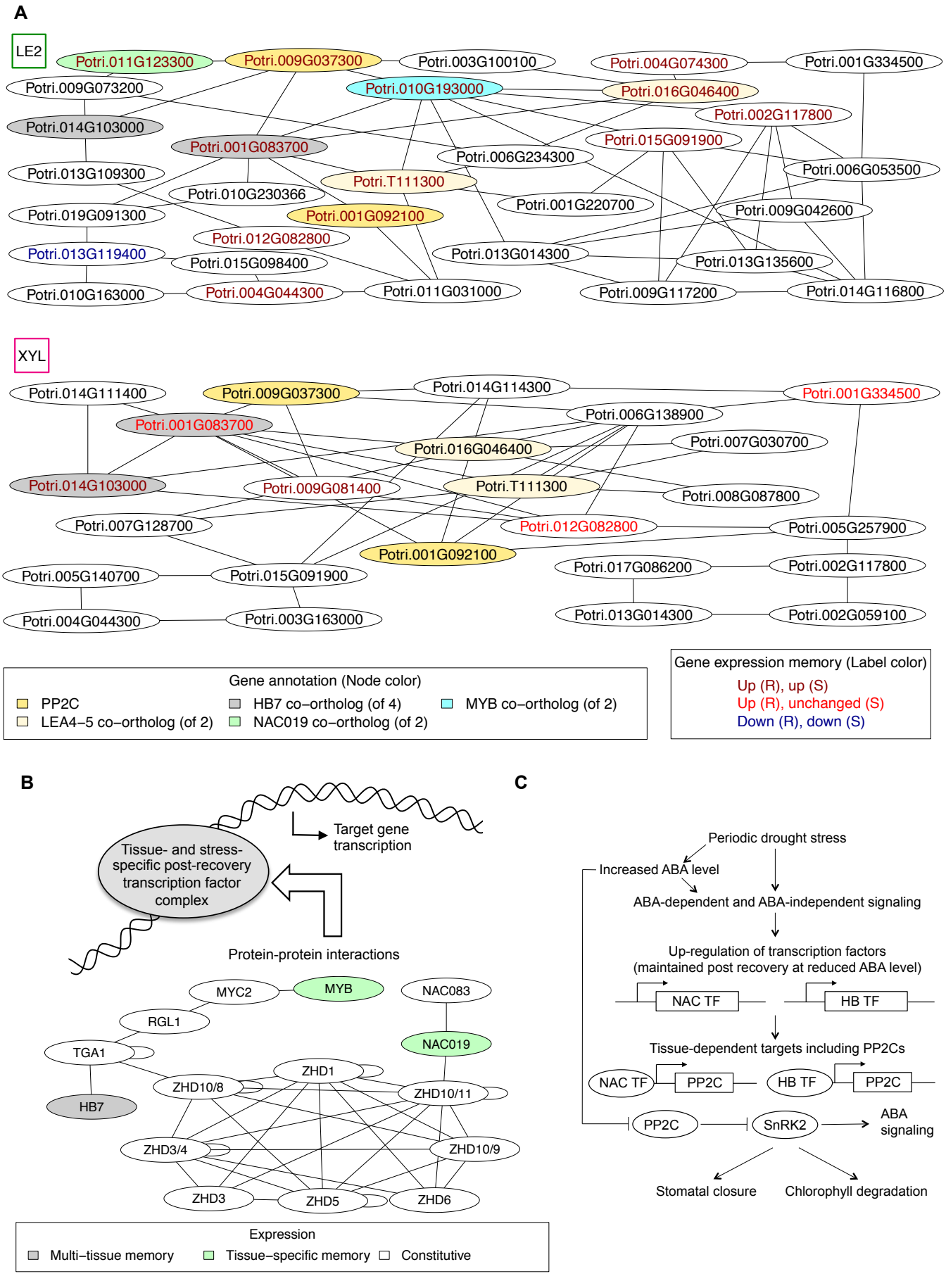
A
LE2
Potri.011G123300
Potri.009G037300
Potri.003G100100
Potri.004G074300
Potri.001G334500
Potri.009G073200
Potri.010G193000
Potri.016G046400
Potri.014G103000
Potri.002G117800
Potri.001G083700
Potri.015G091900
Potri.006G234300
Potri.013G109300
Potri.006G053500
Potri.T111300
Potri.010G230366
Potri.001G220700
Potri.019G091300
Potri.009G042600
Potri.001G092100
Potri.012G082800
Potri.013G119400
Potri.013G014300
Potri.015G098400
Potri.013G135600
Potri.010G163000
Potri.004G044300
Potri.011G031000
Potri.009G117200
Potri.014G116800
XYL
Potri.014G111400
Potri.009G037300
Potri.014G114300
Potri.001G334500
Potri.006G138900
Potri.001G083700
Potri.016G046400
Potri.007G030700
Potri.014G103000
Potri.009G081400
Potri.T111300
Potri.008G087800
Potri.007G128700
Potri.012G082800
Potri.005G257900
Potri.001G092100
Potri.017G086200
Potri.002G117800
Potri.005G140700
Potri.015G091900
Potri.013G014300
Potri.002G059100
Potri.004G044300
Potri.003G163000
Gene annotation (Node color)
PP2C
HB7 co–ortholog (of 4)
MYB co–ortholog (of 2)
LEA4–5 co–ortholog (of 2)
NAC019 co–ortholog (of 2)
Gene expression memory (Label color)
Up (R), up (S)
Up (R), unchanged (S)
Down (R), down (S)
B
Target gene transcription
Tissue- and stress-specific post-recovery transcription factor complex
Protein-protein interactions
MYC2
MYB
NAC083
RGL1
NAC019
TGA1
ZHD1
ZHD10/8
ZHD10/11
HB7
ZHD3/4
ZHD10/9
ZHD3
ZHD5
ZHD6
Expression
Multi–tissue memory
Tissue–specific memory
Constitutive
C
Periodic drought stress
Increased ABA level
ABA-dependent and ABA-independent signaling
Up-regulation of transcription factors
(maintained post recovery at reduced ABA level)
NAC TF
HB TF
Tissue-dependent targets including PP2Cs
NAC TF
PP2C
HB TF
PP2C
PP2C
SnRK2
ABA signaling
Stomatal closure
Chlorophyll degradation

Figure 8. Predicted regulatory stress-related memory processes in mature leaves (LE2) and developing xylem (XYL). (**A**) Core regulatory networks obtained by iteratively removing single-edge nodes from expression-based regulatory network predictions (Fig. 7A). Node label colors refer to periodic stress-related expression patterns. Function annotation is shown for selected nodes discussed in the main text. Potri.010G193000 is a co-ortholog of the *Arabidopsis thaliana* MYB transcription factor AT5G05790, here abbreviated as MYB. (**B**) Model of possible transcription factor complex formation in stress-related memory derived from protein-protein interaction data in *Arabidopsis thaliana*. Gene names are taken from the orthology information in Phytozome. For some ZHD ortholog groups, different *Arabidopsis* genes (marked by an *Arabidopsis* ZHD identifier after the slash) constitute the best BLASTP matches of poplar genes. (**C**) Model suggesting physiological role of protein phosphatases of type 2C (PP2Cs) and regulatory transcription factors in mature leaves during and after periodic stress.

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