

1 Title: Forward and Reverse Genetic Dissection of Morphogenesis Identifies Filament-
2 Competent *Candida auris* Strains

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9 Running Head: Genetic Regulation of *C. auris* Morphogenesis

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24 **Abstract**

25 *Candida auris* is an emerging healthcare-associated pathogen of global concern.
26 Although this organism does not display the same morphological plasticity as the
27 related fungal pathogen *Candida albicans*, recent reports have identified numerous *C.*
28 *auris* isolates that grow in cellular aggregates or filaments. However, the genetic
29 circuitry governing *C. auris* morphology remains largely uncharacterized. Here, we
30 developed an *Agrobacterium*-mediated transformation system to generate mutants
31 exhibiting aggregating or filamentous cell morphologies. Aggregating strains were
32 associated with disruption of homologs of *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* chitinase and
33 chitin synthase regulatory proteins, including components of the Regulation of *ACE2*
34 Morphogenesis (RAM) pathway, while disruption of a homolog of the *S. cerevisiae*
35 *ELM1* gene resulted in a novel filamentous strain of *C. auris*. To facilitate targeted
36 genetic manipulation, we developed a transiently expressed Cas9 and sgRNA
37 expression system for use in *C. auris*. Transformation using this system significantly
38 increased the efficiency of homologous recombination and targeted integration of a
39 reporter cassette in all four clades of *C. auris*. Using this system, we generated targeted
40 deletion mutants to confirm the roles of RAM and Elm1 proteins in regulating *C. auris*
41 morphogenesis. Overall, our findings provide novel insights into the genetic regulation
42 of aggregating and filamentous morphogenesis in *C. auris*. Furthermore, the genetic
43 manipulation tools described here will allow for inexpensive and efficient manipulation of
44 the *C. auris* genome.

45

46 **Importance**

47 *Candida auris* is an emerging and often multi-drug resistant fungal pathogen
48 responsible for outbreaks globally. Current difficulties in performing genetic
49 manipulation in this organism remain a barrier to understanding *C. auris* biology.
50 Homologous recombination approaches can result in less than 1% targeted integration
51 of a reporter cassette, emphasizing the need for new genetic tools specific for
52 manipulating *C. auris*. Here, we adapted *Agrobacterium*-mediated transformation and a
53 transient Cas9 and sgRNA expression system for use in forward and reverse genetic
54 manipulation of *C. auris*. We demonstrated the efficacy of each system by uncovering
55 genes underlying cellular morphogenesis in *C. auris*. We identified a novel filamentous
56 mutant of *C. auris*, demonstrating that this organism has maintained the capacity for
57 filamentous growth. Our findings provide additional options for improving the genetic
58 tractability of *C. auris*, which will allow for further characterization of this emerging
59 pathogen.

60

61 **Introduction**

62 Since its 2009 isolation from the ear canal of a patient in Japan, the emerging
63 fungal pathogen *Candida auris* has caused infections and outbreaks in at least 44
64 countries on 6 continents (2). The global prevalence of *C. auris* is characterized by the
65 seemingly simultaneous emergence of four distinct genetic clades, differing on the scale
66 of hundreds of thousands of single nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs), with a potential
67 fifth clade recently identified (3, 4). Individual isolates exhibit significant heterogeneity
68 both within and between clades in murine models of infection and colonization (5, 6).
69 The continually increasing understanding of biologically and clinically relevant

70 phenotypic variation among *C. auris* isolates, and the variation between *C. auris* and
71 other well-studied model organisms, emphasizes the need for facile genetic
72 manipulation approaches to allow for mechanistic characterization of this organism.

73 Although *C. auris* does not form filaments under many of the same environmental
74 cues that induce hyphal growth in *C. albicans* (7), numerous reports of irregular or
75 multicellular growth indicate *C. auris* does exhibit cellular polymorphism. Depletion of
76 the essential molecular chaperone *HSP90* and genotoxic stress induced by
77 hydroxyurea result in elongated cell growth (7, 8). Growth in high salt concentrations
78 induces cell elongation (9). Strains exhibiting filamentous, elongated, or aggregating
79 morphologies have also been isolated from populations of *C. auris* cells following
80 murine infection (10, 11). Numerous reports detail patient isolates with multicellular
81 aggregating properties, often described by a failure of cell aggregates to disperse upon
82 mixing or vortexing (12–15). Aggregating isolates exhibit reduced biomass in biofilm
83 formation and lower virulence in *Galleria mellonella* infection models compared to non-
84 aggregating counterparts (12, 16). Still, the genetic determinants of irregular
85 morphogenesis in *C. auris* remain largely unexplored due in part to difficulties in
86 performing genetic manipulation in this organism.

87 Transformation of *C. auris* is complicated by low rates of targeted integration and
88 variable transformation efficiency among isolates and clades. The use of RNA-protein
89 complexes of purified Cas9 and gene-specific guide RNAs, referred to as Cas9-
90 ribonucleoproteins (RNPs), to promote homology directed repair demonstrably
91 increases transformation efficiency and targeted integration rates (17). Transformation
92 incorporating RNPs is often the method of choice for manipulating the *C. auris* genome,

93 and variations exist using multiple gRNA target sites to further improve targeted
94 integration efficiency (18). The use of RNPs in transformation, however, comes with
95 increased expense and additional technical considerations during transformation. In
96 *Candida albicans*, transformation with linearized gene cassettes encoding Cas9 and
97 sgRNA promote homozygous gene deletion; these cassettes cannot be detected in the
98 genome of transformants, suggesting they are transiently expressed and not stably
99 integrated (19). A similar transiently expressed CRISPR-Cas9 system promotes
100 targeted genetic manipulation in *Cryptococcus neoformans* (20). We hypothesized that
101 specific adaptation of the transiently expressed CRISPR-Cas9 system to use *C. auris*-
102 recognized promoters would increase the rates of targeted transformation efficiency.

103 A forward genetics system represents an alternative approach for manipulating
104 the genome. *Agrobacterium tumefaciens*-mediated transformation (AtMT) is an
105 insertional mutagenesis approach with a history of proven success in fungal species
106 (21). *A. tumefaciens* is a plant pathogen that causes crown gall in dicotyledonous plants
107 through genetic transformation (22). Its capacity for transformation is not limited to
108 plants and can be taken advantage of to perform insertional transformation in a variety
109 of eukaryotic species, including *C. albicans*, *Candida glabrata*, and *Saccharomyces*
110 *cerevisiae* (23). In practice, mobilization of a DNA sequence flanked by left and right
111 direct repeats (T-DNA) is accomplished by induction of virulence genes during co-
112 culture with a recipient organism using acetosyringone (24). This T-DNA sequence is
113 encoded on the Ti Plasmid harbored by *A. tumefaciens* and can be manipulated to
114 contain fungal selectable markers.

115 We used AtMT to generate an insertional mutant library in *C. auris* and identified
116 morphogenic mutants growing in aggregates or as pseudohyphae. Insertions in genes
117 orthologous to regulators of chitinase and chitin synthase in *S. cerevisiae* were
118 associated with defects in daughter cell separation in *C. auris*, leading to aggregating
119 growth, while an insertion in an ortholog of *ScELM1* resulted in constitutive filamentous
120 growth in *C. auris*. We developed a robust transient CRISPR-Cas9 expression system
121 for *C. auris* and demonstrated its ability to significantly increase targeted transformation
122 in isolates from all four major clades. Using this system, we performed deletions in key
123 regulators of cell separation to demonstrate functional conservation of *ELM1* and
124 regulators of *ACE2* in *C. auris*. The tools presented here allow for novel analyses of the
125 genetic circuitry required for morphogenesis in the emerging pathogen *C. auris* and will
126 serve as a resource to the community for future molecular genetic manipulation of this
127 pathogen.

128

129 **Results**

130 ***Agrobacterium*-mediated transformation identifies *C. auris* morphogenic mutants**

131 While aggregating and filamentous strains of *C. auris* have been recovered from
132 human and murine hosts, the genetic circuitry governing *C. auris* morphogenesis
133 remains largely uncharacterized. Therefore, we set out to apply a forward genetic
134 approach to identify regulators of morphogenesis in *C. auris*. To accomplish this, we
135 developed an *Agrobacterium tumefaciens*-mediated transformation (AtMT) system for
136 *C. auris*. We cloned the CaNAT1 nourseothricin resistance cassette into the pPZP Ti
137 plasmid backbone between the T-DNA left and right borders to generate pTO128

138 (pPZP-NATca) and transformed the resulting vector into *A. tumefaciens* strain EHA105,
139 which also harbors the virulence genes necessary for mobilization of the T-DNA. We
140 chose the South Asian (Clade I) *C. auris* isolate AR382 from the FDA-CDC
141 Antimicrobial Resistance Isolate Bank as the genetic background for insertional
142 mutagenesis (25). We co-cultured *A. tumefaciens* and *C. auris* on Induction Media
143 containing acetosyringone to induce mobilization of T-DNA and identified transgene
144 insertional mutants of *C. auris* by selecting on YPD plates containing nourseothricin.
145 Because previous reports suggest that AtMT transformation efficiency in fungi varies
146 with alterations in co-culture and incubation parameters (26), we monitored the
147 transformation efficiency of *C. auris* after 2, 4, and 7 days of co-culture incubation with
148 different ratios of *C. auris* and *A. tumefaciens* inocula (Fig. 1A). By comparing the rate
149 of transformants to input, we calculated a maximum transformation efficiency of
150 approximately 1 in 6500 *C. auris* cells at 4 days of co-incubation with equal inocula,
151 which is consistent with the range of transformation efficiencies exhibited in integrative
152 AtMT of other yeast species (26, 27). We performed AtMT in *C. auris* AR382 using
153 these optimal co-culture parameters and identified 6 mutants with altered colony
154 morphology, suggestive of an alteration in cellular morphology (Fig. 1B). These findings
155 demonstrate the utility of AtMT as a forward genetics system for *C. auris*.

156 Transgene insertion sites can be defined by identifying the genomic regions
157 flanking the insertions using whole-genome sequencing (28). We reasoned a similar
158 approach could identify transgene insertion sites from multiple mutants sequenced in
159 pools. We generated 150 bp paired-end Illumina sequencing reads from two pools of
160 three morphogenic mutants each and mapped the sequencing reads from each pool to

161 the sequence of the TI plasmid pTO128 (pPZP-NATca). The sequencing reads mapped
162 exclusively to the T-DNA region of the plasmid, with additional read length spanning
163 either junction at the T-DNA left and right borders (Fig. 1C). The sequence extending
164 beyond the left and right borders corresponded to *C. auris* genomic regions flanking the
165 transgene insertions. We extracted the sequence data from these regions and
166 generated consensus sequences based on multiple sequence alignments. We then
167 mapped the consensus sequences to the *C. auris* B8441 reference genome (NCBI
168 GCA_002759435.2, South Asian Clade) to identify insertion sites and determined which
169 morphogenic mutant harbored which specific insertion using insertion site-specific PCR
170 and Sanger sequencing.

171 Among the mutants identified by irregular colony morphologies, four exhibited a
172 similar aggregating phenotype, with individual cells connected into clusters that could
173 not be disrupted by vortexing (Fig. 2). We also observed several cell compartments
174 containing more than one nucleus, suggesting a defect in nuclear separation associated
175 with this failure of cell separation. Insertion events in *CauACE2* (B9J08_000468),
176 orthologous to *S. cerevisiae ACE2* (YLR131C), as well as in *CauTAO3*
177 (B9J08_000181), orthologous to *S. cerevisiae TAO3* (YIL129C), were associated with
178 this aggregatory phenotype. A similar aggregating phenotype resulted from an insertion
179 near the C-terminus of *CauCHS2* (B9J08_003879), an ortholog of *CHS2* (YBR038W) in
180 *S. cerevisiae*. A fourth aggregating strain was associated with an insertion in the
181 promoter region of *B9J08_002252*; however, orthologs of this gene in related species
182 are poorly characterized. To predict a potential function for this gene, we analyzed the
183 *C. albicans* ortholog *C7_00260C* using the CalCEN Co-expression network (29). GO

184 term analysis revealed that 43 of 50 co-expressed genes fall under the “piecemeal
185 microautophagy of the nucleus” term (Fig. S1). We also observed pseudohyphal
186 filaments characterized by elongated cells with constricted separations between
187 compartments in a mutant with an insertion in *CauELM1* (B9J08_002849), an ortholog
188 of *S. cerevisiae ELM1* (YKL048C) (Fig. 2).

189 A sixth insertional mutant identified by its irregular colony morphology exhibited
190 elongated cell growth in short chains (Fig. S2). For this mutant, we identified T-DNA
191 sequence both in the intergenic space upstream of the B9J08_002954 ORF and in the
192 intergenic region upstream of the B9J08_002667 ORF from the B8441 reference
193 sequence, but we were unable to amplify the complete insertion locus of either site from
194 genomic DNA of the mutant. We hypothesize that a recombination event or other
195 chromosomal rearrangement may have occurred following one or multiple T-DNA
196 insertion events in this mutant, though further investigation is required to confirm this.
197 Together, these findings identify key components in the regulation of cell separation in
198 *C. auris*.

199

200 **Expression of Cas9 and sgRNA increases targeted integration in *C. auris*.**

201 To validate the insertional mutagenesis and confirm the role of identified genes in
202 regulating the multicellular phenotypes we observed, it is important to be able to
203 recapitulate the phenotype via clean deletions of the target genes. However, targeted
204 homologous recombination has low efficiency in *C. auris*; in our hands, the rate of
205 targeted integration events approaches or falls below 1% of all transformants for some
206 isolates of *C. auris* when relying on homologous recombination alone (Fig 3D).

207 Transformation in *C. auris* can be facilitated by the use of Cas9 and sgRNA
208 ribonucleoproteins; however, the DNA-based transient CRISPR-Cas9 expression
209 approach used in *C. albicans* been previously shown to not increase efficacy for *C.*
210 *auris* (7)personal communication, Sang Hu Kim). Recently, Ng and Dean reported
211 variable increases in targeted transformation efficiency in *C. albicans* when using
212 different promoters to drive the transcription of the sgRNA (30). We hypothesized that
213 the low previous efficiency of the transient CRISPR system may be due to poor
214 recognition of the *SNR52* promoter from *C. albicans*. Therefore, we developed a
215 transient Cas9 and sgRNA expression system that can be used for efficient
216 transformation in *C. auris* (19, 30). First, we generated expression cassettes for Cas9
217 and sgRNA using *C. auris*-specific promoters (Fig. 3A). We placed the CaCas9
218 cassette, which has been codon-optimized for expression in CTG clade fungi, under
219 control of the *C. auris ENO1* promoter and the sgRNA cassette under control of the *C.*
220 *auris ADH1* promoter. However, use of an RNA Polymerase II promoter would generate
221 a transcript with a 5' cap and 3' polyA tail, ultimately detrimental to the gRNA targeting
222 efficiency; therefore, to generate an sgRNA transcript with clean 5' and 3' ends after
223 transcription, we included the *C. auris tRNA-ALA* sequence immediately upstream of
224 the sgRNA and the hepatitis delta virus (HDV) Ribozyme sequence immediately
225 downstream of the sgRNA. With this design, we anticipated cleavage at the 3' end of
226 the tRNA sequence by endogenous RNase A and self-catalyzed cleavage at the 5' end
227 of the HDV ribozyme (31, 32).

228 To assess the functional capacity of the Cas9 and sgRNA expression system to
229 increase the efficiency of targeted integration in *C. auris*, we designed a reporter

230 cassette that would allow for rapid and specific identification of targeted integration
231 events among transformants (Fig. 3B). The reporter cassette contained approximately
232 500 bp homology to the C-terminus of *C. auris ENO1* and genomic sequence
233 immediately downstream of *ENO1*. We removed the stop codon from the *ENO1* C-
234 terminus homologous sequence and fused *RFP* to the *ENO1* C-terminus with a glycine
235 linker. Because the *RFP* gene had no promoter element, we anticipated transformants
236 would only demonstrate robust fluorescence if the reporter cassette integrated precisely
237 in frame to tag the Eno1 protein and be driven by the endogenous *ENO1* promoter. The
238 reporter cassette also included an independently-driven nourseothricin resistance
239 (NAT^{R}) cassette to allow identification of the total transformant population by selection
240 on nourseothricin, regardless of integration site. To confirm that the reporter cassette
241 specifically identified targeted integration events, we designed a PCR primer set
242 spanning the *ENO1-RFP* junction and a primer set spanning a region of the *ENO1* locus
243 native to the wild type. We performed transformation with the reporter cassette and
244 collected five representative transformants that exhibited robust fluorescence and five
245 that did not. Amplification of the region spanning the *ENO1-RFP* junction was only
246 exhibited by the fluorescent transformants and not by the wild type or non-fluorescent
247 transformants, while amplification of the wild-type sequence was exhibited by all the
248 transformants and the wild-type strain (Fig. 3C). This demonstrates that the ratio of
249 fluorescent to non-fluorescent colonies is a reliable measure of targeted transformation
250 efficiency.

251 We observed variable targeted transformation efficiency among *C. auris* isolates
252 of different genetic backgrounds (Fig. 3D). We therefore sought to determine whether

253 our Cas9 and sgRNA expression system promoted targeted transformation in multiple
254 genetically diverse *C. auris* isolates. We performed transformations of *C. auris* isolates
255 from all four major clades using the reporter cassette alone or in combination with the
256 Cas9 and sgRNA expression cassettes (Fig. 3D). The targeted integration rate under
257 each transformation condition was determined by dividing the number of fluorescent
258 colonies by the total number of transformant colonies. For each isolate, transformation
259 including both the Cas9 and sgRNA cassettes significantly increased targeted
260 integration efficiency compared to transformation with the reporter cassette alone,
261 though absolute rates of targeted integration varied between strains. The *ENO1* C-
262 terminus homologous arm encoded by the reporter cassette showed 100% sequence
263 identity in all four isolates, while AR381 and AR383 exhibited shared 4 nucleotide
264 variants out of 557 bp in the downstream homologous arm and AR386 showed a single
265 nucleotide variant in the same region (Fig. S3). Therefore, differences in the targeted
266 integration efficiency could not be explained by differential homology to the reporter
267 cassette. Taken together, these observations indicate the Cas9 and sgRNA expression
268 cassettes successfully promote targeted transformation in all four *C. auris* clades.

269

270 ***CauACE2* and *CauELM1* are regulators of *C. auris* morphogenesis**

271 Using these tools, we were able to investigate the function of the genes
272 implicated in *C. auris* morphogenic regulation by AtMT. Deletion of *ACE2* in AR382
273 (Clade I) resulted in constitutively aggregating cells with individual cells connected at
274 septa, suggestive of a failure of budding daughter cells to separate from mother cells
275 (Fig. 4A). Mutations in *ACE2* in *S. cerevisiae* or in *C. albicans* result in an aggregating,

276 multicellular phenotype similar to that exhibited by *C. auris* *ACE2* mutants, suggesting
277 *C. auris* has maintained conservation of *ACE2* in regulating morphogenesis (33–35).
278 Deletion of *ELM1* resulted in filamentous pseudohyphal growth with constrictions at
279 septa and numerous highly vacuolar cell compartments (Fig. 4A). *S. cerevisiae* strains
280 with mutations in *ELM1* exhibit similar polarized, elongated growth phenotypes (36). In
281 *C. glabrata*, mutation of *ELM1* results in elongated cells but does not fully recapitulate
282 the pseudohyphal morphology exhibited by *S. cerevisiae* or by the *C. auris* $\Delta elm1$
283 mutant (37). Similar phenotypes were observed for $\Delta ace2$ and $\Delta elm1$ mutants in AR381
284 (Clade II), suggesting conserved roles of these regulators across *C. auris* clades (Fig.
285 4B).

286 To test whether the regulation of cell wall maintenance genes by these regulatory
287 pathways was also conserved between organisms, we investigated transcriptional
288 changes associated with the mutants (Fig. 4C). The $\Delta ace2$ mutant exhibited decreased
289 expression of the putative chitinase *CauCTS1* (B9J08_002761), consistent with the role
290 of *ScAce2* in regulating *ScCTS1* to promote degradation of the primary septum during
291 daughter cell separation (38). While $\Delta elm1$ cells also remained septally conjoined, the
292 $\Delta elm1$ mutant exhibited increased expression of *CauCTS1*. The $\Delta elm1$ mutant also
293 exhibited a modest increase in the expression of *B9J08_002252*, the gene of unknown
294 function identified in our insertional mutagenesis to be associated with aggregating
295 morphology. Disruption of the putative chitin synthase gene *CauCHS2* was also
296 associated with an aggregating cell morphology in our AtMT screen. Orthologs of *CHS2*
297 in *S. cerevisiae* or *C. albicans* are thought to catalyze the formation of primary septum
298 chitin; defects in these orthologous genes result in multicellular clumps or chains with

299 abnormal cytokinesis patterns (39, 40). We observed little change in the expression of
300 *CauCHS2* in $\Delta ace2$ or $\Delta elm1$ mutants (Fig. 4C), suggesting chitin synthase
301 transcriptional regulation in *C. auris* is not altered in response to perturbations in
302 chitinase expression. Deletion of *TAO3*, another gene associated with aggregating cell
303 morphology in our AtMT screen, resulted in aggregating cells similar to $\Delta ace2$ (Fig. 4D).
304 In *S. cerevisiae*, *Tao3* associates with kinases *Kic1* and *Cbk1* as part of the Regulation
305 of *ACE2* Morphogenesis (RAM) pathway. Phosphorylation of *Ace2* by *Cbk1* results in its
306 accumulation in daughter cell nuclei, where it regulates the expression of enzymes that
307 mediate septum degradation (41). Consistent with this role, *CTS1* expression was
308 significantly downregulated in $\Delta tao3$ cells compared to wild type (Fig. 4D). We observed
309 no change in the expression of *CHS2* in the $\Delta tao3$ mutant, suggesting *CHS2*
310 transcriptional regulation is not controlled by *TAO3*-dependent components of the RAM
311 pathway (Fig. 4D). Taken together, these observations identify *ACE2* and *ELM1* as key
312 regulators of *C. auris* morphogenesis associated with transcriptional regulation of
313 *CTS1*.

314

315 **Discussion**

316 We have developed new approaches to performing facile, cost-effective forward
317 and reverse genetic manipulation in *C. auris*. Using these tools, we identified functional
318 conservation of chitinase and chitin synthase regulatory pathways, disruption of which
319 results in aggregating, multicellular growth in *C. auris*. Cell wall chitin remodeling during
320 growth and cell separation involves parallel expression of both chitinase and chitin
321 synthase activities (42). Direct associations to the regulation of chitinase and chitin

322 synthase were especially striking considering multiple genes involved in these
323 processes were identified from a low-saturation library of approximately 2000 mutants.
324 We also uncovered a novel *C. auris* pseudohyphal mutant, $\Delta elm1$, demonstrating the
325 ability of *C. auris* to sustain filamentous growth. Our work represents part of a growing
326 global effort to understand the biology of this emerging pathogen by offering alternative
327 methods of improving its genetic tractability. We demonstrated the ability of a *C. auris*
328 CRISPR-Cas9 expression system to consistently and significantly improve targeted
329 integration of a transformation cassette in representative isolates from all four major *C.*
330 *auris* clades. Targeted integration rates were increased to levels at which mutants of
331 interest can readily be identified by PCR or phenotypic screening. While this level of
332 efficiency was associated with approximately 500 bp arms of homology, we successfully
333 performed deletion of *CauTAO3* using a transformation cassette with only 50-70 bp of
334 homology, albeit with reduced targeted transformation efficiency. Our work, in concert
335 with similar advancements such as successful resistance marker recycling in *C. auris*
336 (18, 43), will promote improved accessibility to mechanistic understanding of the genetic
337 machinery in *C. auris*.

338 From our work, we identified *CauACE2* to be a key regulator of morphogenesis.
339 In *S. cerevisiae*, *ACE2* daughter cell nuclear localization is regulated by the RAM
340 pathway Kic1-Cbk1 kinase complex (41). *ScTAO3*, sometimes called *PAG1*, physically
341 associates with both *ScKic1* and *ScCbk1* and may mediate activation of Cbk1 by Kic1
342 (44, 45). Disruption of *ScTAO3* or downstream *ScACE2* results in cell aggregates and a
343 failure of daughter cells to separate from mother cells during budding (38, 44, 45). We
344 observed similar aggregating phenotypes in $\Delta ace2$ and $\Delta tao3$ mutants in *C. auris*. We

345 therefore propose functional conservation of *ACE2* and the RAM regulatory pathway in
346 *C. auris* (Fig. 5). Downstream of this pathway, we identified a putative chitinase,
347 *CauCTS1* (B9J08_002761), that was downregulated in Δ *Cauace2* compared to the wild
348 type. The sequence of *CauCTS1* contains no GPI-anchor signal, and so is likely more
349 closely related functionally to the secreted chitinases *ScCTS1* in *S. cerevisiae* and its
350 functional homolog *CaCHT3* in *C. albicans* than to *CaCHT2* in *C. albicans* (46). The
351 regulation of *CauCTS1* by *CauACE2* is consistent with homologous pathways in *S.*
352 *cerevisiae* and *C. albicans*, in which chitin degradation in the primary septum is
353 mediated by the *ACE2*-regulated *ScCts1* or *CaCht3* proteins (34, 47). Interestingly, an
354 experiment performing laboratory evolution of *S. cerevisiae* in a bioreactor resulted in
355 multicellular, fast-sedimenting strains that were associated with mutations in *ACE2* (33).
356 The design of the bioreactors in this example may have provided a selective advantage
357 for multicellular growth due to increased sedimentation rate of cell aggregates
358 compared to planktonic cells. An environmental niche may exist that produces a similar
359 selective pressure against the regulatory network upstream of *CTS1* by offering a
360 selective advantage for aggregating cells. Constitutively aggregating strains of *C. auris*
361 have been isolated from clinical samples (12–15). If an environmental reservoir for *C.*
362 *auris* is aquatic in nature, as some hypotheses suggest (48–50), a fast-sedimenting
363 aggregative phenotype may confer a selective advantage by offering increased
364 nutritional access through sedimentation or resistance to dispersal by moving water. It is
365 tempting to speculate whether aggregating *C. auris* isolates have evolved a multicellular
366 phenotype through a similar selective pressure on chitinase or chitin synthase
367 regulation prior to introduction to a human host. Further characterization of the

368 environmental reservoirs for *C. auris* may offer insight regarding the selective pressures
369 driving similar phenotypes.

370 We also observed aggregating growth in an insertional mutant in a putative chitin
371 synthase, *CauCHS2* (B9J08_003879). The orthologous gene *ScCHS2* is required for
372 formation of the primary septum in budding yeast and its disruption results in abnormal,
373 multicellular clusters (39). Careful regulation of both the chitin synthase, catalyzing the
374 formation of the primary septum, and the chitinases that degrade the primary septum is
375 critical in successful cell separation. A “unitary model” of cell wall growth suggests
376 coordinated regulation of chitin synthesis and degradation (51). In contrast to this
377 model, our observations that expression of *CauCHS2* remained relatively constant in
378 $\Delta ace2$ or $\Delta elm1$ *C. auris* strains, which exhibited decreased or elevated *CTS1*
379 expression respectively, indicate regulation of *CHS2* independent of *CTS1*, consistent
380 with a report that regulation of chitin synthase and chitinase activities are independent in
381 *C. albicans* and *S. cerevisiae* (52). Still, the temporal regulation of the contrasting
382 activities of *CTS1* and *CHS2* must be essential for effective cell separation. In support
383 of this notion, recent CHIP-exo data indicates that *ACE2* and *CHS2* are both targets of
384 the forkhead transcription factor Fkh2 in *S. cerevisiae*, suggesting Fkh2 may act as a
385 regulatory hub governing the contrasting chitin synthase and chitinase activities during
386 cell separation (53). While the RAM pathway regulatory kinase Cbk1 targets Fkh2 in
387 addition to Ace2 in *C. albicans*, our findings indicate such an interaction does not
388 directly transcriptionally regulate *CHS2* expression in *C. auris* in a Tao3-dependent
389 manner (54, 55). Future work may yet reveal insights into the concerted regulation of
390 chitin synthase and chitinase activity during cell separation. Our findings suggest the

391 roles of the RAM pathway and *ACE2* in regulating *CTS1* are conserved in *C. auris* and
392 critical for morphogenesis.

393 While the role of the serine-threonine kinase *ELM1* in regulating polar bud growth
394 and morphogenic differentiation in *S. cerevisiae* has been long understood, its role in
395 pathogenic fungi is largely unexplored (36, 56). One report demonstrated that deletion
396 of *CgELM1* in *C. glabrata* results in moderately elongated cell growth, though this strain
397 fails to recapitulate the fully pseudohyphal phenotype exhibited by *S. cerevisiae* or *C.*
398 *auris* (37). We observed elongated cells growing in pseudohyphal chains associated
399 with an insertion event near the C-terminus of *CauELM1*. However, the full $\Delta elm1$ *C.*
400 *auris* strains exhibited a slightly different, more filamentous cell morphology. In *S.*
401 *cerevisiae*, deletion of the C-terminal domain of *ELM1* results in increased Elm1 kinase
402 activity, suggesting this domain may have autoinhibitory function (57). This phenotype is
403 associated with pseudohyphal growth with a cell morphology distinct from that
404 demonstrated by $\Delta Scelm1$ (57). The distinct but similarly pseudohyphal phenotypes
405 associated with disruption of the *C. auris* *ELM1* C-terminus and $\Delta Cauelm1$ suggests
406 similar *ELM1* regulation may exist in *C. auris*. Intriguingly, the pseudohyphal $\Delta elm1$ *C.*
407 *auris* mutant exhibited a significant increase in the expression of *CTS1* compared to the
408 wild type. This is in contrast to $\Delta elm1$ in *C. glabrata*, which exhibited decreased
409 expression of *CgCTS1* compared to wild type (37). Further characterization of Elm1 in
410 diverse fungal species may yet reveal substantial variation in its function. The role that
411 increased *CTS1* expression in $\Delta Cauelm1$ plays in contributing to pseudohyphal growth
412 is unclear. One report indicated reduced expression of the *CTS1* homolog *CaCHT3* in
413 hyphal *C. albicans* compared to *C. albicans* grown in the yeast form (58). However, total

414 chitinase activity was increased in *C. albicans* hyphae compared to yeast (52). Whether
415 *C. auris* pseudohyphal growth is controlled by a similar chitinase function as *C. albicans*
416 hyphal growth remains to be determined.

417 In sum, our work demonstrates an accessible approach to genetic engineering of
418 *C. auris*, facilitating further understanding of the biology of this emerging pathogen.
419 Using new forward and reverse genetic approaches, we characterized conserved and
420 divergent key regulators of morphogenesis in *C. auris*.

421

422 **Materials and Methods**

423

424 **Strains and Growth Conditions**

425

426 A list of *C. auris* and *A. tumefaciens* strains used in this study are listed in Table S1.

427 Unless specified otherwise, *C. auris* cells were grown at 30 °C in YPD liquid media (1%
428 yeast extract, 2% peptone, 2% dextrose) with constant agitation. All strains were
429 maintained in frozen stocks of 25% glycerol at -80 °C.

430

431 **Plasmids**

432

433 A list of all plasmids used in this study is included in Table S2.

434

435 A list of all primers used in this study is included in Table S3.

436

437 **pTO128:** An *Agrobacterium* Ti-plamid was constructed to include the CaNAT1
438 nourseothricin resistance cassette (59) in the pPZP-NEO1 backbone (60). The CaNAT1
439 cassette was excised at the SacI and Sall restriction sites from pLC49 (61) and ligated
440 between the SacI and Sall restriction sites of pPZP-NEO1, replacing the neomycin
441 resistance cassette with CaNAT1 to form pTO128 (pPZP-NATca). pTO128 was
442 subsequently electroporated into *A. tumefaciens* strain EHA 105 (62) using a Bio-Rad
443 MicroPulser Electroporator.

444

445 **pTO135:** A cassette for expression of Cas9 was maintained in the pUC19 cloning
446 vector backbone (63). To form pTO135 (pCauCas9), the Cas9 expression cassette was
447 PCR amplified from pLC963 (64) without the promoter sequence using primers
448 oTO114-oTO115. A promoter region consisting of 1000 bp upstream of the *C. auris*
449 *ENO1* gene (B9J08_000274) was PCR amplified from genomic DNA isolated from *C.*
450 *auris* strain AR387 using primers oTO112-oTO113. The pUC19 vector backbone was
451 amplified using primers oTO116-oTO117. The promoter sequence and Cas9 expression
452 cassette were assembled into the multiple cloning site of pUC19 using the NEBuilder
453 HIFI DNA Assembly master mix (NEB #E2621) according to the manufacturer's
454 instructions.

455

456 **pTO136:** A cassette for expression of sgRNA was maintained in the pUC19 cloning
457 vector backbone (63). To form pTO136 (pCausgRNA), a promoter region consisting of
458 901 bp upstream of the *C. auris ADH1* gene (B9J08_004331) was PCR amplified using
459 primers oTO118-oTO119 and assembled along with a synthesized DNA fragment

460 (Genscript, Piscataway, NJ, USA) containing sequence from *C. auris* tRNA-Ala
461 (B9J08_003096), a 20-bp gRNA sequence targeting the *ENO1* locus, a tracrRNA
462 sequence, and an HDV ribozyme (30) into the multiple cloning site of pUC19 using the
463 NEBuilder HIFI DNA Assembly master mix according to the manufacturer's instructions.
464 The pUC19 vector backbone was amplified using primers oTO120-oTO121.

465
466 **pTO137:** A reporter cassette for tagging the *C. auris ENO1* gene with RFP was
467 maintained in the pUC19 cloning vector backbone. To form pTO137, the *RFP* construct
468 was PCR amplified from pLC1047 (65) using primers oTO124-oTO125; a terminator
469 sequence consisting of 933 bp downstream of the *C. auris ADH1* gene was PCR
470 amplified from genomic DNA isolated from *C. auris* strain AR387 using primers
471 oTO126-oTO127; the CaNAT1 expression cassette including *TEF* promoter and
472 terminator sequence was amplified from pLC49 using primers oTO128-oTO129;
473 flanking regions containing homology to 492 bp at the C-terminal end of the *C. auris*
474 *ENO1* gene minus the stop codon and 557 bp immediately 3' of the *C. auris ENO1* gene
475 were amplified from genomic DNA isolated from *C. auris* strain AR387 using primers
476 oTO122-oTO123 and oTO130-oTO131 respectively; the pUC19 vector backbone was
477 amplified using primers oTO132-oTO133. Fragments were assembled into the multiple
478 cloning site of pUC19 using the NEBuilder HIFI DNA Assembly master mix according to
479 the manufacturer's instructions.

480
481 **pTO154:** A repair cassette for deleting *ELM1* with *CaNAT1* was maintained in the
482 pUC19 cloning vector backbone. To form pTO154 (p*ELM1::NAT*), 501 bp immediately

483 5' of *ELM1* (B9J08_002849) and 502 bp immediately 3' of *ELM1* were amplified from
484 AR387 genomic DNA using primers oTO317-oTO318 and oTO321-oTO337
485 respectively; the *CaNAT1* expression cassette was amplified from pLC49 using primers
486 oTO319-oTO320; the pUC19 vector backbone was amplified using primers oTO323-
487 oTO324. Fragments were assembled into the multiple cloning site of pUC19 using the
488 NEBuilder HIFI DNA Assembly master mix according to the manufacturer's
489 instructions.

490
491 **pTO155:** A repair cassette for deleting *ACE2* with *CaNAT1* was maintained in the
492 pUC19 cloning vector backbone. To form pTO155 (p*ACE2::NAT*), 500 bp immediately
493 5' of *ACE2* (B9J08_000468) and 498 bp immediately 3' of *ACE2* were amplified from
494 AR387 genomic DNA using primers oTO325-oTO326 and oTO329-oTO330
495 respectively; the *CaNAT1* expression cassette was amplified from pLC49 using primers
496 oTO327-oTO328; the pUC19 vector backbone was amplified using primers oTO331-
497 oTO332. Fragments were assembled into the multiple cloning site of pUC19 using the
498 NEBuilder HIFI DNA Assembly master mix according to the manufacturer's instructions.
499

500 All *C. auris* genomic sequence data was obtained from the *C. auris* B8441 reference
501 genome on fungidb.org (66). All plasmid assemblies were verified by restriction digest
502 and sanger sequencing.

503

504 ***Agrobacterium tumefaciens*-Mediated Transformation (AtMT)**

505

506 AtMT was performed as previously described with minor modifications (67). Briefly, *A.*
507 *tumefaciens* strain EHA 105 harboring the pTO128 (pPZP-NATca) plasmid was cultured
508 overnight at 30 °C in liquid Luria-Bertani (LB) media containing kanamycin. *A.*
509 *tumefaciens* cells were harvested by centrifugation, washed once with sterile, ultrapure
510 water, then resuspended at a final OD₆₀₀ of 0.15 in liquid Induction Medium (IM)
511 supplemented with 100 µM Acetosyringone 3',5'-dimethoxy-4-hydroxyacetophenone
512 (AS) (27) and incubated at room temperature for 6 h with constant shaking. Recipient *C.*
513 *auris* AR382 cells were harvested from an overnight culture grown at 30 °C in YPD by
514 centrifugation then resuspended in sterile, ultrapure water at a final OD₆₀₀ of 1.0. To
515 determine the maximal transformation efficiency, prepared cells were combined at *C.*
516 *auris*:*A. tumefaciens* ratios (v/v) of 1:1, 1:3, and 3:1. The combined cultures were
517 incubated on IM with AS agar at 30 °C for 2, 4, and 7 days. Cells were then harvested
518 into liquid YPD, washed three times with fresh YPD, then spread-plated onto YPD agar
519 containing 200 µg/mL nourseothricin and 200 µg/mL cefotaxime and incubated at 30 °C
520 for 2 days. Transformation efficiency was determined by dividing the total number of
521 recovered *C. auris* CFU by the total input number of *C. auris* cells for each condition. To
522 screen for *C. auris* morphologic mutants, *A. tumefaciens* and *C. auris* cells were
523 prepared as described above then equal volumes combined and the mixed culture was
524 incubated on IM with AS agar at 30 °C for 4 days. Cells were then harvested into liquid
525 YPD, washed three times with fresh YPD, then spread-plated onto YPD agar containing
526 200 µg/mL nourseothricin and 200 µg/mL cefotaxime. Plates were incubated at 30 °C
527 for 2 days. Colonies were then screened visually for those exhibiting a wrinkled colony
528 morphology.

529

530 **Genomic DNA Isolation**

531

532 Genomic DNA was isolated from *C. auris* morphological mutants to be used for
533 downstream sequencing and insertion site mapping using a phenol-chloroform
534 extraction. Briefly, cells were incubated overnight at 30 °C in liquid YPD then harvested
535 by centrifugation and resuspended in breaking buffer (2% (v/v) Triton X-100, 1% (w/v)
536 SDS, 100 mM NaCl, 10mM Tris-Cl, 1mM EDTA). DNA was extracted by bead beating
537 into PCA then extracted into Chloroform. Following precipitation by ethanol, extracted
538 DNA was resuspended in TE buffer and treated with RNase A. Genomic DNA quality
539 was assessed by 1% agarose gel electrophoresis.

540

541 **ATMT Transgene Mapping**

542

543 Mapping of tDNA insertion sites was performed similarly to methods previously
544 described (28). Genomic DNA isolated from six morphogenic mutants was collected and
545 pooled into two pools, each containing equal amounts by mass of genomic DNA from
546 three individual mutants. Library preparation, quality control and Whole Genome
547 Sequencing were performed by Microbial Genome Sequencing Center (MIGS,
548 Pittsburg, PA, USA). Library preparation was performed based on the Illumina Nextera
549 kit and sequencing performed on the Nextseq 550 platform generating 150 bp paired
550 end reads for each pool. Sequencing data was analyzed using the Galaxy web platform
551 public server at usegalaxy.org (68). Read quality was assessed using FASTQC and

552 reads were trimmed using CutAdapt (69) with a Phred quality cutoff of 20. A linearized
553 vector reference sequence of pTO121 (pPZP-CaNat) was generated from the circular
554 vector sequence and 150 bp of sequence from the opposite border was added to each
555 border of the linearized sequence. Reads were mapped to the linear pTO121 (pPZP-
556 CaNAT) reference sequence using the Burrows-Wheeler Aligner with maximum exact
557 matches (BWA-MEM) configured with default parameters except for minimum seed
558 length = 50 and band width = 2 (70). Mapped reads were sorted based on position and
559 sequences that extended beyond the left and right boundaries of the tDNA was
560 extracted. The extracted sequences for each pool were aligned using Clustal Omega
561 multiple sequence alignment (71) to identify consensus sequences for all independent
562 insertion events within each pool. Consensus sequences were then mapped to the *C.*
563 *auris* B8441 reference genome (GCA_002759435.2) using NCBI Blast. Primers specific
564 to each identified insertion site were designed: oTO310 and oTO340 for *B9J08_002252*,
565 oTO311 and oTO344 for *B9J08_003879*, oTO312 and oTO342 for *B9J08_002849*,
566 oTO313 and oTO338 for *B9J08_000181*, oTO314 and oTO339 for *B9J08_000468*,
567 oTO315 and oTO341 for *B9J08_002667*, and oTO316 and oTO343 for *B9J08_002954*.
568 These were used to amplify the identified insertion regions in conjunction with insertion-
569 specific primers oTO6 and oTO90 using the genomic DNA from each of the six mutants
570 as templates. Individual insertions were attributed to individual mutants based on
571 amplicon length. Amplicons containing tDNA insertions were Sanger Sequenced to
572 generate insertion maps for each mutant.

573

574 ***C. auris* Transformation**

575
576 Transformation of *C. auris* was performed as described previously, with minor
577 modifications (17). To generate *ENO1-RFP* strains, linear transformation cassettes
578 encoding Cas9, sgRNA, and the RFP repair cassette were PCR amplified from pTO135,
579 pTO136, and pTO137, respectively, using primers oTO18-oTO19. To generate $\Delta elm1$
580 and $\Delta ace2$ strains, a linear Cas9 cassette was amplified from pTO135 using primers
581 oTO18-oTO19, linear repair cassettes were amplified from pTO154 for *ELM1::NAT*
582 using primers oTO18-oTO19 and pTO155 for *ACE2::NAT* using primers oTO18-oTO19.
583 To generate $\Delta tao3$, a linear repair cassette incorporating 50-70 bp homology to either
584 end of the target gene flanking the NAT cassette was amplified from pTO137 using
585 primers oTO353-oTO354. Linear sgRNA cassettes were amplified from pTO136 using
586 fusion PCR as described previously to replace the gRNA sequence with gRNA targeting
587 each gene for deletion (19). Fusion fragments were amplified using primers oTO333-
588 oTO225 and oTO224-oTO334 to target *ELM1*, oTO335-oTO225 and oTO224-oTO336
589 to target *ACE2*, and oTO356-oTO224 and oTO355-oTO225 to target *TAO3*. Each pair
590 of fragments with overlapping sequences were spliced on extension using oTO18-
591 oTO19. PCR products were purified with a Zymo DNA Clean & Concentrator kit (Cat no.
592 D4034, Zymo Research) according to the manufacturer's instructions. *C. auris* cells
593 were incubated overnight at 30 °C in YPD to exponential phase, not exceeding OD₆₀₀ of
594 2.2. Cells were harvested by centrifugation and resuspended in TE buffer with 100 mM
595 Lithium Acetate then incubated with constant shaking at 30 °C for 1 h. DTT was added
596 to the cells at a final concentration of 25 mM and incubation was continued for 30 min at
597 30 °C with constant shaking. The cells were harvested by centrifugation; washed once

598 with ice-cold, sterile, ultrapure water; washed once with ice-cold 1 M Sorbitol; then
599 resuspended in ice-cold 1 M Sorbitol. 40 μ L of competent cells were added to a pre-
600 chilled 2 mm-gap electro-cuvette along with 1 μ g each of the PCR amplified linear
601 transformation cassettes encoding Cas9, sgRNA, and the repair cassette. Alternatively,
602 to compare targeted integration efficiency, an equal volume of Zymo elution buffer was
603 added instead of Cas9 or sgRNA cassettes. Cells were electroporated using a Bio-Rad
604 MicroPulser Electroporator set to the programmed *P. pastoris* (PIC) protocol (2.0 kV, 1
605 pulse), recovered in 1 M Sorbitol, then resuspended in YPD and allowed 2 hrs of
606 outgrowth at 30 °C with shaking. The cells were then spread-plated on YPD with 200
607 μ g/mL nourseothricin and incubated at 30 °C.

608
609 To estimate the efficiency of targeted RFP integration among transformant colonies,
610 transformation plates were imaged using a Typhoon FLA 9500 Bioimager fitted with a
611 532 nm filter. Fluorescent images were visualized using Fiji Software (72). An intensity
612 threshold was set to identify transformant colonies exhibiting fluorescence. Five
613 representative fluorescent colonies and five representative non-fluorescent colonies
614 from transformations performed in AR387 were spotted onto YPD agar and grown at 30
615 °C for 2 days. A sample of the colony growth was collected from each colony and
616 suspended in 15 μ L water. An aliquot of this suspension was used as a template in PCR
617 reactions with primers overlapping the junction of the predicted *ENO1-RFP* insertion site
618 or a genomic region upstream of the junction present in the wild-type locus. Colony
619 PCR was performed using Phire Plant Direct PCR Master Mix (F160S; Thermo Fisher
620 Scientific) according to the manufacturer's instructions. The proportion of transformant

621 colonies with targeted integration was determined by dividing the number of colonies
622 exhibiting fluorescence by the total number of transformant colonies.

623

624 **Fixed Cell Microscopy**

625

626 *C. auris* cells were grown overnight at 30 °C in YPD. Cells were harvested by
627 centrifugation for 1 min at 4000 rpm (1500 x g) and resuspended in methanol. The fixed
628 cells were pelleted by centrifugation for 1 min at 4000 rpm then resuspended in PBS
629 with 10 µg/mL Hoechst 33342 (Cayman Chemical; Item no. 15542). Aliquots of stained
630 cells were loaded onto glass microscope slides and visualized using an Olympus IX70
631 Epifluorescent Microscope fitted with a Hamamatsu C11440 camera.

632

633 **Live Cell Microscopy**

634

635 Cells were grown to mid-exponential phase at 30 °C in YPD and pelleted by
636 centrifugation for 1 min at 4000 rpm (1500 x g) then resuspended in PBS. 5 µL cell
637 suspension was combined with 1 µL of 0.1 g/L Calcofluor White stain and applied to a
638 glass microscope slide. Stained cells were visualized using an Olympus IX70
639 Epifluorescent Microscope fitted with a Hamamatsu C11440 camera.

640

641 **Stereomicroscopy**

642

643 *C. auris* cells were grown on YPD agar at 30 °C for 2-7 days to form colonies. Colonies
644 were visualized using a Leica KL300 LED stereomicroscope.

645

646 **RNA Extraction**

647

648 RNA extraction was performed as described previously (73). Briefly, cells were grown to
649 mid-exponential phase at 30 °C in YPD and harvested by centrifugation. Cells were
650 washed in PBS, then centrifuged and all liquid removed. Dry cell pellets were frozen on
651 dry ice then stored at -80 °C overnight. Cell pellets were thawed and resuspended in
652 100 µL FE Buffer (98% formamide, 0.01M EDTA) at room temperature. 50 µL of 500 µm
653 RNase-free glass beads was added and the cell suspension was ground in 3 cycles of
654 30 sec using a BioSpec Mini-Beadbeater-16 (Biospec Products Inc., Bartlesville, OK,
655 USA). The cell lysate was centrifuged to remove cell debris and the crude RNA extract
656 collected from the supernatant. The extract was DNase-treated and purified using a
657 Qiagen RNeasy mini kit (Qiagen; 74104) as per the manufacturer's instructions. RNA
658 integrity was confirmed through agarose gel electrophoresis using the bleach gel
659 method (74).

660

661 **RT-qPCR**

662

663 cDNA was synthesized from isolated RNA using the AffinityScript qPCR cDNA
664 Synthesis Kit (Agilent Technologies, 600559) according to the manufacturer's
665 instructions and used as a template for qPCR. qPCR was performed in triplicate using a

666 BioRad CFXConnect Real Time System. Fold changes were calculated using the
667 double-delta CT method with expression normalized to that of *ACT1* and compared to
668 wild type. Amplification was measured for *ACT1* using primers oTO359-oTO360, for
669 *CHS2* using primers oTO361-oTO362, for *CTS1* using primers oTO363-oTO364, for
670 *B9J08_002252* using primers oTO365-oTO366, and for *ACE2* using primers oTO373-
671 oTO374. The qRT-PCR was performed in triplicate for two biological replicates. Raw
672 qPCR data can be found in Data S1.

673

674 **Co-Expression**

675 The *C. albicans* ortholog of *B9J08_002252* was identified through orthology on the
676 Candida Genome Database as C7_00260C_A. This was used as a query in CalCEN
677 and the top 50 most co-expressed neighbors were identified. This set was then
678 examined for putative function through GO term enrichment in the Candida Genome
679 database. The network was visualized using Cytoscape.

680

681 **Data Availability**

682

683 Data from Illumina sequences used to identify transgene insertion sites are available in
684 the NCBI SRA under BioProject accession number PRJNA722500.

685

686 **Acknowledgements**

687

688 We thank J. Andrew Alspaugh (Duke University) for generously donating *A. tumefaciens*
689 EHA105 and pPZP-NEO. We also express our appreciation to the CDC for making *C.*
690 *auris* isolates used in this study available through the Antibiotic Resistance Bank
691 program.

692

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695

696 We declare that we have no conflicts of interest.

697

698 **Figures**

699

700 **Fig. 1 *Agrobacterium tumefaciens*-mediated transformation (AtMT) identifies**
701 **regulators of colony morphology in *C. auris*.** (A) AtMT transformation efficiency of *C.*
702 *auris* was measured after 2, 4, and 7 days of coculture with three different combinations
703 of *C. auris* to *A. tumefaciens* inocula. Transformation efficiency is expressed as the ratio
704 of recovered *C. auris* transformants to the total number of input *C. auris* cells. (B)
705 Morphogenic mutants were identified in *C. auris* AtMT transformants through irregular
706 colony morphologies (arrow). (C) Genomic DNA was extracted from 6 morphogenic
707 mutants and pooled into two pools of 3 for Illumina sequencing. Reads were mapped to
708 the TI Plasmid (pTO128). Highlighted regions in blue and red indicate read sequence
709 that extended beyond the T-DNA left and right borders, respectively, used to identify
710 transgene insertion sites in the *C. auris* genome.

711

712 **Fig. 2 Transgene insertion sites associated with *C. auris* morphogenic mutants.**

713 Phase contrast, Hoescht 33342 staining, and colony morphologies demonstrate distinct
714 morphogenic defects in five AtMT mutants (bottom) compared to wild-type *C. auris*
715 AR382 (top). Identified transgene insertion sites were confirmed using Sanger
716 sequencing (right). In all five cases, t-DNA insertion events were not accompanied by
717 any additional insertions or deletions in the insertion locus. Scale bar = 10 μ m.

718

719 **Fig. 3 A CRISPR-Cas9 expression system promotes targeted transformation in**

720 **four *C. auris* clades.** (A) Structures of the Cas9 and sgRNA expression cassettes.

721 *CAS9* is driven by the *C. auris ENO1* promoter and followed by the *CYC1* terminator.

722 The sgRNA cassette is driven by the *C. auris ADH1* promoter and contains *C. auris*

723 tRNA-Ala immediately upstream of the 20-bp gRNA sequence and hepatitis delta virus

724 (HDV) ribozyme immediately downstream of the tracrRNA sequence. Predicted post-

725 transcriptional cleavage sites are indicated by vertical arrows. Primer sites to generate

726 linear transformation cassettes are indicated by horizontal arrows. (B) Design of the

727 reporter cassette for measuring targeted integration. The cassette is flanked by

728 approximately 500-bp homology to the *C. auris ENO1* C-terminus minus the stop codon

729 and the region immediately downstream of *C. auris ENO1*. *RFP* and the *C. auris ADH1*

730 terminator tag the *ENO1* gene at the C-terminus via a glycine linker to generate *ENO1-*

731 *RFP* in targeted transformants. An independently-driven nourseothricin resistance

732 cassette (*NAT1*) allows identification of total transformants, regardless of integration

733 site, by selection with nourseothricin. (C) Targeted integration events are identifiable by

734 colony fluorescence. Transformation of AR387 was performed using the reporter
735 cassette described in panel B. Representative fluorescent transformants and non-
736 fluorescent transformants were spotted onto YPD. Primer set A, spanning the *ENO1*-
737 *RFP* junction, shows amplification only from fluorescent transformants. Primer set B,
738 spanning a neighboring wild-type locus, shows amplification from all transformants and
739 the wild type. (D) Expression of Cas9 and sgRNA promotes targeted integration rate.
740 Transformation was performed in representative isolates from all four major *C. auris*
741 clades with the linear transformation cassettes described in panels A and B.
742 Transformations were performed with and without Cas9 and sgRNA elements; when
743 absent, the cassettes were replaced with an equivalent volume of buffer. Targeted
744 integration rate is expressed as the ratio of fluorescent colonies recovered to total
745 nourseothricin resistant colonies recovered. Each point represents an individual
746 transformation. Shown are the mean and standard error of the mean from three
747 individual experiments, each performed in duplicate. *, $P < 0.05$; **, $P < 0.01$; ***, $P <$
748 0.001 ; NS, $P > 0.05$; Welch's two sample t-test.

749
750 **Fig. 4 *ACE2* and *ELM1* are regulators of *C. auris* morphogenesis.** (A) Microscopy of
751 $\Delta ace2$ and $\Delta elm1$ strains in the AR382 (Clade I) genetic background. Representative
752 images shown for DIC, cells stained with calcofluor white, and colonies formed on YPD
753 agar. (B) *ACE2* and *ELM1* regulate morphogenesis across *C. auris* clades. Microscopy
754 of $\Delta ace2$ and $\Delta elm1$ strains in the AR381 (Clade II) genetic background. Representative
755 images shown for DIC and cells stained with calcofluor white. (C) *ACE2* and *ELM1*
756 regulate putative chitinase *CTS1* transcription. Wild-type (AR382), $\Delta ace2$, and $\Delta elm1$

757 cells were grown to exponential phase in YPD at 30 °C prior to RNA extraction and RT-
758 qPCR analysis of upregulated and downregulated genes. (D) Microscopy of Δ *tao3* in
759 the AR382 (Clade I) genetic background. Representative images shown for DIC and
760 cells stained with calcofluor white. For RT-qPCR, wild-type (AR382) and Δ *tao3* cells
761 were grown to exponential phase in YPD at 30 °C prior to RNA extraction. Scale bar =
762 20 μ m for all microscopy images. RT-qPCR results are presented as fold expression
763 relative to the wild-type strain, normalized to *ACT1* expression. Data represent mean
764 and standard error of the mean from three replicates. Statistically significant fold
765 changes are indicated; *, $P < 0.05$; **, $P < 0.01$; ***, $P < 0.001$; Welch's two sample t-
766 test.

767

768 **Fig. 5** Proposed model for the regulation of morphogenesis in *C. auris*. Ace2 mediates
769 cell separation through transcriptional upregulation of the putative chitinase *CTS1*.
770 Conserved components of the RAM pathway Kic1 and Cbk1 interact through Tao3 to
771 promote the transcription factor activity of Ace2. Elm1 is a negative regulator of *CTS1*;
772 cells defective in Elm1 activity exhibit aberrant pseudohyphal morphology. Elm1 also
773 serves as a negative regulator of *B9J08_002252*, which is associated with cell
774 separation through unknown mechanisms. Genes identified as associated with
775 aggregating or filamentous morphology through AtMT are indicated with stars.

776

777 **Fig. S1** A *C. albicans* ortholog of *B9J08_002252* is coexpressed with genes involved in
778 piecemeal autophagy of the nucleus. For the *C. albicans* gene *C7_00260C*, a putative
779 ortholog of the *C. auris* gene *B9J08_002252*, coexpressed genes were identified and

780 analyzed for GO term association using the CalCEN coexpression network. Each node
781 represents an individual gene and each edge corresponds to the relative degree of
782 coexpression. 43 of 50 coexpressed genes fall under the “Piecemeal autophagy of the
783 nucleus” GO term (dark green) and 7 fall under “GO term unknown, no annotation
784 available” (light blue).

785

786 **Fig. S2** Phase contrast and Hoechst 33342 stain imaging of a sixth insertional mutant
787 identified with irregular morphology through AtMT. The exact genomic locations of
788 transgene insertion sites in this mutant could not be determined.

789

790 **Fig. S3** *C. auris* isolates exhibit differential homology to the *ENO1* 3' homologous arm
791 used in the targeted transformation efficiency reporter cassette. The sequence of the 3'
792 homologous arm used in the cassette is provided. A pairwise alignment between this
793 sequence and the genomic sequence corresponding to the homologous region in each
794 of the four isolates tested for targeted transformation efficiency (AR387, AR381, AR383,
795 AR386) indicates differences in homology to the reporter cassette. Homology at any
796 given position is indicated by '.' while a nucleotide polymorphism at any given position is
797 indicated by A, T, C, or G.

798

799 **Table S1** Strains used in this study.

800

801 **Table S2** Plasmids used in this study.

802

803 **Table S3** Oligonucleotides used in this study.

804

805 **Data S1** Raw data for qPCR in Figure 4

806

807 **References**

808

809

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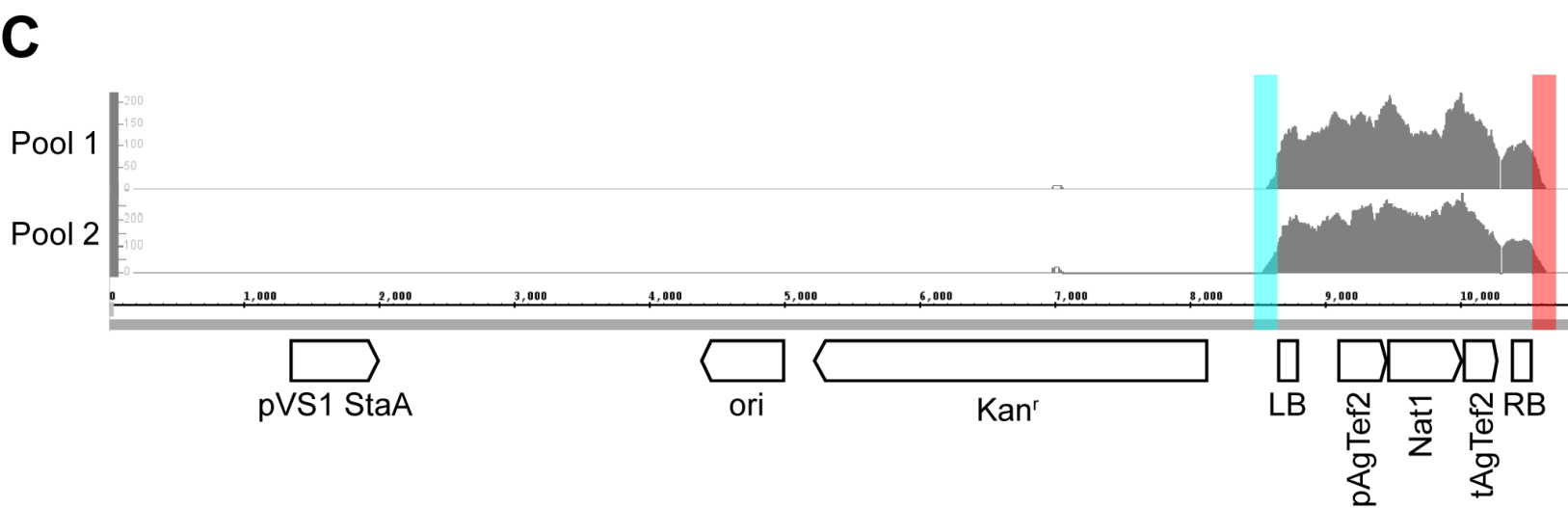
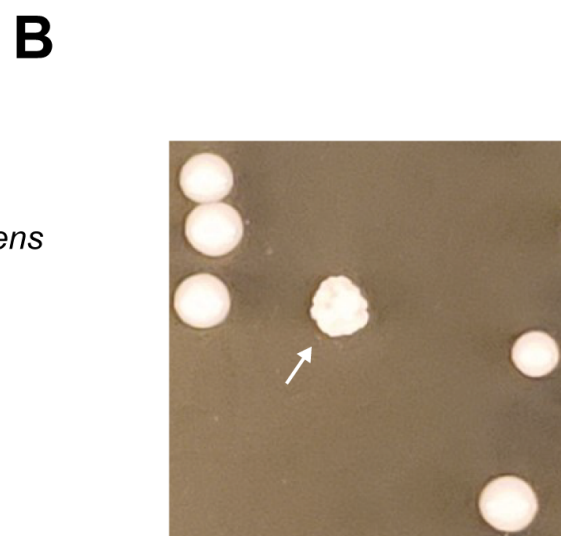
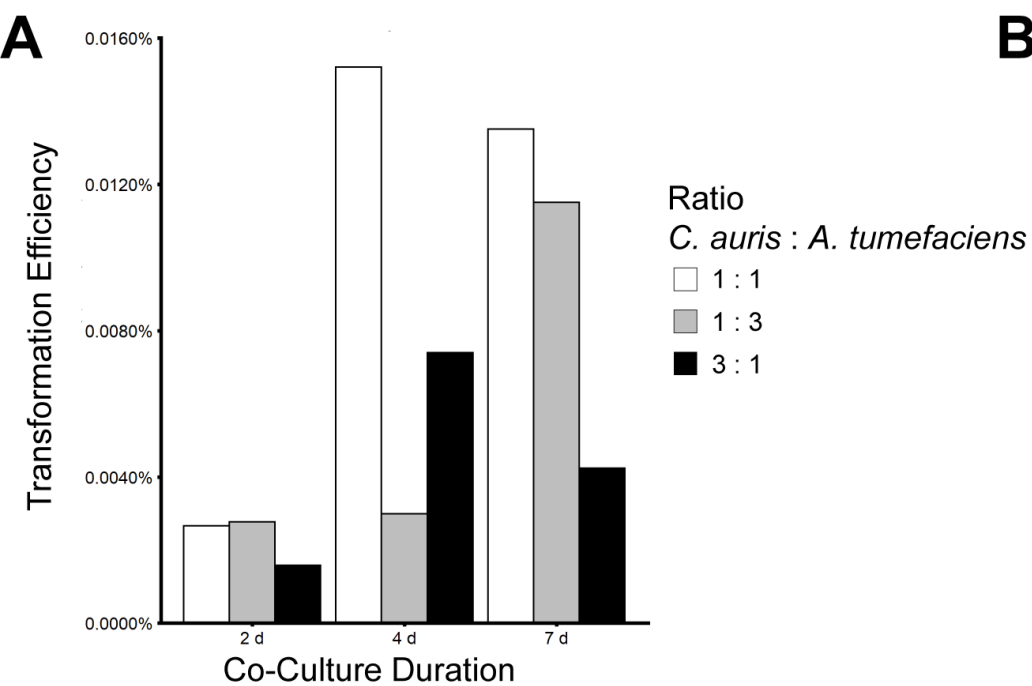
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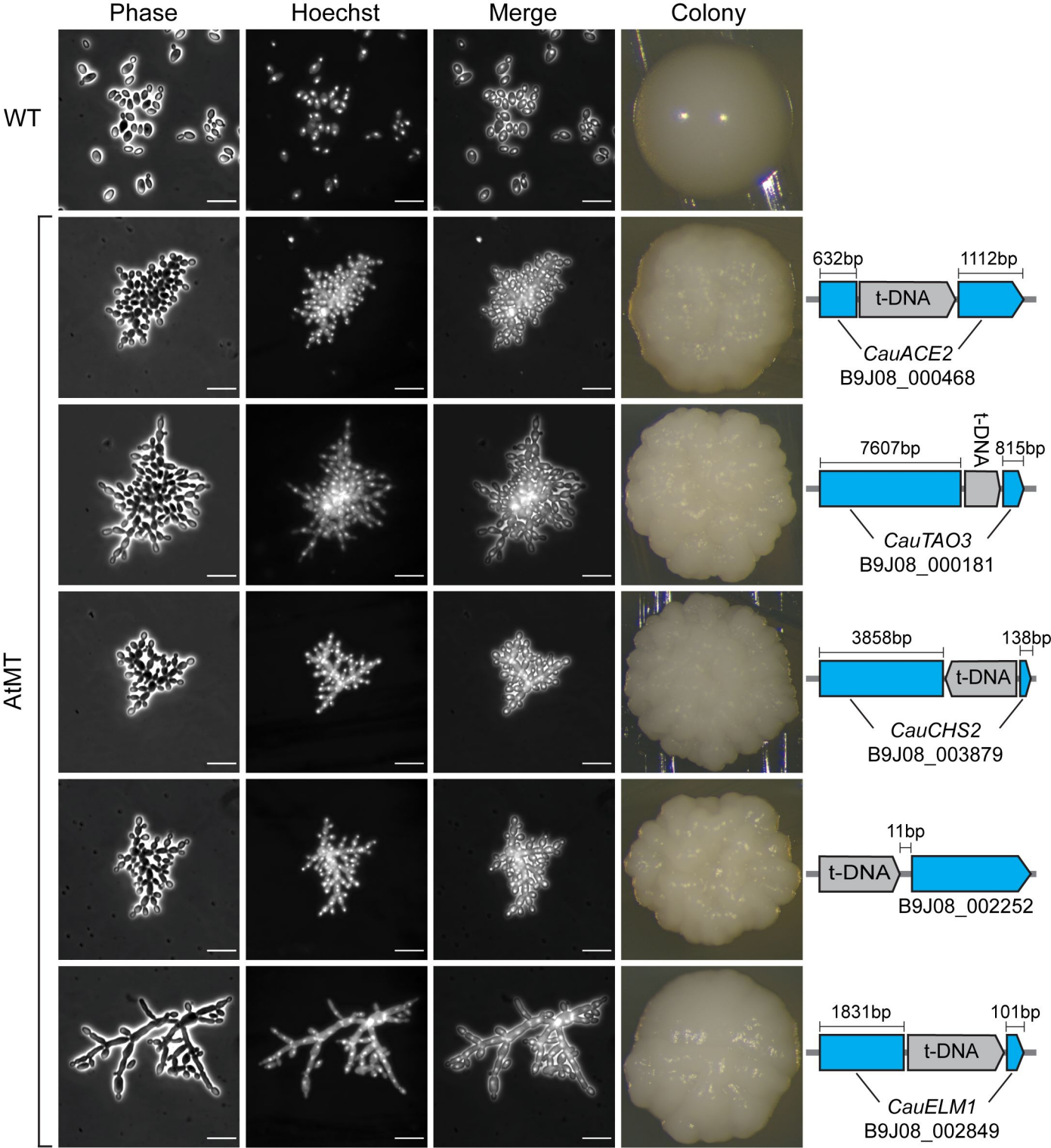
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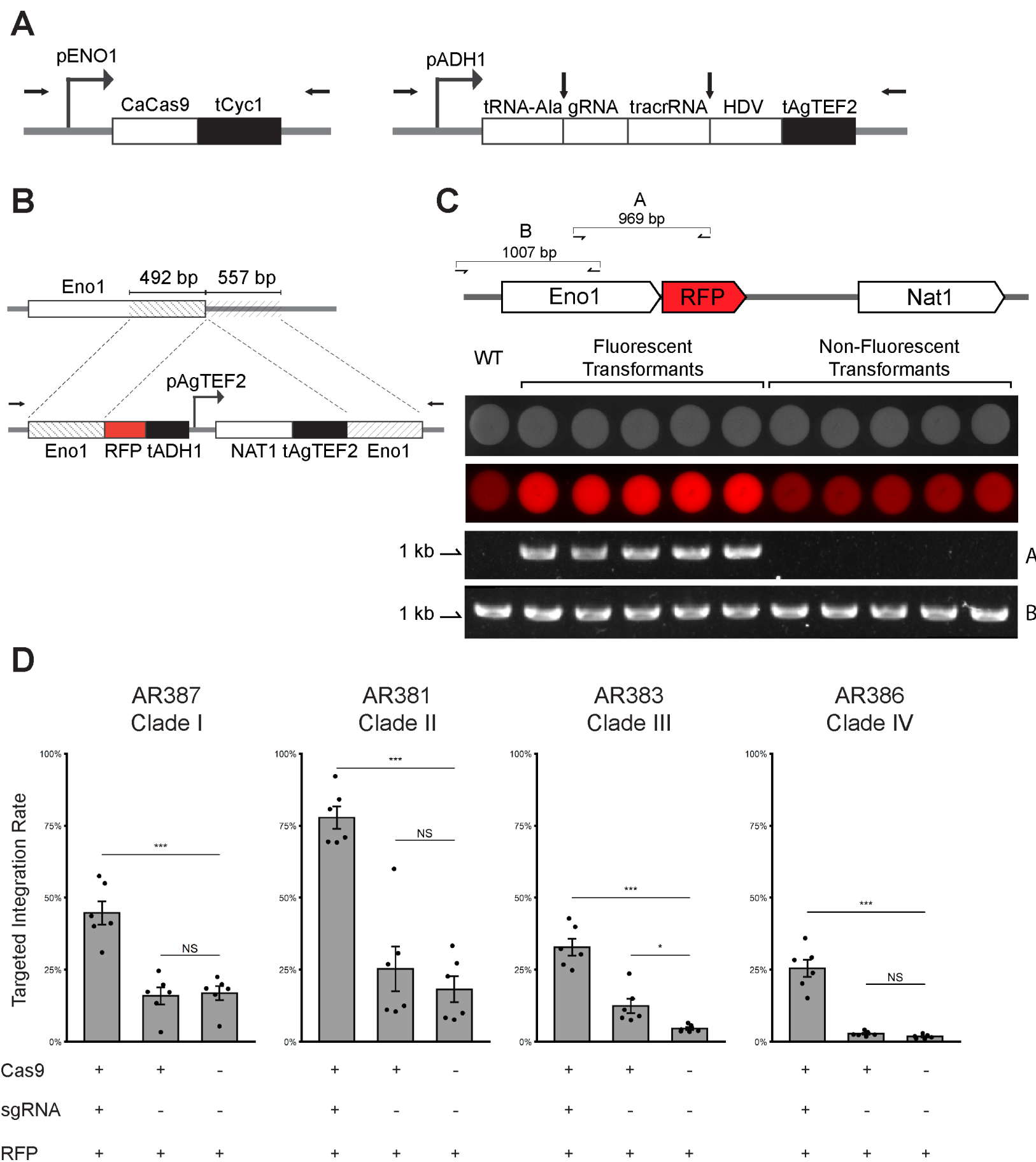
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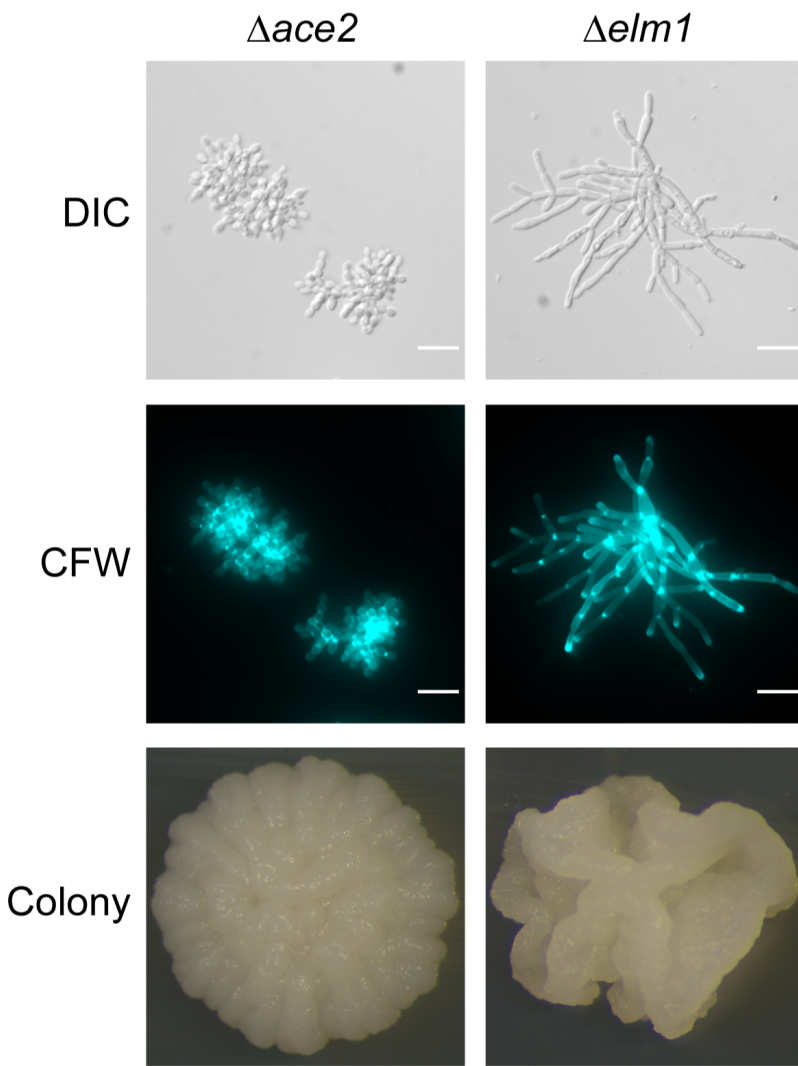
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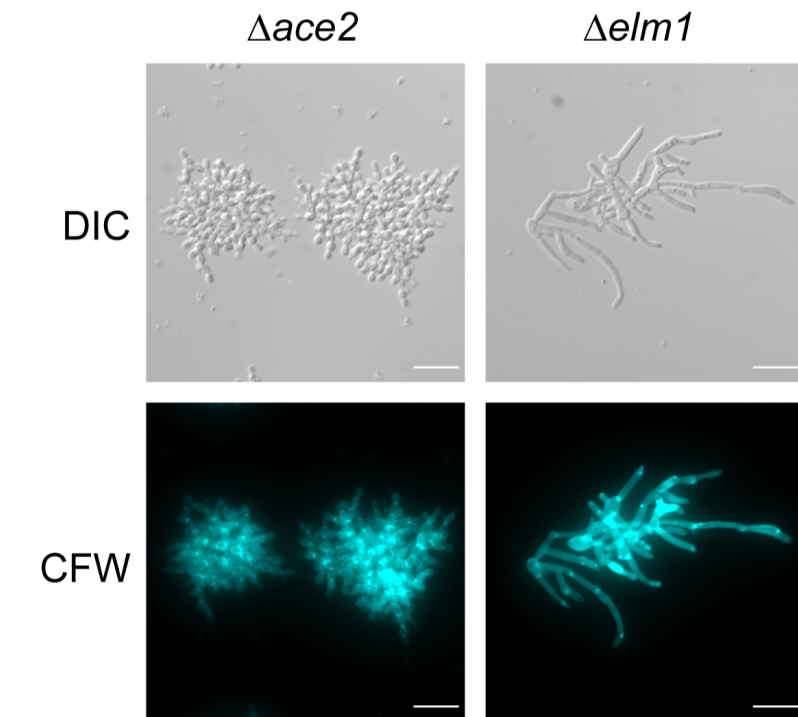


AR382
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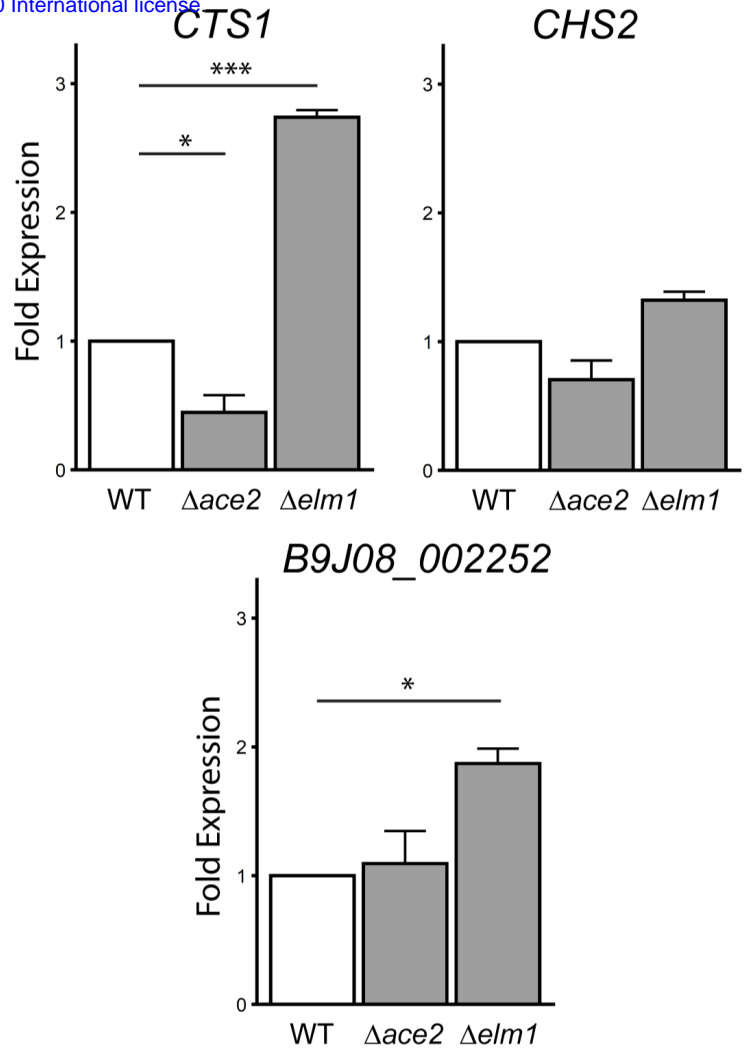


B

AR381
(Clade II)



C



D

