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Heinz Saedler, Alfons Gierl (Eds.)

# Transposable Elements

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Most genes are lined up on chromosomes like pearls on a string. However, a certain class of genes differ by being highly mobile; and the mechanism they are termed transposons. Their properties of transposition will be described in this book. Transposition is the rule, irregularities like a spot on a uniformly plain-coloured surface strike the eye. Thus the phenomenon of variegation has long been a source of fascination among organisms. In plants, variegation is most easily recognised as irregularities in pigment patterns on leaves, flowers and seeds, but other traits such as leaf or flower form might also show characteristics such as variegation. In 1588, such a variegation pattern was described in kernels of *Zea mays* by Jacob Theodor of Bergzabern, a village south of Strasbourg. The report by Theodor counts the different kernel phenotypes described it as if he is looking at a Mendelian segregation. It goes without saying that Latin-American Indians already bred such variegated material much earlier, but no descriptions have yet been uncovered. Meanwhile, genetically heritable variegation patterns have been described at many different loci in more than 34 different plant species.

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