Sequencing and Identification of Proteins from Five-Protein Mixtures on Platinum®

SUMMARY

Complex biological samples contain a diverse array of proteins, and understanding their presence and relative abundance is vital for unraveling the underlying biological processes related to human health and disease. However, traditional protein detection methods requiring antibodies or targeted reagents often face limitations in identifying proteins with variant peptide sequences. Quantum-Si's Platinum® instrument provides an innovative solution by directly sequencing proteins, eliminating the need for antibody-based assays. In this application note, we demonstrate the successful identification of five recombinant proteins within a mixture with Platinum, showcasing the feasibility of detecting multiple proteins without the constraints of antibody specificity.

Q-SI TECHNOLOGY

Quantum-Si's benchtop Platinum® instrument enables protein sequencing from biological samples in a simple user-friendly workflow. Our technology utilizes dye-tagged N-terminal amino acid recognizers and semiconductor chip technology to detect the binding characteristics and binding order of N-terminal amino acids, resulting in unique kinetic signatures that can be used to differentiate and identify amino acid residues and PTMs. A more detailed overview of the workflow and technology can be found in our Science Paper.

INTRODUCTION

Complex biological samples consist of multiple proteins. Understanding the presence and relative abundance of different proteins in a sample can provide important information about the biological processes underlying human health and disease. Some protein detection techniques identify proteins using antibodies or other affinity-based reagents with specificity for the proteins of interest. These methods require the generation of protein-specific antibodies or the use of commercially available or custom targeted antibody panels. The need to source or develop high-quality antibodies with the correct specificity for target proteins and panels limits the proteins that can be identified and typically places key information about proteins with variant peptide sequences out of reach.

Quantum-Si's Platinum® instrument offers a solution to identifying proteins in a mixture by directly sequencing them, eliminating the need for targeted antibody-based detection assay. To demonstrate feasibility of detecting multiple proteins in a sample on Platinum, we combined five recombinant proteins (CDNF, FGF2, IL4, GMFB, and PDIA1) in a mixture and used protein sequencing to identify them (Table 1). Protein identification through next-generation protein sequencing can confirm the presence or absence of specific proteins in a mixture. The ability to interrogate multi-protein sample mixtures at reduced input concentrations compared to the single protein concentration recommendations offers increased process efficiency and testing throughput. These results demonstrate the applicability of the Quantum-Si Platinum sequencing platform to interrogate complex protein samples via real-time dynamic sequencing.

Protein	Function
CDNF	Cerebral dopamine neurotrophic factor (CDNF) plays a role in neuronal function[1]
FGF2	Fibroblast growth factor 2 (FGF2) is part of a family of cell signaling proteins involved in normal development in animal cells[2]
IL4	Interleukin-4 (IL4) is a cytokine that suppresses inflammation and plays a role in tissue repair[3]
GMFB	Glia maturation factor beta (GMFB) is a growth and differentiation factor for both glia and neurons and involved in neurodegeneration[4]
PDIA1	Protein disulfide isomerase (PDIA1) serves many functions in chaperoning and assisting with folding proteins[5]

TABLE 1

The 5 Proteins Sequenced and Their Function

METHODS

Quantum-Si's library preparation workflow uses the Library Preparation Kit (Catalog Number: 910-10011-00) to perform reduction, alkylation, and endopeptidase digestion on intact proteins. The resulting peptide fragments then undergo azide-functionalization on C-terminal lysines, followed by attachment to molecular linkers using click chemistry conjugation.[6] To demonstrate increased sample complexity by combining multiple individual proteins prior to library preparation, we prepared libraries using two different methods (Figure 1).

REFERENCES

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In the first method, individual libraries were prepared separately from each of the five commercially available recombinant proteins CDNF, FGF2, IL4, GMFB, and PDIA1 following our standard library preparation protocol. Briefly, each protein was exchanged into Sample Buffer and diluted to a 5 µM final concentration. The proteins were then reduced, alkylated, and digested with the endopeptidase LysC. The resulting peptide fragments were subsequently functionalized and conjugated to macromolecular linkers as described above using the reagents provided in the Library Preparation kit.

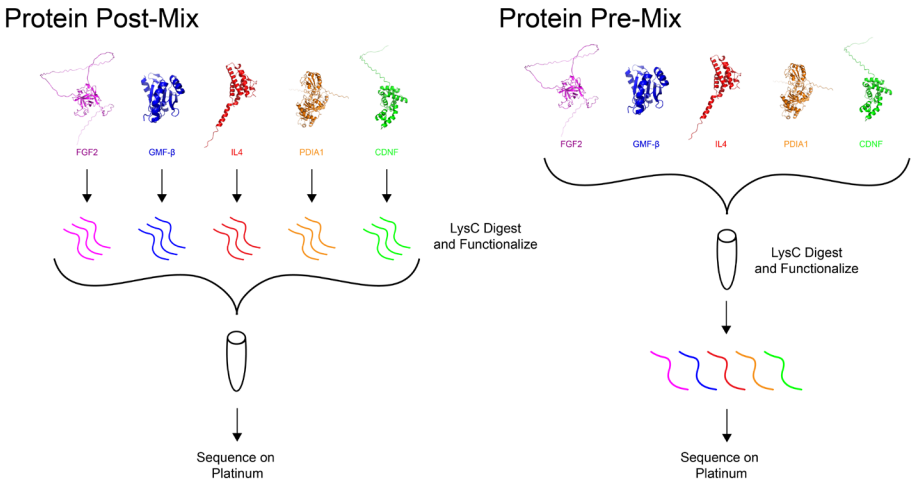

FIGURE 1

Schematic Representation of Library Preparation Workflows. In the post-mix workflow, 5 µM of individual CDNF, FGF2, GMFb, IL4, and PDIA1 proteins were digested with LysC and functionalized with linkers, generating 5 peptide libraries that were then mixed together in equimolar ratios prior to sequencing. In the pre-mix workflow, 1 µM of each of the CDNF, FGF2, GMFb, IL4, and PDIA1 proteins were mixed together, resulting in a 5 µM protein mixture. The proteins were then digested with LysC and functionalized with linkers, generating a single library ready for sequencing.

After library preparation, the individual libraries were combined into a single solution at equimolar peptide concentrations (100 nM final peptide concentration for each library). We term this sample the ‘post-mix’ sample.

In the second method, the five full-length proteins were combined at equimolar concentrations prior to library preparation. Here, a 5 µM solution containing 1 µM each of CDNF, FGF2, IL4, GMFB, and PDIA1 was first prepared. This solution was processed using the standard library preparation workflow described above. We term this sample the ‘pre-mix’ sample.

After library preparation, the post-mix and pre-mix protein libraries were sequenced on Quantum-Si's Platinum instrument with the commercially available Quantum-Si Protein Sequencing kit (PN 860-00002-00) using the previously described workflow for real-time dynamic protein sequencing.[6] Briefly, a 7 nM solution of the respective protein library was injected into one flow cell of the semiconductor chip, resulting in the conjugated peptides with exposed N-termini immobilized onto the chip surface. After washing of each flow cell to remove unbound peptides, fluorescently labeled N-terminal amino acid (NAA) recognizers and aminopeptidases were added to the flow cell. The NAA recognizers bind to the NAAs of the immobilized peptides and the fluorescence signal from these binding events is recorded. The aminopeptidases sequentially cleave amino acids from the N-terminus, exposing the next NAA for recognition, and the process repeats until the whole peptide is sequenced. Data is automatically and securely uploaded to the Cloud software environment for peptide identification and mapping to the correct protein.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

To compare the performance of the Library Preparation kit with a mixture of five proteins on Platinum, we first examined the peptide coverage for each protein in the pre-mix and post-mix samples. Given the five-fold lower sample input for each protein in the pre-mix sample, we sought to determine if the overall peptide coverage for each protein was reduced compared to the post-mix sample. As shown in Figure 2, analysis of the sequencing data resulted in the identification of an identical set of peptides aligning to each of the proteins present in both libraries.

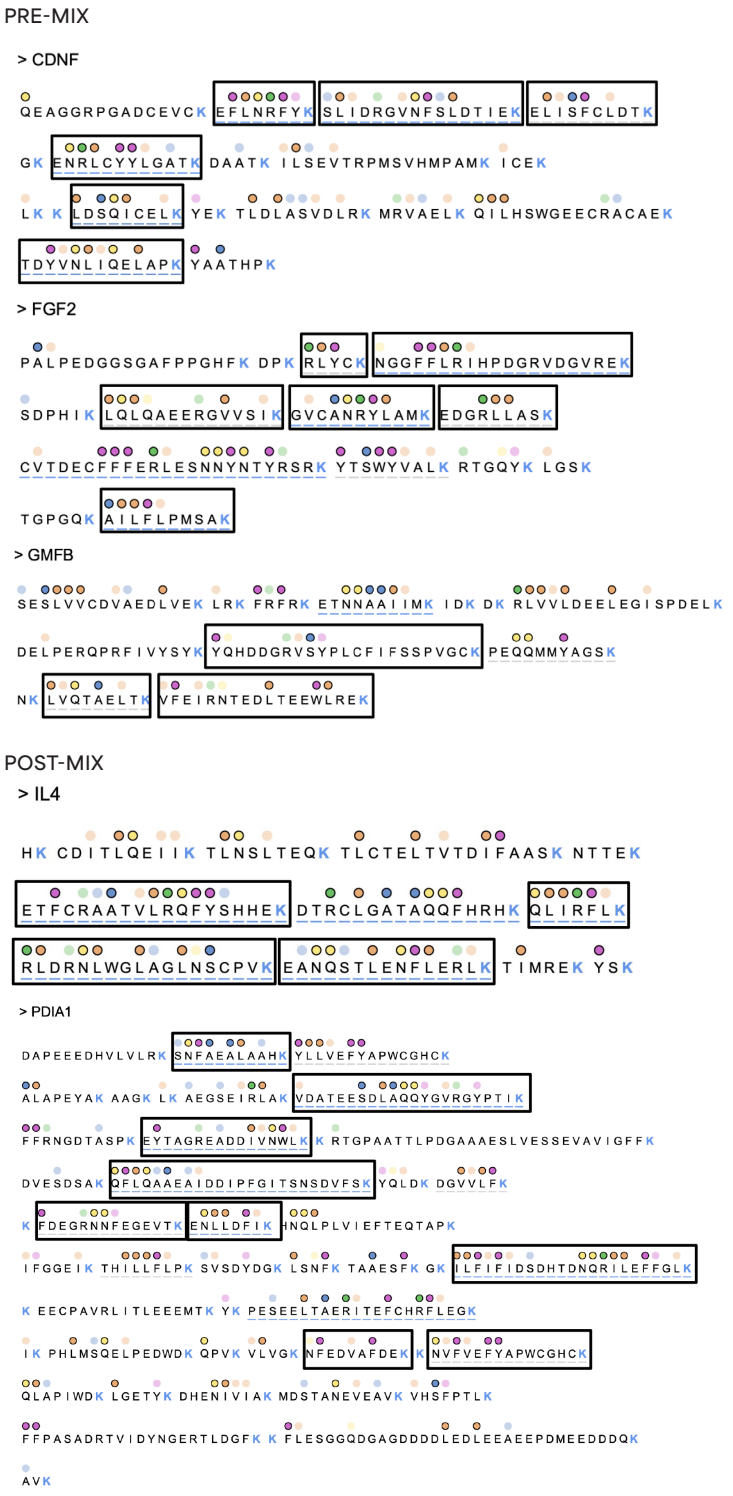

FIGURE 2

Comparison of Peptide Sequence Coverage from the Pre-Mix and Post-Mix Samples. Protein sequences were digested with LysC *in silico* and run through Quantum-Si's kinetic prediction software. Amino acid positions with high predicted average pulse duration (> 0.3 s) are indicated by circles with bold shading. Positions with low predicted average pulse duration (0.1–0.3 s) are indicated with light shading. Black boxes indicate peptides that were identified in the sequencing output by the software analysis pipeline. The same set of 9 total peptides aligned to PDIA1, 6 peptides aligned to CDNF, 5 peptides aligned to FGF2, and 3 peptides each aligned to GMFB and IL4 in both the pre-mix and post-mix samples.

CONCLUSION

In this application note, we demonstrated that the Library Preparation kit was effective in the preparation of multi-protein mixtures for sequencing on Quantum-Si's Platinum instrument. We demonstrated that the multiple protein workflow results in identical peptide identification and sequence coverage compared to preparation of a single library for each protein of interest. This new workflow will enable an increase in efficiency and throughput as multiple proteins can be positively identified within a single library preparation and sequencing run.