Cryo-EM Structural Studies of the *Vibrio cholerae* Flagellum

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*Vibrio cholerae* is a pathogenic bacterium, found in salt and brackish water, responsible for the diarrheal disease cholera [1]. This endemic-causing bacterium uses a single polar flagellum to swim to a surface and colonizes the surface with the help of its pili, forming communities called biofilms. *V. cholerae* forms sessile biofilms or biofilm-like microcolonies both in the environment and intestine during infection as a survival tactic [2]. *V. cholerae* is also capable of leaving a sessile community as a planktonic, hyper-infective, bacterium. *V. cholerae* flagella play a large role during the initial stages of biofilm formation and have a role in *V. cholerae* pathogenicity that is still being explored [1, 2].

Studies of the *Vibrionaceae* flagella have been limited in part due to challenges in purifying the flagellar sheath, which is an extension of the cell membrane, from the flagellar filament [3, 4]. Some bacteria have a single flagellin protein that makes up its flagella, while others have multiple flagellins, forming a helical flagellar filament [5]. *V. cholerae* has 5 flagellins denoted FlaA, FlaB, FlaC, FlaD, and FlaE. FlaA is required to form a flagellar filament, and any ΔFlaA mutant is incapable of forming a filament. The 5 flagellin proteins in *V. cholerae* share approximately 60-80% identity and are redundant in structure but can differ in function [6, 7]. While the purpose of a multi-flagella filament is still being explored, different flagellins are thought to play a role in biofilm formation and toxin expression in *V. cholerae* [6, 8]. Here we show an optimized method for purifying the sheath off the *V. cholerae* flagella while keeping the flagellar filament intact, as well as reconstruction methods for helical assemblies imaged with cryo-electron microscopy (cryo-EM).

*V. cholerae* ΔFlaBCDE (FlaA only) is used to find the FlaA flagellin structure first due to difficulties resolving differences in flagellin structure in a multi-flagellin filaments during helical reconstruction. Flagellar mutants containing single flagellins can be used to solve these structures in a systematic way. *V. cholerae* flagellar filaments were purified as follows. *V. cholerae* ΔFlaBCDE was grown at 37°C and 250 RPM shaking in LB broth (Fisher BioReagents) until the culture reached an OD₆₀₀ of 0.7. Cell culture was passed through a 20-gauge needle using a 60 mL syringe to remove the sheath from the filament. Cultures were then centrifuged at 10,000 x g to remove flagella from cells and pellet cell debris. Next the supernatant containing detached, unasheathed flagella was centrifuged at 48,000 x g to pellet the flagella. The flagellum pellets were resuspended in 50 mM Tris-HCl, 20 mM NaCl, 0.1 mM Dodecyl-D-Maltoside. The centrifugations were repeated in 3 iterations to further remove cell debris. Cryo-EM grids were prepared as follows: purified flagella were plunge frozen onto glow-discharged, 200 mesh R2/1 Quantifoil grids (Quantifoil, Germany) in liquid ethane using a Vitrobot Mark IV (FEI,
Hillsboro, Oregon). Vitrified grids were imaged on a Titan Krios TEM operated at 300 kV. Three-dimensional reconstructions of flagella were generated using RELION 4.0 [9, 10].

Figure 1. Cryo-EM image of *V. cholerae* ΔFlaBCDE purified flagellar filaments. Scale bar is 50 nm.

References:

[10] This work was supported in part by the University of Wisconsin, Madison, the Department of Biochemistry at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, and public health service grants R01 GM104540 and U24 GM139168 to E.R.W. from the NIH. We are grateful for the use of facilities and instrumentation at the Cryo-EM Research Center in the Department of Biochemistry at the University of Wisconsin, Madison.