

Diversity of Plant Virus Movement Proteins: What Do They Have in Common?

Authors:

Yuri L. Dorokhov, Ekaterina V. Sheshukova, Tatiana E. Byalik, Tatiana V. Komarova

Date Submitted: 2021-06-21

Keywords: self-movement, MP/vRNA complex, cell-to-cell movement, intercellular transport, plasmodesmata, tobacco mosaic virus, movement protein (MP)

Abstract:

The modern view of the mechanism of intercellular movement of viruses is based largely on data from the study of the tobacco mosaic virus (TMV) 30-kDa movement protein (MP). The discovered properties and abilities of TMV MP, namely, (a) *in vitro* binding of single-stranded RNA in a non-sequence-specific manner, (b) participation in the intracellular trafficking of genomic RNA to the plasmodesmata (Pd), and (c) localization in Pd and enhancement of Pd permeability, have been used as a reference in the search and analysis of candidate proteins from other plant viruses. Nevertheless, although almost four decades have passed since the introduction of the term "movement protein" into scientific circulation, the mechanism underlying its function remains unclear. It is unclear why, despite the absence of homology, different MPs are able to functionally replace each other in trans-complementation tests. Here, we consider the complexity and contradictions of the approaches for assessment of the ability of plant viral proteins to perform their movement function. We discuss different aspects of the participation of MP and MP/vRNA complexes in intra- and intercellular transport. In addition, we summarize the essential MP properties for their functioning as "conditioners", creating a favorable environment for viral reproduction.

Record Type: Published Article

Submitted To: LAPSE (Living Archive for Process Systems Engineering)

Citation (overall record, always the latest version):

LAPSE:2021.0549

Citation (this specific file, latest version):

LAPSE:2021.0549-1

Citation (this specific file, this version):

LAPSE:2021.0549-1v1

DOI of Published Version: <https://doi.org/10.3390/pr8121547>

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Review

Diversity of Plant Virus Movement Proteins: What Do They Have in Common?

Yuri L. Dorokhov ^{1,2,*} , Ekaterina V. Sheshukova ¹, Tatiana E. Byalik ³ and Tatiana V. Komarova ^{1,2}

¹ Vavilov Institute of General Genetics Russian Academy of Sciences, 119991 Moscow, Russia; ekaterina.sheshukova@gmail.com (E.V.S.); t.komarova@belozersky.msu.ru (T.V.K.)

² Belozersky Institute of Physico-Chemical Biology, Lomonosov Moscow State University, 119991 Moscow, Russia

³ Department of Oncology, I.M. Sechenov First Moscow State Medical University, 119991 Moscow, Russia; bialik@bk.ru

* Correspondence: dorokhov@belozersky.msu.ru

Received: 11 November 2020; Accepted: 24 November 2020; Published: 26 November 2020



Abstract: The modern view of the mechanism of intercellular movement of viruses is based largely on data from the study of the tobacco mosaic virus (TMV) 30-kDa movement protein (MP). The discovered properties and abilities of TMV MP, namely, (a) *in vitro* binding of single-stranded RNA in a non-sequence-specific manner, (b) participation in the intracellular trafficking of genomic RNA to the plasmodesmata (Pd), and (c) localization in Pd and enhancement of Pd permeability, have been used as a reference in the search and analysis of candidate proteins from other plant viruses. Nevertheless, although almost four decades have passed since the introduction of the term “movement protein” into scientific circulation, the mechanism underlying its function remains unclear. It is unclear why, despite the absence of homology, different MPs are able to functionally replace each other in trans-complementation tests. Here, we consider the complexity and contradictions of the approaches for assessment of the ability of plant viral proteins to perform their movement function. We discuss different aspects of the participation of MP and MP/vRNA complexes in intra- and intercellular transport. In addition, we summarize the essential MP properties for their functioning as “conditioners”, creating a favorable environment for viral reproduction.

Keywords: movement protein (MP); tobacco mosaic virus; plasmodesmata; intercellular transport; cell-to-cell movement; MP/vRNA complex; self-movement

1. Introduction

Plasmodesmata (Pd) are channels that provide cell-to-cell flux as they pierce the cell walls and connect the cytoplasm of neighboring cells. Plant pathogens such as viruses exploit the pre-existing systems and mechanisms of intra- and intercellular trafficking of susceptible plants. To invade the distal parts of the plant, viruses follow the pathway of photoassimilate translocation. However, to reach the vascular system, the virus has to spread between cells, overcoming the restricted natural permeability of Pd for macromolecules. According to the function, the first described protein facilitating viral intercellular spread was designated viral “transport protein” [1] or “translocation protein” [2]. However, subsequently, another term became more common, namely, “movement protein” (MP) [1,3], which allows some ambiguity regarding the mechanism underlying its function. Studies performed in the last four decades have resulted in the discovery of several types of viral MP-encoding genetic arrangements. The transport function could be performed by one MP or shared between two or more proteins. However, in all cases, these proteins have the same purpose - facilitation of intercellular virus

spread by exploiting host plant pathways of intracellular trafficking and secretion and affecting the system of Pd permeability regulation and control [4]. Viral MPs are divided into two types: (a) MPs that increase the Pd size exclusion limit (SEL) without modifying the Pd structure and (b) MPs that interact with the components of Pd and modify the Pd channel with multi-subunit tubular structures consisting of tightly packed MP molecules such that intercellular viral transfer is mediated by these MP-formed “tubules”.

Notably, the concept underlying the function of MPs was formulated based on studies of tobacco mosaic virus (TMV). During decades of research on the TMV 30-kDa MP, the following features of this viral protein were revealed [4–9]. TMV MP (a) binds in vitro to viral single-stranded RNA/DNA in a sequence-independent manner; (b) participates in the formation of a stable viral ribonucleoprotein (vRNP) complex that moves through Pd; (c) is targeted to Pd and docks there via the Pd localization signal; (d) increases the Pd SEL by interacting with the host factors and Pd-associated proteins; and (e) moves independently of the viral RNA into the neighboring cells, creating favorable conditions for viral infection (serving as a cell “conditioner”) [10], including the spread of RNA silencing to produce a wave of small RNA-mediated gene expression changes ahead of infection to increase host susceptibility [11].

Thus, studies on TMV MP have resulted in the identification of the main properties of MP, which could serve as a guide for the identification of other viral proteins facilitating the intercellular spread of viral genetic material. Nevertheless, it appears that not all proteins designated as MPs possess the full set of capabilities identified for TMV 30-kDa MP.

We aimed to identify the common features characteristic of plant virus MPs, consider the complications and contradictions in the approaches for MP identification and define the term “movement protein”. We assessed the applicability of different methods that are usually applied for the study of potential MPs.

2. Brief Description of Methods for Evaluation of the Transport Function of Viral Proteins

2.1. Use of Transmission Electron Microscopy

The use of traditional transmission electron microscopy (TEM) to study structural features of symplastic transport in plants began long before the discovery and emergence of the concept of “movement proteins”. The use of TEM made it possible to acquire high-resolution electron microscopic data on the structure of Pd, which led to the creation of the first model of a primary plasmodesma [12] and the determination of its hydrodynamic radius [13]. Development of this technique later allowed electron tomography to be used to obtain unprecedented insights into the 3D ultrastructure of Pd [14]. However, TEM made it possible to detect TMV MP in Pd of transgenic tobacco, for the first time [15]. Findings demonstrated that secondary Pd are a specific site where this protein localizes [16]. Subsequently, immunolabeling fluorescence and electron microscopy showed that viral replicative complexes (VRC) containing proteins involved in TMV genome replication [17,18] and large amounts of MP [19] are localized at the orifice of Pd. TEM also permitted the detection of potato virus X (PVX) coat protein (CP) [20], potato leaf roll virus (PLRV) MP17 [21], and other MPs of plant viruses in the Pd cavity. TEM analysis is highly tedious since small and rare structures, including Pd, must be searched for. Therefore, an approach using a correlative light and electron microscopy (CLEM) technique that combines fluorescent imaging and TEM has been developed for analyzing cells infected with a virus [22]. By combining both microscopy platforms in analysis of the same sample, remarkable results can be achieved, as occurred for GFP-tagged Pd-located protein 5 (PDLP5), for instance [23]. Another example is the localization of remorin interacting physically with the PVX TGB1 protein, which was detected not only in plant plasma membrane domains but also in the Pd cavity [24]. Moreover, TEM enabled impressive results to be achieved in the study of MP and the intercellular transport of tubule-forming viruses such as cowpea mosaic virus (CPMV), for which viral RNA is transported from the cell to cell in the form of virions [4,25]. This method of intercellular movement of viral RNA was also typical for representatives of Bromoviridae, such as *Alfalfa mosaic virus* (AMV) and *Brome mosaic virus*

(BMV). TEM in combination with immunogold labeling revealed long tubular structures containing both MP and virus particles at the surface of infected protoplasts, indicating the functioning of the tubule-guided mechanism [26]. The use of TEM in combination with double-immunogold assays also enabled the discovery that similar to AMV, *Prune dwarf virus* (PDV), another member of the genus *Ilarvirus* that also belongs to the Bromoviridae family, moves in the form of virions from cell to cell via MP-generated tubular structures [27]. Interestingly, the authors performed computer-run 3D modeling and found structural resemblance between PDV and AMV MPs. Of course, as a tool for studying viral transport proteins, TEM has significant limitations [22,28]. For TEM, material of interest, such as plant leaf tissue, must be prepared to withstand observation under an electron beam in a vacuum. Therefore, it is necessary to chemically cross-link proteins to lock them in place. Subsequent treatments include dehydration in solvent to enable penetration of water-immiscible resins, polymerization of resins, ultrathin sectioning, and staining with electron-dense heavy metals. This process not only is labor intensive but also can distort cellular structures, such as Pd [29]. Regarding the topic under consideration, another drawback of TEM is more important. In particular, this approach hardly allows for observation of minor modifications of intercellular transport at the early stages of infection; thus, only late events and the most vivid structural changes in Pd are registered, such as characteristic occurrences for tubule-forming viruses, for example [30]. Therefore, study of the functioning of MPs should include the other methods described below.

2.2. Complementation and Reverse Genetics Experiments

During the study of the TMV MP transport function, a set of particular methods and approaches was developed and established. Furthermore, these methods were used in the study of other viruses. Among these techniques is the trans-complementation test, based on the phenomenon in which a viral protein synthesized in trans (often from a transgene integrated into the plant genome) can maintain or intensify the infection of the “dependent” virus that is temporarily or constantly defective in movement. Studies of the functions of genes encoding MPs have also led to the development of several trans-complementation techniques [31,32] (Tables 1 and 2). At the first stages of the study of TMV transport function, two temperature-sensitive (ts) mutants, namely, the Ni 2519 mutant of TMV A14 strain and Ls1 mutant of tomato strain TMV L, play an important role. These mutant variants can spread in plants at a low permissive (22–25 °C) temperature but not at a high non-permissive (32–33 °C) temperature. Ni2519 mutant, studied by Harald H Jockusch [33], was obtained after TMV A14 treatment with nitrous acid, resulting in the mutation leading to the substitution of arginine144 with glycine in the 30-kDa protein [34,35]. Ls1 is a temperature-sensitive mutant due to a single amino acid substitution in MP: proline154 for serine [2,36,37].

The first experimental setup for the trans-complementation was transgenic tobacco expressing gene encoding the TMV U1 30-kDa protein, which demonstrated the efficient intercellular transport of TMV Ls1 mutant at nonpermissive temperatures [3]. The second setup was the use of infectious cDNA copies of TMV [38,39], through which the phenotype of the Ls1 mutant was reproduced using nucleotide substitutions. The third approach involves simultaneous delivery into cells of the studied viral MP gene with the movement-defective viral genome during joint bombardment [40,41]. The fourth approach is the use of transient expression methods by which a movement-defective infectious plant virus (for example, TMV or PVX) and an investigated putative viral movement protein gene are introduced during joint agroinfection [42].

For an adequate interpretation of the results of complementation, the following aspects should be kept in mind. (a) The complementation can occur between unrelated viruses demonstrating the nonspecificity of viral transport systems [31,43]. This means that a trans-complementation approach could be used for RNA-containing viruses belonging to different taxonomic groups and having significant differences in genome structure. (b) The use of complementation methods revealed a close relationship between cell-to-cell movement and host range of plant viruses [1,31], i.e., for plant species to be a host for a particular virus, the indispensable feature is to maintain the ability of that virus spread

within plant and to be “compatible” with viral transport protein(s). (c) It is necessary to take into account and differentiate the phenomena of complementation of nonfunctional MP and synergism [32] mediated by other viral proteins, such as viral silencing suppressors, e.g., PVX TGB1 protein [43] and PVX Hc-Pro [44].

When assessing modern methods of candidate MP evaluation, it should be noted that, in addition to *Arabidopsis thaliana*, *Nicotiana benthamiana* is widely used as a model plant (Tables 1 and 2). Widespread in the field of host-pathogen research, this plant has become so popular because it is susceptible to a variety of pathogens, including a wide range of plant viruses [45]. However, the results obtained should be analyzed with some caution, as the characteristics of the candidate MPs obtained on *N. benthamiana* are not always reproducible when using other plants. For example, PVX TGB1 protein induces Pd gating and moves between cells in several host species, whereas its CP is able to move only in *N. benthamiana* leaves [46].

Table 1. Movement proteins (MPs) of the “30K” superfamily: involvement in plasmodesmata (Pd) permeability control.

| Viral Genome | Selected Viruses | SSEG | MP Properties and Experimental Approach Used to Study Its Ability to Increase Pd Permeability | | | | | | References | |
|--|---|--|---|--------|-------------------------------|---|---|------|------------|---------|
| | | | MW | Bind. | Model/Tested Plants | Identified/Confirmed | Tub. | Mov. | | |
| RNA positive sense | <i>Tobacco mosaic virus</i> (TMV) (genus <i>Tobamovirus</i>) | 126 kDa | 30 kDa | Yes | <i>Nicotiana tabacum</i> (Nt) | Trans-complementation test: complementation of TMV ts-mutant Ls1 in MP transgenic tobacco | NR | Yes | [3] | |
| | | | | | | Microinjection: increased movement of F-dextran in MP transgenic tobacco plants | | | [47] | |
| | | | | | | Microinjection <i>E. coli</i> -synthesized MP increased Pd SEL to permit passage of 20-kDa dextrans | | | [48] | |
| | | | | | | <i>Nicotiana clevelandii</i> (Nc) | Microinjection: <i>E. coli</i> -synthesized MP specifically mediated its own movement (demonstrated self-movement ability) between trichome cells as well as GUS:MP 90-kDa fusion protein | | | [49] |
| | | | | | | <i>Nt, Nc, Nicotiana benthamiana</i> (Nb) | Particle bombardment: cell-to-cell self-movement of TMV MP:GFP or MP:2xGFP encoded by 35S-promoter-based constructs | | | [50–53] |
| | | <i>Red clover necrotic mosaic virus</i> (RCNMV) (genus <i>Dianthovirus</i>) | p27 and p88 replicase proteins and 35 kDa MP | 35 kDa | Yes | <i>Nb, Vigna unguiculata</i> | Microinjection: <i>E. coli</i> -synthesized RCNMV 35 kDa MP increased Pd SEL to permit passage of F-dextran. <i>E. coli</i> -synthesized and FITC-labeled 35 kDa MP moved into neighboring cell (self-movement) | NR | Yes | [54] |
| Trans-complementation test: complementation of cell-to-cell movement of TMV with defective MP (TMV-MPfs) in the transgenic plant expressing the RCNMV 35 kDa MP gene | [55,56] | | | | | | | | | |
| Particle bombardment: RCNMV 35 kDa MP increased the SEL of Pd | [57] | | | | | | | | | |

Table 1. Cont.

| Viral Genome | Selected Viruses | SSEG | MP Properties and Experimental Approach Used to Study Its Ability to Increase Pd Permeability | | | | | | References |
|---|--|-------------------|---|-------|---------------------------|--|------|--------|------------|
| | | | MW | Bind. | Model/Tested Plants | Identified/Confirmed | Tub. | Mov. | |
| | <i>Cucumber mosaic virus</i> (CMV) (genus <i>Cucumovirus</i>) | CMV 2b | 30 kDa (3a) | Yes | <i>Nt</i> | Trans-complementation test: increased movement of microinjected F-dextran (10 kDa) in trichome cells of 3a MP transgenic tobacco | NR | Yes | [58] |
| Microinjection: <i>E. coli</i> -synthesized and FITC-labeled 3a MP moved into neighboring cell (self-movement). Unlabeled 3a MP increased Pd SEL to permit passage of F-dextran | | | | | | [59] | | | |
| Particle bombardment: cell-to-cell self-movement of 3a MP:GFP or 3a MP:GUS encoded by 35S-promoter-based constructs. | | | | | | [60] | | | |
| | <i>Alfalfa mosaic virus</i> (AMV) (genus <i>Alfamovirus</i>) | NR | 32 kDa (3a) | Yes | <i>Nt, Nb</i> | Microinjection: increased movement of F-dextran in 3a transgenic tobacco plants. Genetic analysis indicated that 3a gene of AMV is functionally interchangeable with different MPs assigned to the 30K superfamily | Yes | NR | [61–63] |
| | <i>Brome mosaic virus</i> (BMV) (genus <i>Bromovirus</i>) | NR | 32 kDa (3a) | Yes | <i>Nt, Nb</i> | Agroinfection: cell-to-cell self-movement of BMV MP:GFP encoded by 35S-based constructs | Yes | NR | [26,64] |
| | <i>Cowpea mosaic virus</i> (CPMV) (genus <i>Comovirus</i>) | Small CP | 48 kDa | Yes | <i>V. unguiculata, Nb</i> | Tubule-guided virus transport | Yes | NR | [65–67] |
| | <i>Tobacco rattle virus</i> (TRV) (genus <i>Tobravirus</i>) | 16 kDa, 29 kDa MP | 29 kDa | Yes | <i>Nc, Nt, Nb</i> | Microinjection: TRV-mediated increased movement of F-dextran in trichome cells. Trans-complementation test: TMV MP can substitute for TRV 29 kDa MP | NR | Yes(?) | [68–70] |
| | Potato leaf roll virus (PLRV) (genus <i>Polerovirus</i>) | | 17 kDa (MP17) | Yes | <i>Nt</i> | Microinjection: increased movement of F-dextran in MP17 and MP17:GFP transgenic tobacco plants | NR | NR | [71] |
| | <i>Tomato bushy stunt virus</i> (TBSV) (genus <i>Tombusvirus</i>) | P19 | 22 kDa | Yes | <i>Nt, Nb</i> | PVX-expressed 22 kDa MP complemented TBSV cell-to-cell movement defective mutants | NR | NR | [72] |

Table 1. Cont.

| Viral Genome | Selected Viruses | SSEG | MP Properties and Experimental Approach Used to Study Its Ability to Increase Pd Permeability | | | | | | References |
|--------------------|---|------|---|-------|-------------------------------|--|------|------|------------|
| | | | MW | Bind. | Model/Tested Plants | Identified/Confirmed | Tub. | Mov. | |
| RNA negative sense | <i>Tomato spotted wilt virus</i> (TSWV) (genus <i>Orthotospovirus</i>) | NSs | 30 kDa (NSm) | Yes | <i>Arabidopsis thaliana</i> | Cell-to-cell self-movement of NSm:GFP encoded by 35S-promoter-based constructs after particle bombardment | NR | Yes | [73] |
| | <i>Rice yellow stunt virus</i> (RYSV) (genus <i>Nucleorhabdovirus</i>) | P6 | 30 kDa (P3) | Yes | <i>Nb</i> | Trans-complementation test: P3 complemented the movement of MP-defective mutants of TMV and PVX | NR | NR | [42] |
| | <i>Citrus psorosis virus</i> (CPsV) and <i>Mirafiori lettuce big-vein virus</i> (MiLBVV) (genus <i>Ophioviridae</i>) | NR | 30 kDa | Yes | <i>Nb</i> | Agroinjection: cell-to-cell self-movement of CPsV MP:mRFP or MiLBVV MP:mRFP encoded by 35S-promoter-based constructs | NR | Yes | [74] |
| | <i>Raspberry leaf blotch virus</i> (genus <i>Emaravirus</i>) | NR | 30 kDa (P4) | NR | <i>Nb</i> | Trans-complementation test: P4 MP complemented the movement of MP-defective mutant of PVX | NR | NR | [75] |
| DNA | <i>Cauliflower mosaic virus</i> (CaMV) (genus <i>Caulimovirus</i>) | P6 | 40 kDa (P1) | Yes | <i>A. thaliana</i> | CaMV P1 MP is responsible for the formation of tubules through which CaMV virions move Particle bombardment: P1 MP forms tubules and does not pass from cell to cell by self-movement | Yes | NR | [76,77] |
| | <i>Bean dwarf mosaic virus</i> (BDMV) (genus <i>Begomovirus</i>) | TrAP | 33 kDa (BC1) | Yes | <i>Phaseolus vulgaris, Nt</i> | Microinjection: <i>E. coli</i> -synthesized BC1 MP increased Pd SEL to permit passage of F-dextran | NR | NR | [78] |
| | <i>Abutilon mosaic virus</i> (AbMV) (genus <i>Begomovirus</i>) | AC2 | 33 kDa (BC1) | Yes | <i>Allium cepa, Nb, Nt</i> | Particle bombardment: AbMV BC1 encoded by 35S-promoter-based constructs was only detected in single cells and never in neighboring cells | NR | NR | [79,80] |

SSEG, silencing suppressor-encoding gene; MW, molecular weight; Bind., RNA/DNA binding in vitro; Tub., tubule-forming; Mov., self-movement; NR, not reported.

Table 2. MPs encoded by two or more genes: the role in intercellular viral spread.

| Plant Virus MP Groups | Selected Viruses | Phl. | SSEG | MP Properties and Experimental Approach Used for Study of Its Involvement in Viral Trafficking | | | | | | References |
|-------------------------|---|------|------|--|------------|--|---|------|------|------------|
| | | | | MP comp. | Bind. | Model/Tested Plants | Identified/Confirmed | Tub. | Mov. | |
| Double gene block (DGB) | <i>Hibiscus green spot virus</i> (HGSV) (genus <i>Higrevirus</i>) | NR | NR | BMB1 and BMB2 | Yes (BMB1) | <i>Nb</i> | The trans-complementation of cell-to-cell movement of transport-deficient potato virus X (PVX) in leaves agroinfected with BMB1 and BMB2. BMB2 directed transport of BMB1 to Pd and neighboring cells (self-movement). BMB2 increases the Pd SEL in a GFP diffusion test | NR | Yes | [81,82] |
| | <i>Melon necrotic spot virus</i> (MNSV) (genus <i>Carmovirus</i>) | NR | CP | p7A and p7B | Yes (p7A) | <i>Cucumis melo</i> cotyledons | The trans-complementation of p7A- or p7B-deficient GFP-encoding MNSV-ΔCP infectious copy by transient expression of p7A or p7B, respectively, resulted in formation of fluorescent cell clusters | NR | NR | [83] |
| | <i>Turnip crinkle virus</i> (TCV) (genus <i>Carmovirus</i>) | NR | CP | p8 and p9 | Yes (p8) | <i>A. thaliana</i> | The trans-complementation of movement defective TCV mutants in transgenic <i>A. thaliana</i> plants | NR | NR | [84] |
| | <i>Pelargonium flower break virus</i> (PFBV) (genus <i>Carmovirus</i>) | NR | CP | p7 and p12 | Yes (p12) | <i>Chenopodium quinoa</i> leaves and protoplasts | Site-directed mutagenesis using the PFBV infectious clone | NR | NR | [85] |
| Triple gene block (TGB) | <i>Potato virus X</i> (genus <i>Potexvirus</i>) | NR | TGB1 | TGB1, TGB2, TGB3 | Yes (TGB1) | <i>Nt, Nb</i> | Microinjection: <i>E.coli</i> -synthesized 25 kDa TGB1 increased Pd SEL to permit passage of F-dextrans | NR | Yes | [86,87] |
| | | | | | | <i>Nt, Nc, Nb, Lycopersicon esculentum</i> | The trans-complementation of cell-to-cell movement of TGB1-defective GUS-encoding PVX with TGB1 fused to GFP after joint particle bombardment Cell-to-cell self-movement of PVX TGB1 fused to GFP encoded by 35S-promoter-based constructs after particle bombardment. | NR | | [46,88] |
| | | | | | | <i>Nt</i> | The particle bombardment: the GFP:TGB1 fusion protein moved from cell to cell in tobacco without presence of other PVX-encoded proteins (self-movement) | NR | | [89] |

Table 2. Cont.

| Plant Virus MP Groups | Selected Viruses | Phl. | SSEG | MP Properties and Experimental Approach Used for Study of Its Involvement in Viral Trafficking | | | | | | References |
|--------------------------|--|------|----------------|---|--------------|---|--|------|------|------------|
| | | | | MP comp. | Bind. | Model/Tested Plants | Identified/Confirmed | Tub. | Mov. | |
| | <i>Barley stripe mosaic virus</i> (genus <i>Hordeivirus</i>) | NR | γ b | TGB1, TGB2, TGB3 | Yes (TGB1) | <i>Nb</i> , <i>Chenopodium amaranticolor</i> | Usage of infectious cDNA copies showed (a) functions required for systemic invasion of plants and (b) TGB1 interaction with nucleolar protein fibrillarin is required for cell-to-cell movement of BSMV Trans-complementation: TMV MP was able to functionally substitute for the BSMV TGB-coded MPs. | NR | NR | [90–92] |
| Multiple-gene blocks | Genus <i>Potyvirus</i> : <i>Potato virus Y</i> , <i>Bean common mosaic necrosis virus</i> (BCMNV), <i>Lettuce mosaic virus</i> (LMV), <i>Turnip mosaic virus</i> (TuMV) | NR | HC-Pro | CP, HC-Pro, VPg, P3N-PIPO | Yes (HC-Pro) | <i>Nb</i> , <i>Lactuca sativa</i> <i>A. thaliana</i> | Microinjected <i>E. coli</i> -synthesized and FITC-labeled CP of BCMNV or LMV and HC-Pro moved into neighboring cell (self-movement). Microinjected CP of BCMNV or LMV and HC-Pro increased Pd SEL to permit passage of F-dextran | NR | Yes | [93] |
| | <i>Beet yellows virus</i> (BYV) (genus <i>Closterovirus</i>) | Yes | p21 | p6, Hsp70 h, p64, CPm and CP | NR | <i>Nb</i> , <i>Claytonia perfoliata</i> | Cell-to-cell self-movement of TuMV P3N-PIPO:GFP encoded by 35S-promoter-based constructs after particle bombardment | NR | NR | [94] |
| | <i>Citrus tristeza virus</i> (CTV) (genus <i>Closterovirus</i>) | Yes | CP, p23 p20 | p33, p6, HSP70 h, p61, CPm, CP | NR | <i>Nb</i> , <i>Citrus macrophylla</i> | Genetic analysis indicated that the BYV cell-to-cell movement requires the presence of p6, Hsp70 h, p64, CPm and CP | NR | NR | [95–97] |
| | | | | | | | Genetic analysis indicated that the CTV cell-to-cell movement requires p33, p6, HSP70 h, p61, CPm and CP | NR | NR | [98–100] |

Phl., phloem-limited; SSEG, silencing suppressor-encoding gene; comp., composition; Bind., RNA binding in vitro; Tub., tubule-forming; Mov., self-movement; NR, not reported.

2.3. Assessment of MP Ability to Increase Pd Permeability

Pd permeability is determined by the size of molecules that can move through it and is estimated by a criterion termed SEL [101]. The SEL value was determined using microinjection of fluorescent probes into plant cells, and it was shown that relatively small molecules (<1 kDa) freely diffuse through the Pd of cells of an intact leaf. Moreover, it is generally accepted that the hydrodynamic Stokes radius, rather than molecular weight, is the key factor in the passage of small molecules through Pd [13]. Thus, evaluating the intercellular movement of GFP, which has a Stokes radius of 2.82 nm, the coefficient of epidermal cell Pd conductivity was calculated, which strongly depends on leaf developmental state (sink/source) and the effect of abiotic factors such as temperature (16/25°C) and illumination (light/dark) [102]. It is indisputable that the most important function of viral MPs is their ability to increase the Pd SEL [101]. This property was first identified in TMV MPs when transgenic plants expressing the 30-kD MP of TMV were studied [47]. The Pd of the leaves of these transgenic plants exhibited the ability to permit transfer of microinjected dextrans of up to 10 kDa in size, which was significantly larger than the size limit for the control leaves (<1 kDa). These experiments used a pressure injection system, exploiting air pressure as a physical force to deliver the probe into the target cell. Although it is believed that sudden changes in pressure are less harmful to plant cells than changes caused by iontophoresis [103,104], surprisingly, TMV MP could mediate the movement of coinjected fluorescent dextrans within minutes to not only neighboring cells but also cells farther away from the primary injected cell [48].

Subsequently, the particle bombardment method was developed and applied: the primary inoculated so-called “0” cell [102] received not the bacterially synthesized “candidate” MP (as during the microinjection procedure) but the plasmid encoding MP:GFP translational fusions [51]. The fusion of TMV MP with GFP did not significantly affect the functional activity of the MP (see below). This method enabled identification of a “0” biolistically transformed cell surrounded by cells with decreasing GFP fluorescence. The detected gradient of GFP fluorescence was interpreted as evidence of MP (as MP:GFP) transport from “0” cells to neighboring cells. This phenomenon seems to be based on the ability of MPs to move to neighboring healthy cells in the absence of replicating viral RNA, i.e., as a self-movement phenomenon [10], characteristic not only for TMV MP but for MPs of other viruses as well (Tables 1 and 2).

Genes encoding candidate GFP-fused MPs can also be delivered to the cell by agroinfection [53,105]. Although diluted bacterial suspensions are used for agroinfection, unlike microinjections and particle bombardment, it is sometimes very difficult to identify the “0” cell. Therefore, during agrobacterial delivery of plasmids, it is necessary to create a genetic construct containing, in addition to the expression cassette encoding a putative MP, another transcribed unit—a promoter and a terminator flanking a fluorescent protein gene for marking the “0” cell, as was carried out for example using mRFP as a marker [81].

2.4. Use of Viral Vectors Encoding MP Tagged with GFP

Viral vectors encoding MP tagged with GFP now play an important role in understanding the participation of MPs in the intracellular and intercellular trafficking of viral RNA. This approach opened up new insights regarding the intracellular distribution of MPs and their association with host components [106–111]. Thus, fluorescence microscopy of protoplasts and leaf cells infected with TMV that encodes the MP:GFP fusion protein confirmed the fact that the MP:GFP is capable of being targeted to plasmodesmata and punctate sites near the plasma membrane [112,113]. Moreover, MP:GFP supported the infectivity of the viral copy and caused the expansion of necrosis on the leaves of the indicator plant, characteristic of wild-type TMV [114]. However, the presence of the GFP sequence fused to MP of an infectious TMV copy dramatically reduces the level of protein synthesis. Thus, a significantly smaller amount of MP:GFP was synthesized from the viral vector in both tobacco leaf cells and protoplasts compared with unmodified MP [19].

The decrease in the synthesis of MP:GFP directed by the infectious copy of the TMV is explained by the peculiarity of the functioning of the TMV subgenomic promoters; specifically, their “strength” decrease when the distance between the subgenomic promoter and the 3′-end of the TMV genomic RNA increases [115–117]. However, decreased MP:GFP synthesis did not significantly affect the development of infection at fluorescent infection sites on *N. tabacum* and *N. benthamiana* leaves [19,118]. This fact is in good agreement with the data of Arce-Johnson et al. [119], obtained in studies of transgenic plants accumulating different amounts of MP. It was found that the amount of MP required for local spread of TMV is much less than the amount of MP produced during TMV infection.

3. Diversity and Heterogeneity of Viral MPs: General Characteristics and Classification

Viral MPs can be divided into several groups [4,9,25,120,121]. The largest group (Table 1) is the so-called ‘30K’ superfamily, represented by a single gene product, as was first shown for TMV 30-kDa MP [120]. In other viruses, the transport function is performed by more than one protein (Table 2) and is distributed between two (encoded by double gene block, DGB) [81,122], three (encoded by triple gene block, TGB) [123–126] or many proteins (multiple MPs) [100,127–129].

MPs can be classified into two types according to their ability to interact with Pd [4]. The first and largest group is represented by MPs that increase the Pd SEL without affecting the Pd structure, as shown, for example, for TMV when, as is generally accepted, vRNPs spread from cell to cell [130,131]. Another small group is represented by MPs (Table 1), such as those from CPMV and cauliflower mosaic virus (CaMV), which are capable of self-interacting and forming tubular structures that replace the desmotubule, thus restructuring Pd in a drastic manner. With the aid of tubular structures, intercellular transport of the encapsidated virus occurs [132,133]. For some viruses transported as virions, the MPs, in addition to forming tubular structures, can apparently perform other functions. For example, tomato spotted wilt virus (TSWV) NSm MP is able to move independently of other viral components from a “0” cell to neighboring healthy cells of a model plant such as *A. thaliana* [73]. It is also known that MPs of tubule-forming CPMV are capable of transporting vRNPs in the AMV model system [30], which indicates the likelihood of intercellular transport in tubule-forming viruses using both vRNPs and virions [4].

4. MP Provides Intracellular Trafficking of Viral RNA to Plasmodesmata

Early studies of the synthesis of MP TMV strain OM in protoplasts showed that both MP and its mRNA could be registered as early as 2 h after inoculation of protoplasts, and after 7 h, their synthesis ceases [36]. Subsequently, the transient synthesis of MP TMV strain U1 was confirmed, and it was shown that MP was detected in protoplasts 4–6 h after protoplast inoculation. In the following hours, MP accumulated in the cells. Its amount reached a maximum by 13–16 h and then decreased [19]. Protoplast studies also confirmed the earlier conclusion that TMV MP is not involved in TMV RNA replication [2] but influences localization and intracellular trafficking of viral RNA (vRNA) and VRC [111,134]. Subsequently, the involvement of elements of the cytoskeleton and components of the endoplasmic reticulum (ER) in the intracellular trafficking of MP:GFP from the sites of synthesis in the cytoplasm to Pd was shown [134,135]. Thus, at the early stage of infection in BY-2 protoplasts, vRNA is colocalized with MP in perinuclear ER, and at a later stage, it becomes associated with vRNA-containing hair-like protrusions on the surface of the protoplasts. For the topic under consideration, it is important that the vRNA produced from the mutant infectious copy of TMV lacking functional MP was distributed not in the same manner as wild-type vRNA. Cells infected with TMV cDNA lacking the MP gene did not exhibit the fluorescent vRNA-containing protrusions of the cellular surface that occurred in cells infected with wild-type vRNA [134]. Thus, MP was not required for association of vRNA with perinuclear ER but was indispensable for the formation of the large irregular bodies and hair-like vRNA-containing protrusions [111,134]. Thus, already in early studies, it became apparent that MP mediates intracellular vRNA trafficking from the site of its synthesis to the Pd. The detection of TMV MP in VRC apparently reflects its ability to bind vRNA, as it is produced in the vicinity, as well as the

commonality of the location of vRNA replication and translation. This ability to co-localize with VRC is characteristic not only for TMV MP but also for MPs of other plant viruses [4,8,136].

However, the presence of MP in the VRC is not a prerequisite for its movement and localization in Pd. Experiments with trans-complementation [8,31,32] (Tables 1 and 2), indicate that the function of MP is to mobilize and trigger cellular mechanisms of symplastic intercellular trafficking. Apparently, ER membranes contribute to mechanisms of adduction MPs and replicated viral genomes in close proximity despite even trans-complementation conditions. It is known that the TMV MP introduced into the cell is located on the cytosolic face of the ER membrane [137], interacts with microtubules [131] and, thereby, provides accelerated intercellular movement of the replicating virus, as observed by Kawakami et al. [18] in *MP*-transgenic tobacco. The quantitative assessment of the rate of VRC intercellular movement showed that after viral exit from the first infected cells, the rate of spread sharply increases, which indicates the conditioning of neighboring cells, a process in which both replicase and MP can participate. When considering the possible mechanism of MP-mediated intracellular trafficking of VRC to Pd, known studies confirm the diffusion model, in which a complex including ER-associated MP, vRNA, and other cellular and viral components diffuse along the ER membrane within the Pd [138]. It can be assumed that the driving force underlying this process is the concentration gradient between an infected cell and adjacent noninfected cells, as suggested by considering the transport of photosynthetic sugar [139–141].

5. Are MP/vRNA Complexes Responsible for the Cell-to-Cell Transport of Viruses?

The discovery of the ability of TMV MP to nonspecifically bind *in vitro* to single-stranded RNA and DNA [142], confirmed by electron microscopy [143] and atomic force microscopy [144], led to the hypothesis of the involvement of the vRNA/30-kDa MP complex in intercellular transport [6,142]. Subsequently, in addition to TMV MP, the ability to nonspecifically bind RNA *in vitro* was shown for MPs of many viruses [6] (Tables 1 and 2). Possessing this ability, TMV MP can form an RNP complex in a cell with its own template; since the MP is translated in the vicinity of the viral RNA, it is likely that the MP will be part of the viral movement complex. Indeed, the presence of the MP/vRNA RNP complex in a TMV-infected cell was confirmed by a technique combining the visualization of MPs fused with a fluorescent tag with MS2-based RNA labeling technology [145]. Although the sensitivity of MS2-technology was not high and only a small number of RNA-containing MP particles could be detected, the authors were able to show that transiently expressed TMV MP accumulated in Pd and mediated the transport of its own mRNA to the Pd pore. Recently, the technique of *in planta* mRNA tagging was improved based on the ability of the sequence-specific binding of the bacterial transcriptional antiterminator BglG [146]. The authors were able to show that transiently expressed *MP* mRNA is specifically associated with MP and transported between cells. Moreover, in this experimental system, *MP* mRNA could move between cells when not bound to MP [146].

To explain the results obtained, researchers have hypothesized that viral RNA is capable of moving to a neighboring cell, even in the absence of the bound MP, using the cellular mechanism of RNA transport, i.e., “MP may piggyback a ride on a normal RNA transport mechanism” [145]. Indeed, recent studies have indicated the presence in plant transposable RNAs of specific nucleotide sequences recognized by RNA-binding proteins that guide the RNAs to a neighboring cell [147]. Thus, it has been established that cellular RNA with a tRNA-like structure is capable of intercellular transport [148]. It should be borne in mind that TMV RNA, as well as RNAs of many other plant viruses, has a tRNA-like structure [149]. It is possible that, in addition to participating in viral replication, tRNA-like structures are also involved in the intercellular transport of viral RNA.

When evaluating the MS2 and BglG technologies and the ability of these methods to reflect probable events in a TMV-infected cell, it should be considered that in addition to the MP, the 126-kDa replicase is also involved in cell-to-cell movement [150–153]. It is known that the TMV RNA [134], as well as the RNA of other RNA-containing plant viruses [136], released from the virion immediately binds to the ER to form VRC. VRCs are trafficked to Pd and are believed to move through Pd to spread

infection [18,136]. Moreover, it was found that only progeny viral RNA is available for the formation of movement complexes [154]. All of these results demonstrate that the Pd-mediated cell-to-cell spread is linked to replication. Therefore, the formation of a vRNP as a complex consisting only of MP and viral RNA is not sufficient for movement [8]. As we discussed above the MP/vRNA complex, in close interaction with the VRC via lateral diffusion along the ER membrane [138], moves into adjacent cells [8,131,155].

Moreover, the point of view that MP/vRNA complexes are the only structures responsible for the intercellular transport of viruses is questionable for the following additional reasons. MP mutant lacking amino acids 3, 4 and 5 (MP Δ 3-5) in transgenic plants was not functional and was unable to move to Pd; therefore, the intercellular movement of a fluorescently labeled dextran of 9.4-kDa molecules was blocked [156]. Deletion of amino acids 9 to 11 (TAD 1 mutant) also prevented the localization of MP in the Pd, although it retained its ability to bind to microtubules [157,158]. Regarding the topic under discussion, it is important to note that these deletion mutations were located in the MP N-terminal 50-amino-acid region designated as the plasmodesmal localization signal (PLS) and responsible for interaction with Pd [159–162]. These small deletions in the N-terminal region of MP were outside of its RNA-binding domains [143] and, therefore, did not affect the potential ability to bind both its own and cellular mRNA. Thus, the potential ability to form MP/vRNA complexes does not guarantee MP functionality.

6. Cell Conditioning: Is It a Universal Feature of All Plant Virus MPs?

The study of the properties of TMV MP revealed its ability to move into neighboring cells (self-movement) independently of other viral components [51–53]. MP self-movement is the basis for the mechanism of cell conditioning [10] or cell “predisposing” [18] that results in creating a favorable environment for the accelerated intercellular movement of genomic vRNA in the leading edge of the viral infection focus [118]. We believe that the cell conditioning occurs as follows: first, early synthesis of MP is likely mediated by an internal ribosome entry site (IRES_{MP75}) that allows translation of the MP gene directly from genomic RNA even before the synthesis of subgenomic RNA [117,163–166]. Moreover, direct experiments to restore movement function using the KK6 TMV mutant [167] containing IRES^{CR}_{MP75}, confirmed the possibility of early synthesis of MP from the genomic TMV RNA [168]. Second, the MP has the ability to interact with cellular factors, performing the function of a positive regulator of Pd, ensuring MP movement into the neighboring cell [169]. Third, TMV MP is believed to function as a viral enhancer of RNA silencing (VER) by stimulating the spread of RNA silencing between cells [11,170]. This conclusion deserves a separate comment and was made based on experiments using a sophisticated system for testing the intercellular transport of the silencing signal in the GFP-transgenic *N. benthamiana* 16c line [171]. The essence of the system is that 10 days after the introduction of additional ectopic gene encoding GFP into the leaf by agroinfiltration, GFP mRNA-specific silencing occurs, in which 21 nt siRNAs move outside the ectopic GFP gene introduction locus for a distance of 13 cells on average (\pm 2 cells) [171]. To assess whether TMV MP may influence the spread of the silencing signal, the gene encoding TMV MP or its different non-functional mutants was introduced into the system [157,172,173]. Surprisingly, both MP and its deletion mutants (MP Δ 3-5, aaD49-51 and MPP81S) mediated movement of 21-nt siRNAs through Pd [170]. Thus, it is undeniable that TMV MP and its tested mutants are involved in the spread of the silencing signal; however, apparently, they do this through a cellular mediator, interaction with which is not affected by mutations.

Finally, the ability of the MP to increase Pd SEL is transient and limited only by the leading edge of infection. Phosphorylation, as a posttranslational modification of TMV MP, leads to MP inactivation and thereby ends the period of permitted intercellular virus transport [174,175]. Thus, the transient cell conditioning function of TMV MP may include the mobilization of cellular mechanisms that open the Pd and the stimulation of RNA silencing movement between cells.

To what extent are the cell conditioning properties of TMV MP extended to MPs of other viruses (Tables 1 and 2)? If we exclude phloem-limited and tubule-forming viruses in which MP-formed tubular structures drastically modifying Pd, the MPs of the “30K” superfamily have characteristic features largely similar to those of TMV MP (Table 1). Among plant RNA viruses encoding more than one MP, there are very few examples of MPs with confirmed self-movement ability (Table 2). This property has been identified only for potyviruses, potexviruses and higreviruses. We believe that this is most likely due to either insufficient research on this feature in viruses or the lack of adequate model plant systems, as observed for phloem-limited viruses [128].

7. Conclusions

1. Genetic methods, including trans-complementation and techniques for Pd SEL assessment, allow identification of genes encoding proteins that are involved in the intercellular transport of plant viruses. It remains unclear how viruses belonging to different taxonomic groups and having significant differences in genome structure and host range can complement each other in the manifestation of the movement function.
2. Analysis of the properties of MPs of various viruses has been carried out in model plants, among which *N. benthamiana* has recently become the leading model due to its susceptibility to many viruses, although the use of this plant as a host could yield misleading results that are not reproducible when using the natural host of the virus.
3. TMV 30-kDa MP for a long time remained a standard in the search for candidate MPs; however, the characteristic properties of TMV MPs are rarely found in their entirety for other viral MPs.
4. The obvious ambiguity of the term “movement protein” will remain until we decipher the mechanisms of mobilization and exploitation by the virus of cellular factors that control intracellular and intercellular transport of macromolecules.

Author Contributions: Y.L.D., E.V.S., T.E.B. and T.V.K. analyzed the data, drafted the outline of the manuscript and wrote the manuscript. Y.L.D., E.V.S., T.E.B. and T.V.K. revised and finalized the manuscript. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: The work was funded by the Russian Science Foundation (project No. 19-74-20031).

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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