

The Evolution of Mass Spectrometers for High m/z Biological Ion Formation, Transmission, Analysis and Detection: A Personal Perspective

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Abstract

Mass spectrometry (MS) has become an essential tool in virtually all academic, pharmaceutical and biopharmaceutical analytical laboratories. The specialized and bespoke area of MS research and application of high m/z ion ($>m/z$ 6,000 and high mass, >150 kDa) formation, transmission, analysis and detection is a relatively new area of focus for MS, that has seen dramatic acceleration in interest over the last two decades. Herein we delve into this exciting aspect of MS, discussing how MS instrumentation has been refined and evolved for native-MS analysis. We cover the early groundbreaking experiments showing high m/z ion formation, transmission and preservation of protein structure in the gas phase. Additionally, we discuss specific instrument optimizations and modifications that have advanced high m/z generation, transmission, analysis and detection, contributing to the research area known as gas-phase structural biology. Native-MS sample introduction methods, emerging technologies, and future perspectives are also examined. Finally, we share personal opinions, observations and experiences that are new to the community or previously unpublished.

Introduction

Mass spectrometry (MS) is as ubiquitous as the application of nuclear magnetic resonance ¹, surface plasmon resonance ² and multiple chromatographic analytical methods ³ for analytical project advancement. MS is routinely used in pharmaceutical ⁴ and biopharmaceutical settings ^{5,6} including, but not limited to, research ^{6,7}, development and lot release ^{8,9}, government research ¹⁰ and academic research ¹¹ across the globe. MS has become much more routine, useable and accessible as a result of many factors, such as massively reduced instrument footprint, multiple detector types, easy and routine software control, much of which has been MS manufacturer driven. And of course, the development of both matrix-assisted laser desorption ionization (MALDI ¹²) and electrospray ionization (ESI ^{13,14,15}) which enabled the generation of biological ions, subsequent detection and exquisite characterization by the MS technologies described herein.

In the context of this discussion, what is high m/z ? This question really depends on one's perspective. If one's research area is Inductively Coupled Plasma MS ¹⁶ where the m/z range is typically no higher than m/z 250, then arguably a peptide of molecular weight (MW) 1500 Da, such as Glu-Fibrinopeptide b with an m/z value of 785.8 $[M+2H]^{2+}$, or routine reversed phase tandem-MS proteomics applications ¹⁷ can be considered high m/z . However in realistic terms, ions above the typical upper m/z range of a quadrupole instrument (generally is m/z 2000 ¹⁸) and are routinely accessible by ToF ¹⁹, orthogonal acceleration ToF (oa-ToF ²⁰) and Fourier transform ion cyclotron resonance (FT-ICR ²¹) were and are considered to be high m/z .

Over the past four decades the m/z and MW limits of MS instruments have been pushed (higher) and therefore have continually evolved. One can argue that the main impetus for this MS evolution was due to the need to analyze biological molecules that retain their native-like tertiary and quaternary gas-phase structures, being electro-sprayed directly from aqueous based solutions in to the vacuum of the MS. Exactly two decades ago, the term native-MS was coined ²², and the research area of gas-phase structural biology was born ²³. For a number of excellent reviews of native-MS and structural biology, we point the authors to the following review articles by Loo ²⁴, van den Heuvel and Heck ²², Benesch ²⁵, Benesch and Ruotolo ²⁶ Benesch and Hilton ²⁷ and Olinares ²⁸

For native-MS and gas-phase structural biology to have evolved to where it is today, MS instrument developments needed to be realized, implemented and become readily available for use by the diverse range of MS researchers across the globe. MS technology has evolved through multiple key areas, which we will discuss in detail below. For brevity, high m/z inorganic ion detection by FT-ICR and ion trap, the first proteins to be electro-sprayed from aqueous based solutions to bespoke time-of-flight (ToF) and Orbitrap MS instrumentation enabling mega-Dalton virus detection, are all key progress milestones. Herein we have chosen to focus on the enabling technology, that is MS instrument evolution affording high m/z and high MW formation, transmission and detection, that has enabled the area of native-MS.

This is not intended to be an exhaustive literature review. Instead, it's a personal perspective and commentary on subject matter that we are both passionate about and based on the works that we feel are most representative, impactful, and influential in high m/z and high MW research spanning the past four decades. Finally, additional authors' opinions on related topics can also be found in the Supporting Information.

What was High m/z Analysis?

Early pioneering high m/z research was presented by Amster ²⁹ and Lebrilla ³⁰ where they demonstrated, using cesium desorption ionization ³¹, the transmission and detection of CsI clusters at m/z values 16,241.9 [Cs(CsI)₆₂]⁺ and 31,833.6 [Cs(CsI)₁₂₂]⁺ respectively, by FT-ICR MS (Figure 1a) and Kaiser ³² measuring m/z 44,560 [Cs(CsI)₁₇₁]⁺ by quadrupole ion trap MS (Figure 1b). In 1983, Barber produced an [M+H]⁺ spectrum of proinsulin (MW 9.4 kDa) on a ZAB-HF tandem magnetic and electric sector mass spectrometer ³³ using fast atom bombardment (FAB ³⁴). ²⁵²Cf-plasma desorption ³⁵ coupled to ToF was an effective ionization technique for high m/z biological molecule analysis, where porcine pepsin was observed over a narrow set of charge states $z = 4^+$ to $z = 1^+$, up to m/z 34,633 for the [M+H]⁺ ion ^{35, 36} (Figure 1c; which can still be classed as high m/z today!). In the early 1990s, MALDI ToF was widely adopted for high m/z analysis of large biomolecules. Nelson ³⁷ demonstrated this when they reported the analysis of an intact IgM pentamer, with a measured MW of 982 kDa, with observed charge states ranging from $z = 6^+$ to $z = 2^+$. The development of ESI, specifically in combination with oa-ToF, further revolutionized the field of high m/z analysis.

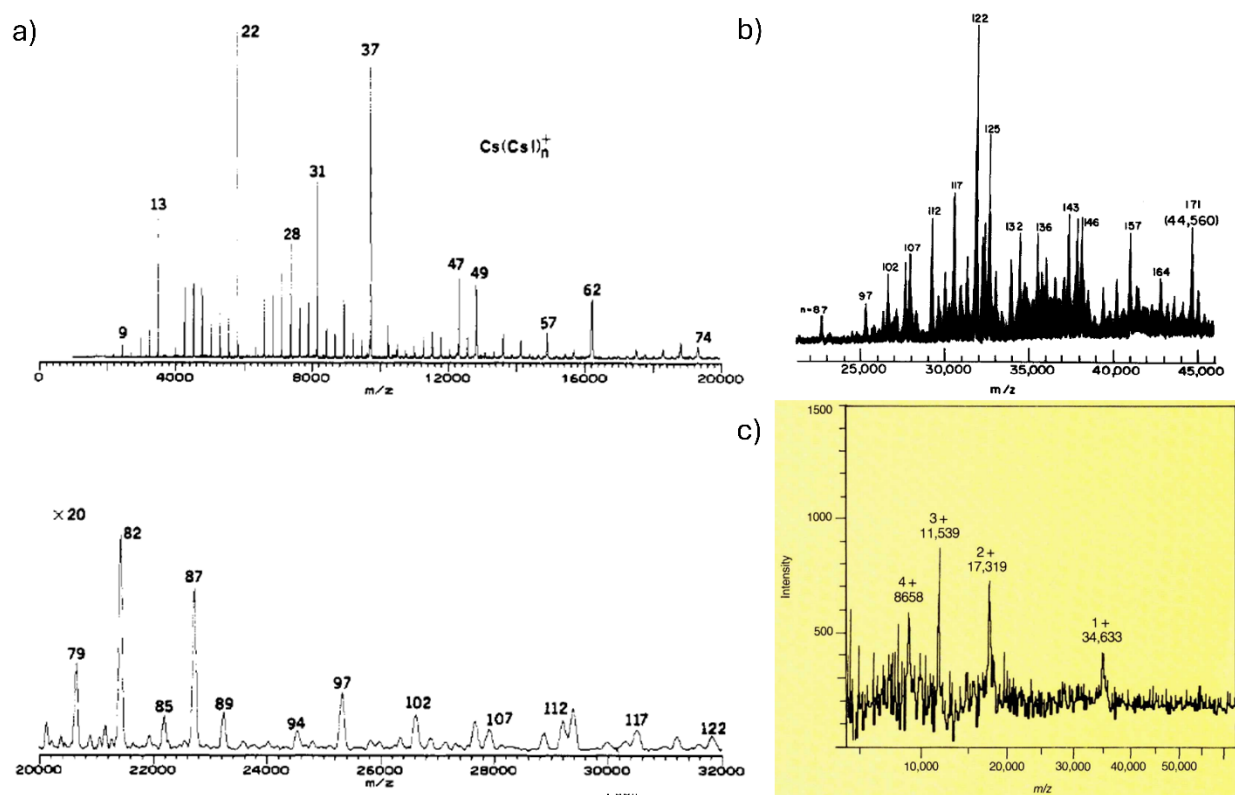


Figure 1. Examples of high m/z examples a) cesium iodide cluster ions obtained with an external ion source FT-ICR MS. The peaks are labeled by the number of cesium iodide units in the cluster, according to the general formula $[\text{Cs}(\text{CsI})_n]^+$, reproduced from reference ³⁰, with permission from the American Chemical Society, Copyright 1990; b) a high m/z cesium iodide spectrum using an axila modulation frequency quadrupole ion trap with reduced drive frequency, reproduced from reference ³² with permission from Elsevier Publishers, Copyright 1991; c) a plasma desorption mass spectrum of porcine pepsin obtained on a BIO-ION 20, reproduced from reference ³⁵ with permission from the American Chemical Society, Copyright 1988.

The Early Days of Intact Protein Analysis

After the initial discovery that ESI could generate measurable ions from protein solutions without causing significant fragmentation, a hallmark of electron ionization and FAB ionization methods, there was a mild “race” to demonstrate desorption/ionization of larger molecular mass proteins. Early ESI measurements of proteins such as serum albumin (66 kDa) and its covalent dimer (133 kDa) were measured using quadrupole ³⁸ and quadrupole ion trap ³⁹ mass analyzers.

The initial “native” mass spectra of human FKBP with FK506 and rapamycin complexes published by Ganem and Henion ⁴⁰ and the myoglobin-heme complex by Katta and Chait ⁴¹ (Figures 2a & b) also used a quadrupole analyzer. ESI coupled to quadrupole ion traps were quickly developed as a viable detector for protein MS. Later, other higher-performance analyzers, such as ToF ^{42, 43} (catalase HP II) and FT-ICR ⁴⁴ (tetrameric streptavidin) were demonstrated to have capabilities to measure protein ions high on the m/z scale. Even the magnetic sector instrument, once considered the premier mass spectrometer for protein sequencing applications ⁴⁵, pioneered by Klaus Biemann, was interfaced with an ESI inlet. Figure 2c shows ESI mass spectra of a FabI (enoyl acyl carrier protein reductase) homotetramer complex measured with a Finnigan MAT900 magnetic sector instrument ⁴⁶. Analysis of alcohol dehydrogenase under native-MS conditions has also been demonstrated using a magnetic sector MS ⁴⁷.

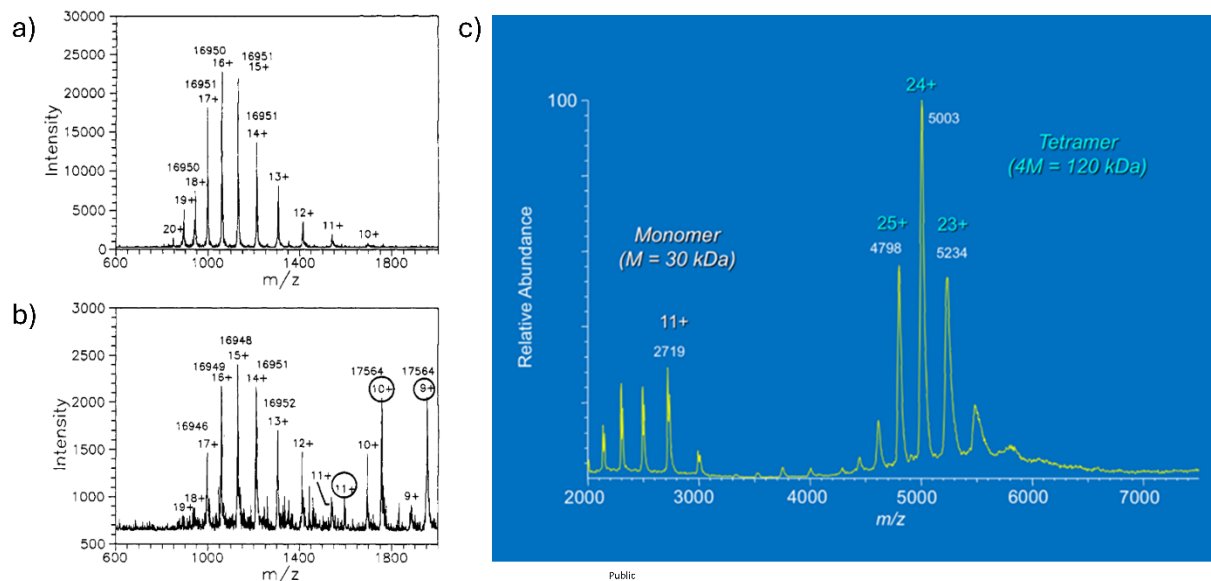


Figure 2. Early examples of native-MS analysis of: a) myoglobin (30-40 μ M) acquired at pH 3.35; b) myoglobin (30-40 μ M) acquired at pH 3.90, using a quadrupole MS, reproduced and modified from reference ⁴¹ with permission from the American Chemical Society, Copyright 1991; c) enoyl acyl carrier protein reductase (FabI) homotetrameric protein complex acquired on a double focusing magnetic sector MS (Finnigan MAT 900) reproduced from reference ⁴⁶.

Noncovalent Complexes become Larger and m/z Values Higher

Several pivotal works in ionization, instrument development and applied high m/z (and high MW) analysis will now be briefly described. Mann and Wilm initially described nanoESI (nESI ^{48, 49}) affording gentle aqueous to gas-phase transfer and desolvation of small droplets containing proteins and associated complexes. From an MS instrument perspective, the notably unmodified “off the shelf” first generation Micromass quadrupole time-of-flight (Q-ToF ^{50 51}) and the Micromass LCT (non-quadrupole based ToF ⁵¹) from the late 1990s afforded routine high m/z analysis,

Tito and Robinson ⁵² described the analysis of the tetradecameric chaperone complex, GroEL (14mer, 802 kDa). The analysis was performed on a non-modified first-generation Q-ToF ^{50, 51}, where the source pressure was increased (Figures 5a & b). The resulting spectrum displayed partially resolved charged states observed at m/z 10,000 (Figure 3a). It must be noted that this GroEL sample was nESI sprayed from a pH 5 water solution, as ammonium acetate was not commonly used then.

The next was by Rostom where they analyzed intact 30S, 50S and 70S intact ribosome complexes ⁵³. In 2000, Tito ⁵⁴ published a spectrum of an intact virus of MW 2.5 MDa acquired on an LCT ToF MS instrument ⁵¹.

Over the subsequent five years, instrument modifications (described below) were realized and implemented, allowing for dramatically improved high m/z (and high MW) transmission. As a result, improved GroEL charge state separation was rapidly achieved (Figure 3b). Finally, over the past quarter of a century, GroEL has taken on legendary status for native-MS analyses, in that it's now considered a “yardstick” protein standard, by many groups, for instrument evaluation ⁵⁵⁻⁵⁸. It is important to note that in addition to an optimized MS instrument, the key to a well-

resolved GroEL native-MS spectrum is a sample preparation method specific for this complex ⁵⁹,
60.

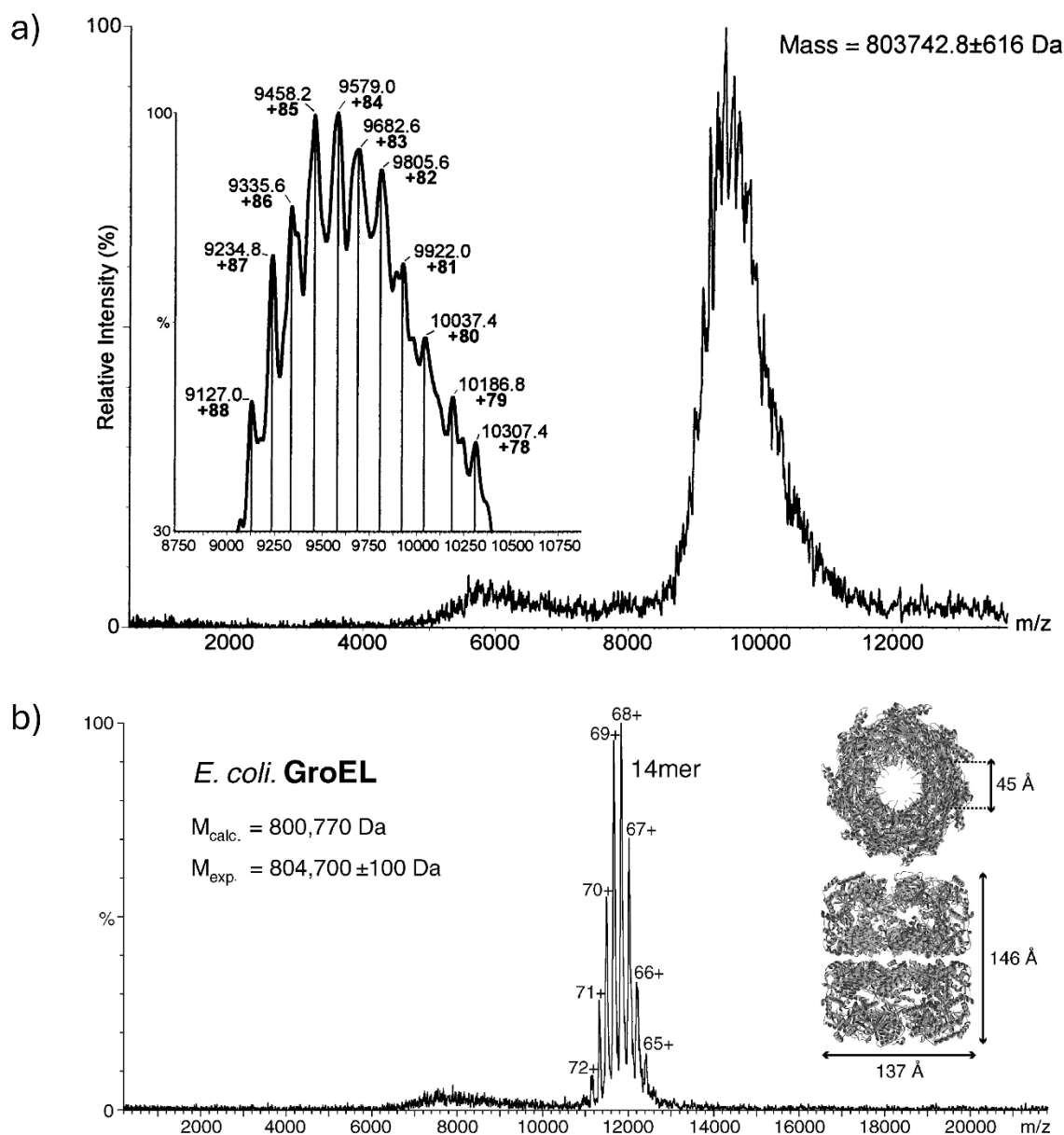


Figure 3. The evolution of GroEL native-MS over five years: a) the first published GroEL spectra, acquired on a non-modified Q-ToF MS, reproduced from reference ⁵² with permission from the American Chemical Society, Copyright 1999; b) the first published close-to-baseline resolved GroEL charge states acquired on a modified Q-ToF MS, reproduced from reference ⁶¹ with permission from Elsevier Publications, Copyright 2004.

What is High m/z Now?

The development of ESI^{13, 14, 62} rapidly afforded more routine analysis of higher m/z species, especially when combined with oa-ToF analyzers, that operate at relatively high pressures (compared to the ICR and Orbitrap) with routine extended m/z ranges. In the context of this manuscript, high m/z has somewhat moved away from the ultra-high m/z CsI spectra acquired prior to the development of ESI, to high quality charge state separation of native proteins and protein-protein complexes afforded by the instrumentation and associated development described herein. As a protein or protein complex becomes larger and is no longer solubilized in an acid and organic mobile phase, but is solubilized in an aqueous-based solution that is close to neutral pH, such as ammonium acetate (typically 50-200 mM or higher, depending on sample^{63 64}) it retains a more native-like folded structure, therefore possesses less overall surface charge (z), therefore appearing higher up the m/z scale.

High m/z analysis is now more routine than what it was two decades ago and in the context of protein analysis, has evolved into its own research field that can broadly be termed as native-MS^{22, 65} or even gas phase structural biology²³. The diversity of samples analyzed by researchers in these areas is now vast and range from monoclonal antibodies (mAbs) to membrane proteins and beyond, being analyzed in both positive and negative nESI polarities (Figures 4a-f).

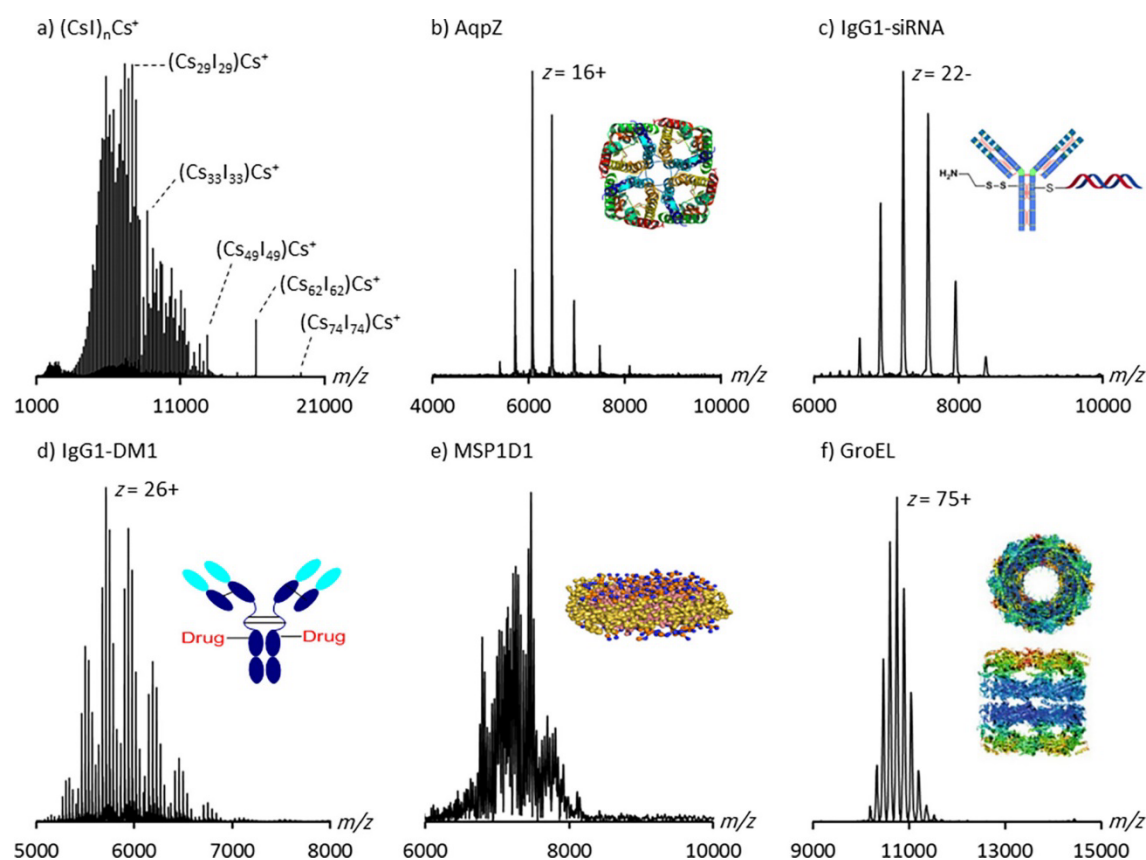


Figure 4. A selection of inorganic salt clusters, proteins and proteins complexes, analyzed by nESI, displaying charge states over a wide m/z range, acquired on a solarix 15 Tesla FT-ICR MS. All data displayed in magnitude mode using the Hann windowing function of $F = 0.5$: a) cesium iodide at a concentration of 50 $\mu\text{g}/\mu\text{L}$; b) the tetrameric AqpZ complex liberated from C8E4-micelles, 10 μM (1RC2, downloaded from www.rcsb.org); c) an IgG1-siRNA conjugate, 5 μM (displaying a single cysteamine modification); d) an IgG1-DM1 conjugate, 5 μM ; e) the empty MSP1D1 nanodisc, 10 μM and f) the tetradecameric chaperone complex GroEL, 5 μM (4V43, downloaded from www.rcsb.org). Reproduced from reference ⁵⁷ with permission from the American Chemical Society, Copyright 2020.

Bespoke MS Instruments make a Big Difference

A number of key reports have documented ⁶⁶⁻⁶⁸ and patented ^{69, 70} the bespoke modifications required for improved high m/z and high MW transmission and detection. We will now discuss each MS region, adding additional, and in certain cases, rarely referenced work.

Increasing Source Pressure: Ions are transferred into the intermediate pressure region of the MS source by a combination of gas flow, vacuum and voltage potential differences. Once inside the intermediate pressure region of the source, there is a free jet expansion process ⁷¹. This process results in the ions significantly deviating from their original axial and radial trajectories and gaining energies of 1 keV (or higher) with initial axial and radial velocities in the order of 2000 m/s and 1000 m/s, respectively ⁴³, depending on the size of the complex being studied.

The first documented uses of increased source pressure for improved high m/z transmission were by Krutchinsky ⁴³, Rostom ⁵² and Schmidt ⁷². In 2001 Tahallah ⁷³ systematically described the adjustment of the Micromass LCT Z-Spray source backing pressure for optimal high m/z transmission, for the protein complex vanillyl alcohol oxidase. This is a very simple, yet a highly effective MS source modification, where the external rotary pump was restricted by closing a factory, or user installed, restriction valve (Edwards Speedivalve; Figures 5a&b). The effect was an increase in pressure (~2 mbar to ~7 mbar) in the intermediate region of the Z-Spray source; the region immediately between the sample cone and extraction cone. This increase in source pressure provided the required collisional damping/cooling ^{43, 67, 68} and focusing of the large energetic ions, resulting in improved transmission, and ultimately, their detection. The pressure was accurately monitored by means of an Edwards pirani gauge ⁷³.

Other early examples of increasing Z-Spray source pressure are described by Sobott ^{61, 66}. Campuzano ^{70, 74} also described how heavy polyatomic gases, such as sulfur hexafluoride (SF₆) and octafluoropropane (C₃F₈), when used as a source cone curtain gas, are effective modifications for improving high m/z transmission. Bagal ⁷⁵ also demonstrated the use of xenon (Xe) and SF₆ as a cone gas for stabilizing small non-covalent complexes. It is likely that these large mono and polyatomic cone gases are carried into the intermediate pressure region of the Z-Spray source where they have the effect of collisionally cooling ^{67, 68} large energetic ions.

Additional pressure increases in the immediate proceeding ion optics regions have been implemented. These were achieved by direct introduction of gases (argon, Ar or nitrogen, N₂) into the source multipole (quadrupole or hexapole) region of the Q-ToF MS instrument ^{66, 67}. A gas flow restrictive sleeve ^{67, 68} (32 mm id and 100 mm in length) was also placed over the hexapole ion optics (Figure 5a) that increased the local pressure, improving CsI cluster ⁶⁷, proteasome 20S ⁶⁷ and GroEL ⁶⁸ transmission. The ion sleeve pressure was not adjustable.

Transmission is increased due to the improved axial and radial focusing, described by Chernushevich ⁶⁷ and later by van den Heuvel ⁶⁸ Benesch ²⁵ and Lee ⁷⁶, whereby the stopping path (for proteasome 20S) was reduced to approximately 120 mm at 4e^{-2} mbar (Figure 5c). Radio frequencies were also optimized in these regions to favor high m/z transmission. For example, the Synapt G2 ^{77, 78} (*circa* 2010 Waters Corporation, MS Technologies Center) can utilize a maximum radio frequency (RF) peak-to-peak voltage of 450 V at a frequency in the 1-3 MHz range, applied to the source stacked ring ion guide ⁷⁹.

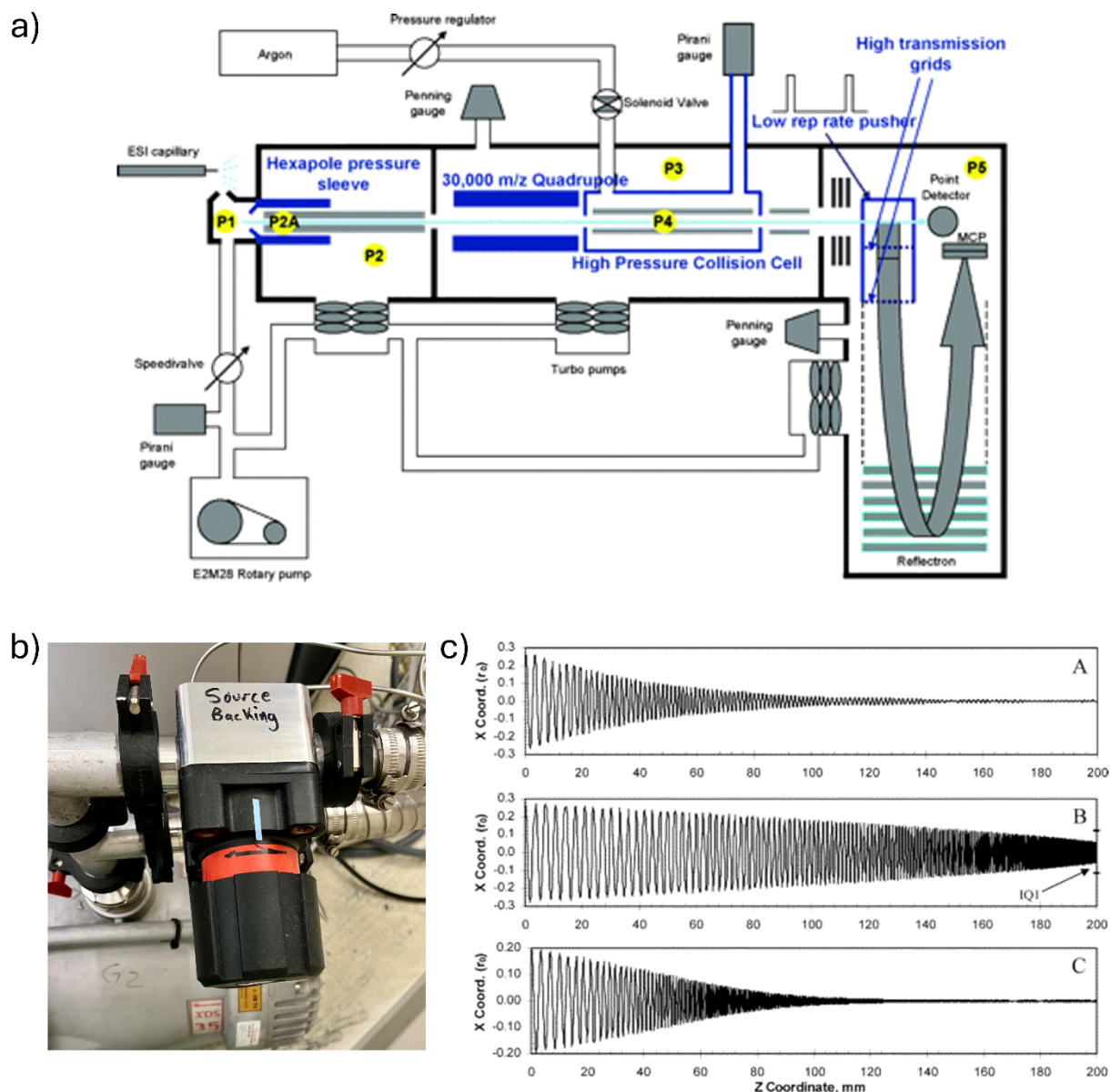


Figure 5. Early bespoke Q-ToF ion optics modifications to enhance high m/z ion transmission: a) a Micromass first generation Q-ToF MS instrument schematic describing the important modifications for improved high m/z transmission, reproduced from reference ⁶⁸ with permission from the American Chemical Society, Copyright 2007; b) arguably one of the most effective modifications to the Micromass-Waters Z-Spray source to enable high m/z transmission, the Edwards speedi-valve used to restrict source pumping, and increase localized pressure. The current image is of a speedivalve mounted to a Waters Synapt G2 and an Edwards XDS 35 scroll pump; c) the simulated ion stopping paths for myoglobin at $1e^{-2}$ mbar (A); proteasome 20S at $1e^{-2}$

² mbar (B) and proteasome 20S at 4e⁻² mbar (C), reproduced and modified from reference ⁶⁷ with permission from the American Chemical Society, Copyright 2004.

Low Frequency Quadrupole RF-Generators: The quadrupole serves two purposes within an MS instrument; to transmit ions in RF-only mode and for ion (*m/z*) selection. As proteins and protein complexes become larger (in MW, when compared to monomeric cytochrome-C and myoglobin) and when ionized, by nESI, from neutral aqueous solutions, the charge states appear higher on the *m/z* scale. As a result, MS ion optics optimization was required.

Prior to the field of native-MS fully establishing itself, multiple studies were conducted where the upper *m/z* selection range of a quadrupole were increased to *m/z* 8585 ⁸⁰, 9000 ⁸¹ and 45,000 ⁸². When operating in RF-only (transmission) mode, the upper *m/z* limit is determined by Equation 1 ⁸³:

$$m/z_{\max} = \frac{4eV_{\text{RFmax}}}{0.70600r_0^2\Omega^2} \quad (1)$$

where *e* is the electronic charge of an electron in Coulombs (1.602e⁻¹⁹), *V*_{RFmax} is the maximum RF voltage output applied to adjacent quadrupole rods. *r*_o is the field radius, which is the center point of the quadrupole to an electrode. *Ω* is the operating frequency and 0.70600 is the *q_x* value from the Mathieu equation first stability region ⁸³.

Sobott described the reduction in RF frequency, from 832 kHz to 300 kHz allowing for an 8-fold extension in quadrupole selection ability (*m/z* 4190 to 32,400) and based on known quadrupole RF-transmission behavior, up to five times (Figure S1, Supporting Information) the RF-specified *m/z* transmission can be achieved, which in practical terms, is in excess of *m/z* 90,000. It must also be noted that CsI high *m/z* transmission was demonstrated on an unmodified 15 Tesla FT-ICR MS using a 6 k quadrupole (Figure 4a ⁵⁷). Sobott ⁶⁶ exquisitely demonstrated CsI *m/z* 22,226 (CsI cluster [CsI₈₅]Cs⁺) quadrupole selection (Figure 6a). Aquilina ⁸⁴ reduced the complexity of a highly polydisperse alpha crystallin complex, by *m/z* 10,000 selection and subsequent collisional activated dissociation (CAD). Utrecht ⁸⁵ demonstrated tandem-MS at *m/z* 21,000 for the HBV

cp149 capsid. Campuzano ⁸⁶ also demonstrated how tandem-MS of the highly polydisperse nanodisc, followed by mild CAD (and infrared multiphoton dissociation; IRMPD) on an FT-ICR MS, can be used to dramatically simplify the spectra, affording manual charge and MW assignment (Figures 6b & c). High m/z quadrupole selection has also been demonstrated on the hexameric membrane protein CYP3A4 ⁸⁷. Finally, the extended m/z range Orbitrap QExactive described by Belov ⁵⁶, contained a quadrupole operating at 285 kHz, demonstrating m/z 10,265 (CsI cluster $[\text{CsI}_{39}]\text{Cs}^+$) selection.

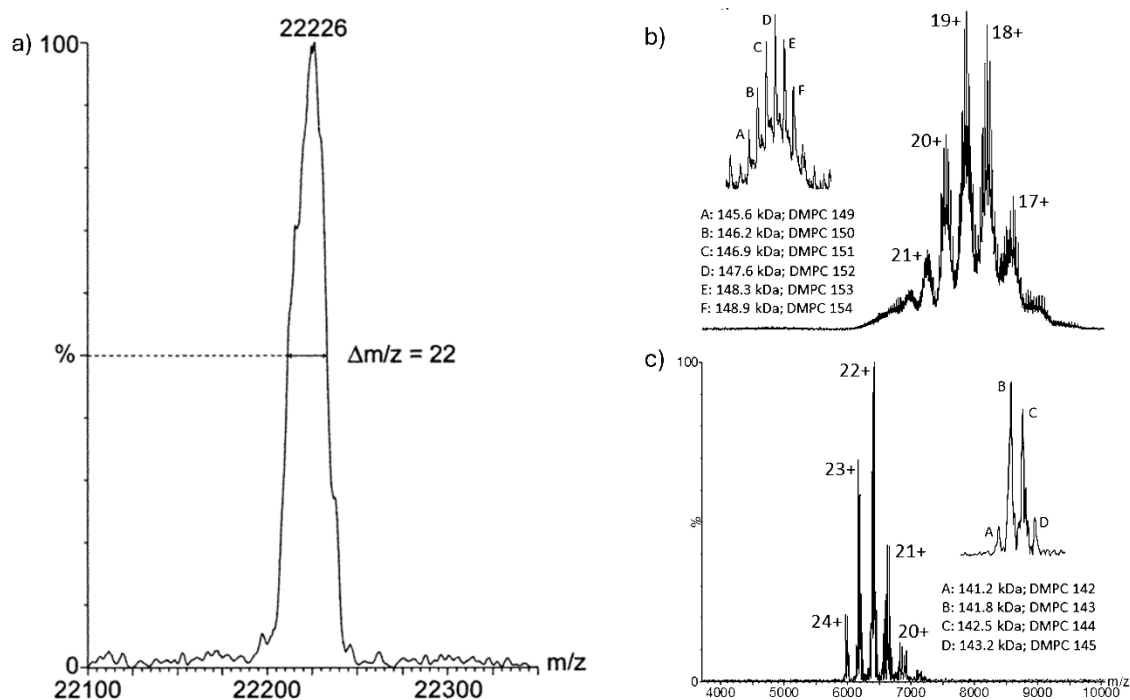


Figure 6. Examples of Q-ToF and FT-ICR high m/z quadrupole selection: a) cesium iodide cluster $[\text{CsI}_{85}]\text{Cs}^+$ at m/z 22,226, reproduced from reference ⁶⁶ with permission from the American Chemical Society, Copyright 2002; b) nanodisc spectral simplification by collision activated dissociation, Q-ToF Trap TWIG 40 V, SF_6 ; c) 15 Tesla FT-ICR infrared multiphoton dissociation, 0.2 s, 50% power, Synrad 10.6 μm CO_2 laser, reproduced and modified from reference ⁸⁶ with permission from the American Chemical Society, Copyright 2016.

The Collision Cell: A critical component for high m/z transmission, and optimal tandem-MS is the collision cell and the gas that is utilized. Briefly, CAD was first described Jennings ⁸⁸ in 1968, using an MS9 double focusing mass spectrometer (Associated Electrical Industries, Ltd.). In the context of high m/z transmission and specifically native-MS, different gases have been used, ranging from small monoatomic to larger polyatomic molecules (Table 1).

In 1988, Schey ⁸⁹ described multiple collision gases including, but not limited to helium, neon, Ar and Xe, for small molecule (≤ 352 Da) CAD purposes. This work preceded any biologic high m/z transmission and associated MS or tandem-MS optimization, using monoatomic and polyatomic collision gas studies by over a decade. In the context of the early Q-ToF MS instrument and associated high m/z transmission, the presence of a collision cell filled with a high-pressure neutral gas is absolutely essential for the required collisional cooling ^{67, 68} of the large energetic ions, minimizing or completely eliminating ion losses prior to the orthogonal injection pusher stack, thus enabling their subsequent analysis and detection by oa-ToF and microchannel plate, respectively.

The effect of collision cell voltage is also described by Green ⁹⁰ and van den Heuvel ⁶⁸ demonstrating fine structure, representing hemoglobin subassemblies and detection of noncovalently bound flavin cofactor, respectively. A consequence of operating at higher collision energies is that the ions become more energetic, requiring a higher collision cell gas pressure to refocus and cool them. To increase the localized gas pressure (in the collision cell) the apertures of the collision cell entrance and exit lenses were reduced from a diameter of 2.4 mm to 1.6 mm (2×10^{-3} to 1×10^{-2} mbar and 5×10^{-3} to 2×10^{-2} mbar, Ar) ⁶⁷. Collision cells also evolved from hexapole ion guides to stacked ring ion guides (SRIGs ⁷⁹). This change did not impact high m/z transmission, as demonstrated by multiple groups ^{77, 91-93}. Additional declustering and desolvation can also be achieved in the SRIG collision cell of an MS instrument. This has been effectively demonstrated on GroEL ⁶⁰, where GroEL charge state FWHM was dramatically reduced as collision energy increased (50-200 V, using SF₆ as the collision gas).

The nature of the collision gas is important. The first description of the use of Xe and SF₆ for native-MS applications was by Tito ⁶⁹ and then Sobott ⁶¹. Lorenzen ⁹⁴ described how the molecular nature of the collision gas (monoatomic noble gas-based) is also critical. The effect of the collision gases (Ar, Krypton; Kr, Xe) were measured as a function of transmission and

therefore, detection of the CAD-induced GroEL dodecamer (12-mer) decomposition species. The larger collision gas, Xe, was the most effective. The use of Xe as the high energy collision activated dissociation (HCD) gas in the Orbitrap (and N₂) was also described by Rose ⁵⁵. Due to the higher number of degrees of freedom ($3N$; translational, rotational and vibrational; Table 1), polyatomic molecules make for more optimal MS collision gases. Their increased ability to absorb the kinetic energy of translational motions of the highly energetic macromolecular ions and dissipate this energy equally across all degrees of freedom ^{69, 89}, resulting in reduced fragmentation ⁸⁹, improved MS and tandem-MS transmission and ultimately detection ⁹⁴. One must also note that as the collision gas MW increases (and degrees of freedom) the polarizability constant also increases (Table 1). One can therefore hypothesize that the increased polarizability constant of the collision gas results in a stronger long-range ion-induced ion-neutral dipole interaction, which also contributes to improved high m/z focusing, transmission and the overall collisional cooling process.

Collision Gas	MW (Da, ave)	Degrees of Freedom Total*	Polarizability Constant (x10 ⁻²⁴ cm ³)	Additional Notes
Argon (Ar)	39.9	3	1.64 ⁹⁵	Originally described by Morris ⁵⁰ for Q-ToF tandem-MS. Later described by Lorenzen ⁹⁴ for GroEL tandem-MS optimization
Krypton (Kr)	83.8	3	2.48 ⁹⁵	Described by Lorenzen ⁹⁴ for GroEL Q-ToF tandem-MS optimization
Xenon (Xe)	131.3	3	4.04 ⁹⁵	Described by Tito ⁶⁹ and Sobott ⁶¹ (Q-ToF) and later by Lorenzen

				⁹⁴ for GroEL Q-ToF tandem-MS optimization.
Nitrogen (N ₂)	28.0	6	1.74 ⁹⁵	Described by Tito for collisional cooling in intermediate pressure region of an LCT ToF MS ⁵⁴ . Described by Rose ⁵⁵ for GroEL (Orbitrap-EMR) and by Belov ⁵⁶ for GroEL and Pyruvate Kinase tandem-MS (in HCD cell)
Sulphur Hexafluoride (SF ₆)**	146.1	21	6.54 ⁹⁵	Described by Tito ⁶⁹ and later in publications by Ruotolo ⁹² and Campuzano ⁶⁰ (all Q-ToF)
octafluorocyclobutane (cC ₄ F ₈)	200.0	36	7.37-12.47 ⁹⁶	Described by Campuzano ^{97,98} for mAbs, mAb-siRNA conjugates, nanodiscs and GroEL (Q-ToF)

Table 1. A table describing the collisional cell gases that have been used over the past 30 years for either high m/z transmission or protein complex tandem-MS. The collision gas MW was calculated using MassLynx v4.1 (Waters MS Technologies, Manchester, UK). *Degrees of freedom based on 3 total (translational only) for monoatomic and $3N$ total (3 translational, 3

rotational and $3N-6$ vibrational) for non-linear polyatomic gases. N is equal to the number of atoms. SF_6 is a potent greenhouse gas ⁹⁹.

General Ion Declustering Considerations: The term declustering refers to the removal of non-covalently associated solvent, salt molecules and counter ions that were not removed from the protein or protein complex, during the nESI process. These species add to the charge state peak width ¹⁰⁰ and can be removed by increasing the number of ion-neutral collisions within the MS, by increasing acceleration voltage in a number of different areas in the MS.

In the Z-Spray source the voltage offset between the atmospheric sampling cone and partial vacuum region ($\sim 6\text{-}7$ mbar) and extraction cone can be increased to 200 V resulting in increased ion-neutral collisions, as the mean-free path in this region is in the order of $1.5\text{ }\mu\text{m}$ ⁸⁶. The voltage at which ions are accelerated into the collision cell (mean free path $500\text{ }\mu\text{m}$ at 2 e^{-2} mbar ⁸⁶) can also be increased to 200 V and results in effective declustering. The pressure in this region is high enough that accelerating ions up to 200V does not impact their stopping distance. Collision cell modifications (Q-ToF Ultima ⁵¹) have been described where the applied voltage was increased to 400 V ¹⁰¹. When using the early Synapt G1 MS instrument ⁵¹, it was observed that improved high m/z transmission and protein complex declustering was achieved when the mobility gas (N_2) was present in the traveling wave ion mobility (TWIM ⁷⁹) cell and the TWIM trapping voltages were turned off (no mobility separation taking place). As opposed to the TWIM cell being evacuated and the MS being operated in MS mode only (personal observation). In the Orbitrap instrument, effective declustering occurs by “in source” CAD, immediately after the S-lens ¹⁰², or in the HCD cell ^{55 103}. Effective ion activation and declustering has also been described for MDa complexes within both the C-Trap and the Orbitrap analyzer ¹⁰⁴. However, it is not clear if the radial path (up to 10 km depending on transient time ¹⁰⁴) of ions of lower m/z in the Orbitrap device contributes to any meaningful residual solvent removal. Finally, before the routine use of ion mobility for native-MS applications ^{60, 92, 93}, the extent of gas-phase unfolding ¹⁰⁵ was not fully appreciated when using higher source and collision cell voltages.

Time-of-Flight Optics: An ion's flight time (t) is proportional to the square root of its mass-to-charge ratio and is described by Equation 2, reproduced from reference ¹⁰⁶:

$$t = \frac{L}{v} = L \sqrt{\frac{m}{2qU}} \quad (2)$$

Where L is the length of the drift space, v is the ion velocity, m is the mass of the ion (in kg) and q is the charge (where a single charge equates to 1.602×10^{-19} Coulomb) and U is the ion energy, in volts. If one considers the Waters Q-ToF instrument ^{66, 68, 94} the maximum upper ToF range was m/z 100,000, which equates to a flight time of 450 μ sec and an instrument determined pusher frequency of 2.22 kHz ⁶⁶ (Figure 5a). If one considers the early viral capsid work of Tito ⁵⁴ (m/z values $>20,000$) and the GroEL tandem-MS experiments described by Lorenzen ⁹⁴, in the latter example, there is an approximate 38,000 m/z span (monomer 57 kDa, m/z 2000-5000, to dodecamer 688 kDa m/z 30,000-40,000), therefore the pusher frequency must be set to the flight time of highest m/z value.

The associated analyzer resolution on isotopically resolved data (and not the peak width of an isotopically unresolved and adducted and/or solvated protein charge state) is relatively consistent across a very broad m/z range ^{19, 107, 108}, as demonstrated by Sobott ⁶⁶, where the instrument resolution was 10k FWHM at m/z 22,226 (Figure 6a) and is described by Equation 3, reproduced and modified from reference ¹⁰⁶:

$$R_{\Delta u} = \frac{m}{\Delta m} = \frac{u}{\Delta u} = \frac{t}{2\Delta t} \quad (3)$$

where the resolution R (typically the FWHM definition; Equation 1, Supporting Information) is only determined by the energy spread (Δu), t is the ions flight time and Δt is its width, as a result of the spread and velocity spread, in the field-free ToF region.

ToF analyzers are ideal detectors for high m/z species as the m/z range is theoretically unlimited ¹⁰⁶. However, there are practical limitations such as reduced MCP detection efficiency ($\sim 11\%$)

for large lower-speed ions ¹⁰⁹. This can be overcome by increasing the voltage gain on the MCP detector (personal observation).

The spatial volume of a ToF analyzer is large, therefore space charge effects is not a practical issue for a single pass reflectron based instrument. This is not the case for multi-reflective ToF MS instruments ¹¹⁰. However, if ion counts are too high, time-to-digital (TDC) converter saturation does occur ¹¹¹, therefore, limiting mass measurement accuracy. However, this is rarely ever realized when performing native-MS, as ion currents are generally low. From an Orbitrap perspective, charge capacity is carefully controlled on the Orbitrap MS instruments, using the automatic gain control function, which is typically set to 2×10^6 charges. In 2009, Waters described a new inhouse developed analogue to digital converter (ADC) detection system ¹¹². Ion saturation effects were significantly reduced, dynamic range increases realized, and still capable of exquisite high m/z detection ⁷⁷.

The grids that make up specific regions in the oa-pusher and also the reflectron do have the ability to deflect the trajectory of the ions, therefore creating an additional source of peak broadening ¹⁰⁸. Sobott described a reduced gridline density from 1000 to 200 lines/inch for two regions within the oa-pusher stack ⁶⁶ (Figure 5a). It was hypothesized that large proteins or protein/protein complexes with large cross sections may undergo unwanted scattering with the standard and higher line density grids.

Oa-ToF detectors typically operate at low 10^{-6} to mid 10^{-7} mbar pressures, compared to the higher vacuum of the Orbitrap and ICR instrument that are typically in the 10^{-9} to 10^{-10} mbar values, due to the ultralong ion paths and requirements to minimize ion-neutral collisions. As briefly mentioned earlier, when Xe was used as the collision gas on a Q-ToF, the ToF vacuum would reduce in efficiency to high 10^{-6} mbar, due to Xe bleeding into the ToF analyzer and not being effectively evacuated. Reductions in ToF vacuum efficiencies were not observed when using SF₆ (personal observation). This observation may be related to polyatomic gases having consistently higher compression ratios (K_0) than monoatomic gases ¹¹³ in the pressure regimes that ToF operating in ($<10^{-4}$ mbar). However, it must be noted that the standard penning pressure gauge used on most MS systems is not universally calibrated for all gases, therefore likely show inconsistent pressure values across different gases.

Finally, calculated MW mass accuracies for native-MS (FT-ICR) measured versus denatured (reversed phased liquid chromatographic MS; oa-ToF) species (IgG1) are highly comparable ⁹⁷.

Native-MS for All: A Dedicated Instrument for High m/z Analysis

As described in the aforementioned sections, the rapid progress in high m/z native-MS from the mid-90s through the late 2000s was routinely performed using oa-ToF analyzers and microchannel plate detection. Then, in 2012, there was a paradigm shift in native-MS data acquisition. Rose ⁵⁵ published nESI native-MS spectra for a mAb, proteasome 20S complex and of course GroEL (including ATP bound), using a modified Orbitrap Exactive Plus, later commercially named as the Orbitrap Extended Mass Range (EMR). Briefly, it must be noted that Sharon ¹¹⁴ (in 2013) also presented well resolved ATP bound GroEL charge states, acquired on a Q-ToF instrument. In twelve years, the Orbitrap analyzer had undergone dramatic levels of refinement and optimization from that originally described by Makarov in 2000 ¹¹⁵. Of note on this new Orbitrap EMR, are a source stacked ring ion guide (S-lens ^{116, 117}); a bent flatapole where collisional cooling occurs; an additional Xe gas line on the HCD cell; HCD voltages from 100 to 200 V applied to improved protein detection, transmission and desolvation (analogous to Q-ToF collision cell CAD experiments); increased m/z range of 400-24,000; Orbitrap detector pressures ranging from 5×10^{-10} and 2×10^{-9} mbar and the typical resolution setting was 17,500 at m/z 200. The fact that the Orbitrap could acquire both proteomics RPLC-MS/MS data ¹¹⁸ and now high m/z native-MS data, made this a highly disruptive and attractive technology.

Briefly, ion movement around the Orbitrap central electrode is complex, detection is image current based ¹¹⁵, followed by eFT ¹¹⁹ into frequency and therefore m/z . However, the true power of this new Orbitrap-based native-MS instrument was in the quality of the m/z spectral data. This was the first time that native charge states, high on the m/z scale ($> m/z$ 5000) appeared to be fully desolvated, baseline resolved and close to their theoretical isotopic peak widths ⁵⁵. These MS spectral improvements were realized through the accurate knowledge of the initial phase of the ion packet entering the detector from the C-Trap, a level of real-time apodization, and a combination of magnitude mode ²¹ data at the base of mass spectral peak and absorption

mode ¹²⁰ forming the top of the peak and an interpolation between these two extremes, forming the central portion of the peak ^{119, 121}.

The Orbitrap continued to prove itself as more than a rival for oa-ToF detection and analysis of high MW species. Snijder ¹²² described the detection of an intact 4.5 MDa viral capsid with exquisite charge state definition at m/z 24,000. It must be noted that one year prior to this, Snijder ¹²³ also reported a viral capsid of 18 MDa, displaying partially resolved charged states at m/z 50,000, reported from a modified Q-ToF2 instrument (*circa* 1999 ⁵¹). Then in 2016, there was a direct comparison of oa-ToF and Orbitrap technology ¹²⁴ for viral particle analysis and unsurprisingly, the Orbitrap charge state apparent resolution and levels of desolvation were superior (Figures 7a-d). Finally, preceding all the aforementioned work, in 2008 native-MS of the intact 3-4 MDa Hepatitis B virus particle was demonstrated by travelling wave ion mobility mass spectrometry ^{85, 125}.

The next dedicated Orbitrap based instrument designed for high m/z transmission, selection and detection was the Orbitrap ultra-high mass range (UHMR ¹⁰²), that now possesses a quadrupole for high m/z precursor selection and additional ion activation capabilities. Belov ⁵⁶ first described a precursor to the commercial UHMR (Figure 7e). Presented was exquisite pyruvate kinase isoform charge state definition, pyruvate kinase and GroEL tandem-MS and MS³ generated fragment ion information. Of note, this model of Orbitrap used an RF-only dual ion funnel with orthogonal injection for the transfer capillary, where the first ion funnel operated at 12 mbar likely providing very effective collisional cooling. Collisional cooling also takes place in the bent flatapole region ⁵⁶ (Figure 7e) likely by a similar method to that described by Thomson ⁶⁷. A quadrupole allowing for m/z 20,000 ion selection and an improved image current preamplifier with improved linearity and high-pass filter cutoff was also implemented. Three years later, Gault et al. also described a tandem-MS Orbitrap system for membrane protein analysis ¹⁰³ using the UHMR. More recently, subtle effects of ion motion, such as eccentric and non-circular orbits have been documented, that may impact the radial distance and therefore the induced image current. Other small effects such as electronic noise of the pre-amplifier transistors that may be impacting charge assignment, have also been observed, although, only reported for MDa species ¹⁰⁴.

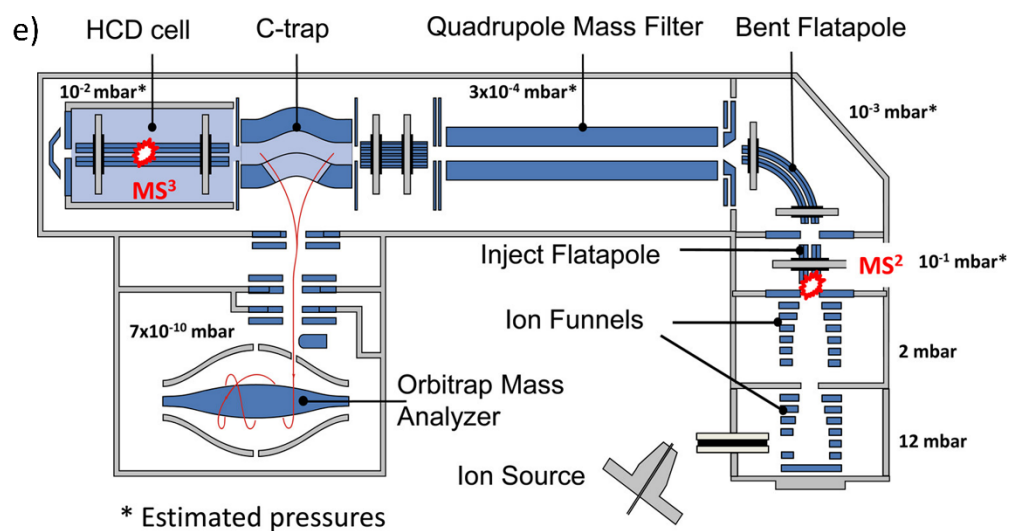
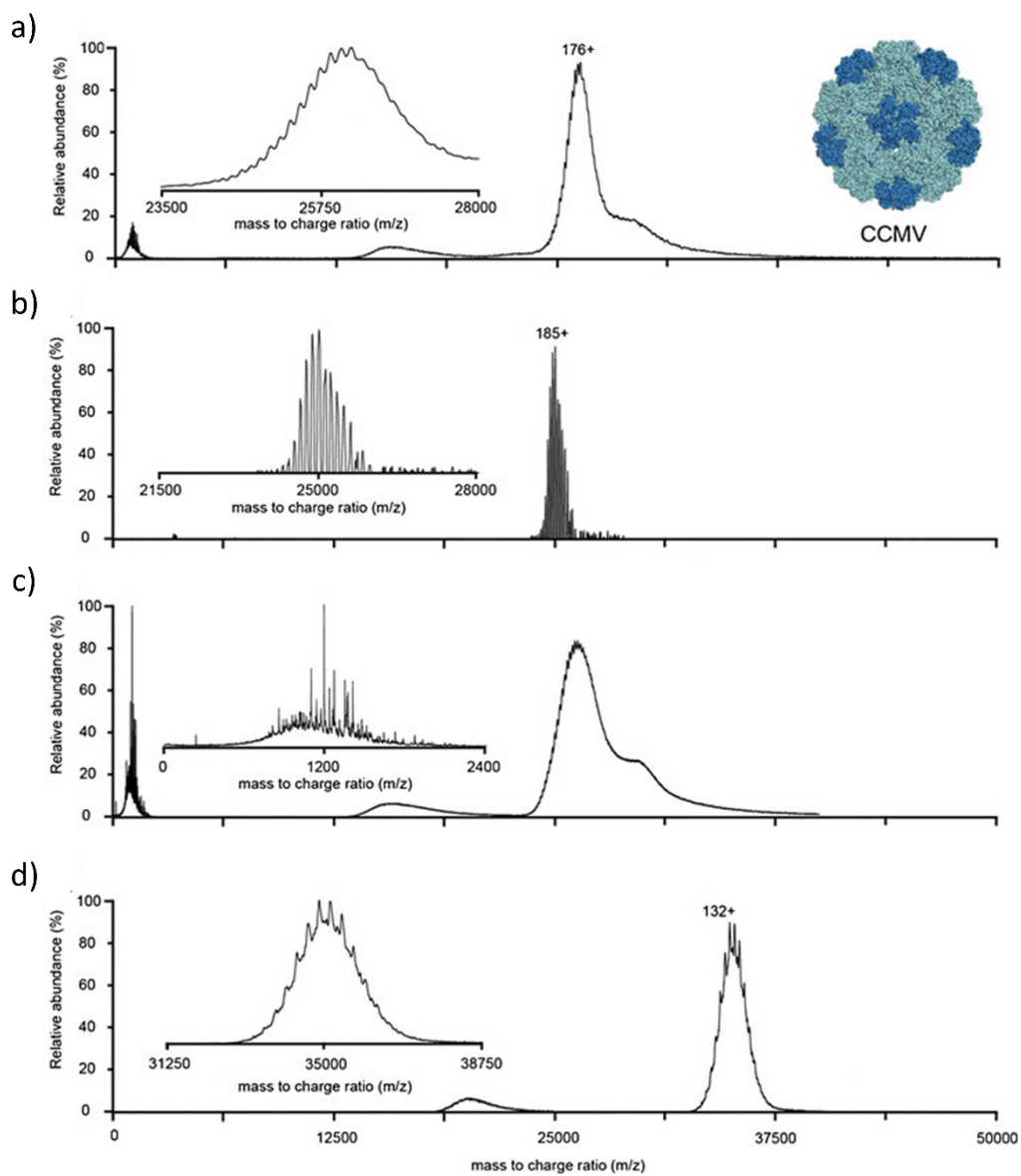


Figure 7. Native mass spectra of multipartite CCMV endogenous virions acquired under different experimental conditions using different mass spectrometer. a) Spectrum acquired using a Q-ToF. A single series of resolved charge states can be resolved at high collisional activation; b) Spectrum acquired on an Orbitrap EMR with extended mass range, displaying baseline resolved ion signals; c) All ion fragmentation of CCMV on the quadrupole time-of-flight instrument; d) Q-ToF spectrum after charge reduction using triethylammonium acetate. Reproduced from reference ¹²⁴, with permission from the American Chemical Society, Copyright 2016; e) Schematic diagram of the modified Orbitrap Q-Exactive mass spectrometer. Reproduced from reference ⁵⁶, with permission from the American Chemical Society, Copyright 2013.

Regular “Off-the-Shelf” MS Instruments are Still Good Enough

It must be noted that other commercial, non-bespoke MS instruments still remain an option for high m/z transmission and detection, and therefore native-MS studies. If we consider the FT-ICR MS instrument and the following Equation 4 ^{21, 126}:

$$m_{critical} = \frac{1.20607 \times 10^7 z B_0^2 \alpha^2}{V_{trap}} \quad (4)$$

where $M_{critical}$ is in Da, B is magnetic field strength in Tesla, V_{trap} is in volts, z in multiples of elementary charge, α is a dimension referring to the length of the Infinity cell, in meters ²¹.

Throughout FT-ICR evolution, arguably it never appeared that this MS instrument was being focused for high m/z analysis, but rather smaller ionic species, such as petroleomics ¹²⁷ and ultrahigh resolution analytics ¹²⁸. As Li ¹²⁶ notes, the current 15 Tesla FT-ICR is more than capable of trapping species of 1 MDa. Additionally, the majority of the recent high m/z FT-ICR research, outline below, utilized the Infinity cell ¹²⁹. For example, Li ¹²⁶ demonstrated aggregated β -galactosidase and charged reduced glycogen phosphorylase at m/z values 17,000 and 25,000, respectively. Campuzano^{86, 130 57} demonstrated just how flexible the 15 Tesla FT-ICR MS is for native-MS analysis for a very broad range of analytes (CsI clusters, mAbs, ADCs, nanodiscs,

membrane proteins and large multiunit complexes; Figure 4). Cytochrome P3A4 hexamer ejection from a loaded nanodisc was demonstrated, producing well resolved charged states at m/z 7000-9000, equating to a intact hexameric MW of 308 kDa ¹³¹ (Figure S2, Supporting Information). Finally, the 1.61 MDa GroEL dimer, with m/z values of 14,000-15,500 has also been demonstrated ⁵⁷.

The current native-MS data that is being generated on the FT-ICR is also comparable to that of the Orbitrap ^{55, 56, 103, 132}, when the FT-ICR data is either acquired directly in absorption mode (aFT; for mAbs ¹³³) or post-acquisition aFT processed, recently described for nanodiscs ⁸⁷. MAb native-MS aFT acquired data is displayed in Figure 8a. The FT-ICR MS footprint has also significantly reduced. For example, the latest iteration, the scimaX ¹³⁴ (7 Tesla conduction cooled magnet; Bruker Daltonics) is more than capable of detecting GroEL, with zero instrument optimization ⁵⁷.

Finally, a highly relevant but rarely referenced piece of work, is that by Heck and van den Heuvel from two decades ago ⁶³. They demonstrated measured charge states at m/z values 10,000 to 12,000 for the octameric vanillyl-alcohol oxidase, using an LCQ-Deca ion trap mass spectrometer.

Subtle and Applied Ion Source Design Considerations

In 2011 Waters introduced the StepWave ^{135, 136} ion guide, which did not require pressure modifications for high m/z transmission. This ion source was a significant change from the original hexapole ion guide of the early Q-ToF instruments ^{50, 51}, and somewhat similar to the dual series oriented stacked ring ion guides ⁷⁹ of the Q-ToF Ultima (*circa* 2000 ⁵¹) and the later generation single stacked ring ion guide of the Q-ToF Premier (*circa* 2003 ⁵¹). The StepWave source operates at a much higher gas flow than earlier generation sources and therefore higher pressures. It is estimated the pressure in the first StepWave ion guide is approximately 3 mbar. Therefore, the area immediately preceding the first ion guide (source backing region) will be significantly higher, likely affording highly effective collisional cooling. As a result, high m/z transmission is efficient on the StepWave enabled MS instrument. Giles ¹³⁵ and Harrison ¹³⁷ described effective transmission and subsequent detection of GroEL (802 kDa) and urease (545

kDa) respectively, on a StepWave enabled Q-ToF MS. Recent StepWave ion guide developments utilize RF enhanced ion declustering in the second SRIG¹³⁸. Churneshevich⁶⁷ noted the SCIEX QqToF MS prototype with the inline source configuration did not require elevated interface pressure for optimized high m/z transmission.

The Orbitrap EMR⁵⁵ (S-lens), the precursor to the UHMR⁵⁶ (dual ion funnel), the commercial UHMR¹³⁹ (S-lens), the next generation tribrids, the LUMOS¹⁴⁰ and the Eclipse¹⁴¹ (both single funnel) and FT-ICR MS⁵⁷ (dual funnel) instruments have all shown impressive high m/z transmission capabilities. The source S-lens or funnels, operate at similar or higher pressures than those reported on the original Micromass/Waters LCT^{51, 73} and Q-ToF^{50, 51} instrument. For example, the standard UHMR Orbitrap S-lens operates at ~1.4-1.8 mbar (software derived; XCalibur). The first (of two) funnels described by Belov⁵⁶ (Figure 7e) operates at 12 mbar with orthogonal injection. Therefore, in both, cases it can be inferred that the ion transfer capillaries operate at higher pressures, therefore providing sufficient collisional cooling, therefore source pressure adjustment is not required. The same inferences can be made for the heated capillary preceding the dual ion funnel source, with orthogonal ion sampling configuration of the solariX ion optics cart⁵⁷. It must be noted that Krutchinsky⁴³ utilized a heated metal transfer capillary for improved protein complex desolvation.

The commercial UHMR implemented in-source trapping (between the S-lens exit and the flatpole entrance) dramatically improving high m/z desolvation¹⁰²

There is precedent to investigate the perceived superior desolvation capabilities of the S-lens on a non-Orbitrap MS platform. Close to a decade ago, an inline heated capillary S-lens source was hyphenated to a Micromass Q-ToF 2¹⁴². The findings suggest the S-lens (operated at 6 mbar) had little effect on mAb desolvation. The critical area was still the hexapole transfer lens and its optimized pressure (~2 e^{-2} mbar). This observation may also suggest the benefits that eFT¹¹⁹ (and absorption mode FT processing; Figure 8a) data processing affords for Orbitrap spectral data quality for native-MS applications. It must be noted that the lens spacing in the Waters based SRIGs described by Giles⁷⁹ are equivalent (center to center spacing of 1.5 mm). As opposed to increase center-to-center spacing of the S-lens (1 mm to 5 mm¹⁴³) which increases the confining RF field as the ion cloud travel through the device¹¹⁷.

One important point of note is that both aforementioned Orbitrap and Bruker source designs use mostly in-line nESI sample introduction (Supporting information, Figures S3a & b, Supporting Information). This is not the case for the original Z-spray source (Figure S3c; off axis, dual orthogonal sampling). Additionally, the Bruker solariX source utilizes a partial vacuum orthogonal sampling stage as the ions exit the heated transfer capillary prior to ion funnel entry (Figure S4, Supporting information). Never-the-less, all current MS source designs, with or without modifications and/or pressure optimizations, appear to operate well for high m/z transmission.

An important consideration is the temperature at which the ions are introduced into the MS source. For example, native-MS nESI experiments performed on the Bruker 15 Tesla FT-ICR and Orbitrap EMR, the transfer capillaries have been documented to operate over a broad range of temperatures (40 °C to 200 °C ^{86, 103, 130}). Large and measurable differences in ion solvation/adducting have been observed on the solariX source if operated at ambient versus elevated temperatures ⁵⁷. Native-MS nESI experiments using the Waters Z-Spray source are mostly acquired at ambient temperatures ⁶⁴.

Is the Term High Resolution Native-MS Accurate or Appropriate?

The term “high-resolution” for native-MS ^{100, 103, 144} and general protein MS ¹⁴⁵ has coincided with the Orbitraps superior native and denatured-MS spectral quality, therefore must be addressed in the context of this MS instrument evolution discussion. The question is, do the new MS instruments afford true high resolution native-MS data? and is this new term linked to the m/z peak resolution (Equation 1, Supporting Information) ¹⁴⁶ or the instrument measured resolving power (Equation 2, Supporting Information) ¹⁴⁶, , or another MS property?

Described earlier (Equation 3) oa-ToF MS resolution is relatively consistent across a very broad m/z range ^{19, 107, 108}. This is in stark contrast to that of the Orbitrap where the MS resolution, R (or more commonly defined as resolving power in ICR MS instrumentation, Equation 2, Supporting Information) decreases as a square root of m/z ^{147, 148 149}, as described by Equation 5:

$$R = \frac{m}{\Delta m_{50\%}} = -\frac{1}{2\Delta\omega_{50\%}} \sqrt{\frac{kq}{m}} \quad (5)$$

Where ω is the axial oscillations (frequency), q is the electronic charge of an electron in Coulombs (1.602e^{-19}) and k is field curvature value. In contrast to the ICR frequency which varies inversely with the m/z ^{21, 148} described by Equation 6, reproduced from Marshall ²¹:

$$R = \frac{m}{\Delta m_{50\%}} = -\frac{qB_0}{m\Delta\omega_{50\%}} \quad (6)$$

which in practical terms means, as the m/z doubles, the resolution reduces by approximately 1.41 and two-fold on the Orbitrap and FT-ICR MS instrument, respectively (Table S1, Figures S5a & S5b, Supporting Information). Therefore, representative oa-ToF native and denatured MS acquisitions, where the MS instrument resolution (Equation 2, Supporting Information) is typically 10k-14k FWHM ^{6, 97, 150, 151} is in fact comparable, or even higher to those used on the Orbitraps instruments over similar m/z ranges ^{55, 56, 86, 103, 132, 145}. Therefore, the aforementioned Orbitrap native and denatured-MS data is far from high resolution if one considers the MS instrument resolution at which the data was acquired.

In 1998 Shi ¹²⁸ demonstrated fine isotopic structure of insulin, using a 9.4 T FT-ICR instrument using a 3 s transient, which equates to an instrument resolving power of 5 M at m/z 300. If one extends this description of resolving power to larger proteins, specifically those acquired by Orbitrap MS, then one can consider the first isotopically resolved mAb data by Shaw ¹⁵² (3 s transient length, resolving power 330 k at m/z 2800; Figure 8b) as high resolution protein data. Mass accuracies are compared (3.1 vs 5.0 ppm) to lower resolving power oaToF MS instrument acquisitions ^{97, 153}. McGee et al. ¹⁵⁴, using Orbitrap-based single ion counting, presented high-resolution native-MS whereby isotopically resolved protein complexes (Figure 8c), up to MW 466 kDa, were achieved.

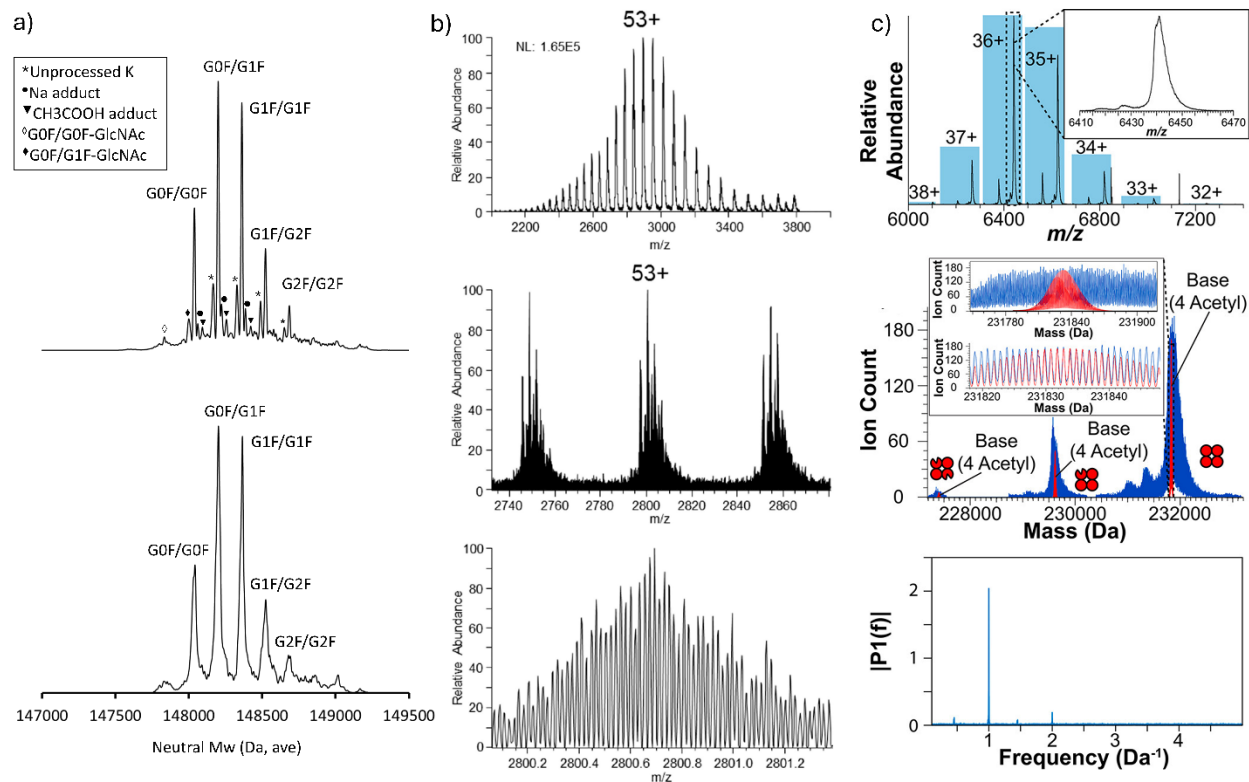


Figure 8. A selection of high-resolution protein data acquired by FT-ICR and Orbitrap MS; a) native-MS deconvolved spectrum of the NIST IgG1k mAb acquired by nESI (1 minute acquisition; 5 μ M, in 200 mM ammonium acetate, skimmer 25 V, collision cell 30 V) using a solariX 15 Tesla FT-ICR MS system using a transient size and length of 1 M and 0.68 sec, respectively. The data was acquired directly in absorption mode using the FTMS Booster X3 (Spectroswiss). Both magnitude (lower spectrum) and absorption (upper spectrum) mode data were acquired, displayed and processed using the Spectroswiss PeakbyPeak FTMS data analysis software (v2021.8.0). The transient was apodized using a semi-Kaiser function with zero transient truncation. Deconvolution was performed using Protein Metrics Intact^{97, 155}. The main glycoforms are annotated and minor truncated species are tabulated; b) a mAb acquired in the ion trap (upper); three selected charge states acquired by Orbitrap FT-MS (middle) and a zoomed-in regions for the $z = 53^{+}$ charge state showing fine isotopic structures. Reproduced and modified from reference¹⁵² with permission from the American Chemical Society, Copyright 2013 and c) a native mass spectrum of pyruvate kinase in the m/z domain created by averaging 26339 unprocessed spectra. The inset shows an expansion of the most abundant charge state. The histogram overlay shows the relative abundance of ions assigned to charge states via the I²MS

workflow (upper). The experimental I^2 MS mass spectrum of pyruvate kinase (blue trace) overlaid with the theoretical isotopic distribution calculated for a tetramer of pyruvate kinase where the base sequence of each monomer was modified with N-terminal acetylation (red trace). The secondary and tertiary distributions of pyruvate kinase correspond to tetrameric complexes that have one and two N-terminally truncated monomers, respectively (middle). Data obtained by Fourier transformation of the mass distribution of pyruvate kinase from panel b (lower figure). Reproduced and modified from reference ¹⁵⁴ with permission from the American Chemical Society, Copyright 2021.

There is an additional line of discussion which must be considered in the context of the term high resolution native-MS. It is tempting to describe Orbitrap native-MS charge states, and mAb glycoforms ^{55, 132} and GroEL for example, that are well separated from each other, baseline resolved and appear to be of theoretical isotopic peak width ⁵⁵ as high resolution native-MS data. All of which are still somewhat challenging to achieve on an oa-ToF instrument ^{97, 151, 156} (progress is being made by using post-acquisition processing to improve oa-ToF data quality, such as inverse FT and apodization ¹⁵⁷). A descriptive term, and one in which we are more aligned, and we believe more accurately describes the aforementioned protein data quality (especially native-MS data) and have previously introduced, in 2020, as “highly desolvated” ions ⁵⁷. Groups have also described the strong and improved desolvation and ion cooling capabilities of the Orbitrap instrument ^{86, 103, 139, 158}. Narrower, more desolvated charge states were recently described for CD-MS by Worner ¹⁰⁴.

Therefore, the term high resolution native-MS may not be an appropriate description for ionic species that may have been effectively desolvated, and data captured that is a function of enhanced FT (eFT) acquisition ^{119, 121}. Therefore, how should one describe this new paradigm shift in native-MS data quality which is not isotopically resolved, possibly still adducted and acquired at low instrument resolving power? We are suggesting the term “resolved native-MS data”.

Future Instrument Developments

Native-MS and high m/z analysis has become much more routine, useable and accessible due to the development of ESI^{13, 14} enabling generation of gas-phase native-like biological ions, subsequent detection and exquisite characterization by the MS technologies described herein. MS instrumentation also offers multiple fragmentation techniques^{88, 159, 160, 161, 162, 141, 163, 164, 165, 166}. We argue that for high m/z and native-MS analyses, all of the above fragmentation methods and ion mobility capabilities such as drift tube^{93, 167}, travelling wave^{60, 77, 79, 168} and trapped ion mobility^{169, 170}, have been enabled by ESI, and benefitted from the source and detector modifications described above, therefore will not be described further.

Over the past decade charge reduction has been used to effectively generate ions that possess low levels of overall charge. For example Lermyte¹⁷¹ described how glow discharge based electron transfer dissociation effectively charge reduces pyruvate kinase in the MS source of a Q-ToF, to a $z = 2^+$ ion, with an m/z value of 117,000. Over a decade later, the same group demonstrated extensive levels of charge reduction including a GroEL $z = 7^+$ ion and AAV8 charge reduced ions up to m/z 200,000, using the Orbitrap analyzer¹⁷². One of the most impressive and recent demonstrations of charge reduction is the work of Bhanot¹⁷³ where a $z = 2^+$ GroEL charge state (m/z 400,000) was generated, transmitted and detected on a relatively unmodified Triple ToF 5600 (SCIEX). Moreover, the authors discuss how the ion cloud size increases as the overall charge (z) decreases, thus impacting ion transmission and detection efficiency. Much of this work is based on the seminal ion/ion chemistry work originally described by McLuckey¹⁷⁴. Additionally, routine charge reduction and therefore high m/z formation was made somewhat routine on the Orbitrap MS through commercialization of the Proton Transfer Charge Reduction¹⁷⁵, much like glow discharge on the Q-ToF MS¹⁷⁶. Preceding many of the aforementioned examples, Campuzano and Schnier¹⁷⁷, using corona discharge based on the original designs of Smith¹⁷⁸ (in earlier iterations of charge reduction, Smith also used ^{210}Po ¹⁷⁹) demonstrated effective charge reduction and high m/z transmission for PEG and multi-subunit protein complexes, including GroEL. Nevertheless, all these described studies were performed on mostly standard MS platforms, demonstrating the inherent high m/z capabilities of these instruments, and the potential of charge reduction, in its various forms. The recent development of digital ion traps and quadrupoles has proven their worth for both high m/z transmission (β -galactosidase, m/z 30,000¹⁸⁰; ribosome 70S, m/z 100,000 to 110,000¹⁸¹) and selection (GroEL; m/z 13,000, $z = 62^+$ isolation¹⁸²) respectively, by manipulating the waveform frequency.

A technology now being successfully used for ultra-high mass detection is charge detection, which is particularly enabling for MW measurement of highly polydisperse species, is charge detection mass spectrometry (CD-MS). Originally described in the mid-1990s by Benner ¹⁸³ and further developed by Jarrold ¹⁸⁴ and Williams ¹⁸⁵ evolving in to technologies capable of ultrahigh MW measurements. For example, Jarrold has recorded adenovirus species of 63 MDa and 134 MDa ¹⁸⁶ and Williams has recently recorded nanodrop sizes of 40 nm to 120 nm with recorded MWs of 50 MDa to 550 MDa ¹⁸⁷.

A commercial version of CD-MS was showcased by Heck (IgM complex, >1MDa ¹⁸⁸) and Kafader ¹⁸⁹ describing single-particle charge detection on an Orbitrap MS. Another exciting hyphenation of technologies, is the recent combination of the single particle counting based nanoelectromechanical system (NEMS) to both ToF ¹⁹⁰ and Orbitrap ¹⁹¹ mass spectrometer instrument. Where the authors have demonstrated a MW measurements ranging from kDa to MDa (IgMs and gold nanoparticles ¹⁹²) to the well-known native-MS standard, that is GroEL ¹⁹¹.

A potential emerging highly enabling technology for gas-phase structural biology is soft-landing. Originally described Volny ¹⁹³ and later by Cooks ¹⁹⁴, then first documented for native-MS analysis of aqueous soluble protein complexes, by Mikhailov ¹⁹⁵ on a QToF instrument. Recently soft landing has been implemented on the Orbitrap instrument ¹⁹⁶. The ability to *m/z*-select large, protein ions, even from complex mixtures, and land them onto a grid for cryogenic electron microscopy (cryoEM) could potentially advance structural biology studies of large protein complexes. The aforementioned soft-landing methods benefit from the high *m/z*, high MW transmission capabilities of the MS instruments to which EM is hyphenated to ^{190, 191}. Prefacing the above MS-EM example, MS has historically been described to support both X-ray crystallography and NMR high resolution structure determination ¹⁹⁷.

From a native-MS sample introduction perspective, two methods can be considered. The first being the nESI single shot glass vial ^{49 48} where the user can exquisitely control the flow rate and levels of desolvation, but throughput for this method is clearly low. The Advion nanomate ¹⁹⁸ can add the required level of automation and throughput to the aforementioned nESI method. The second method, that is much higher throughput, automated and platformable, is direct chromatographic hyphenation to the MS. This is achieved by using ammonium acetate mobile phases for SEC ¹⁹⁹, CEX ²⁰⁰ and HIC ²⁰¹. Recently online detergent exchange was demonstrated

for membrane protein complexes ²⁰² SEC has also been hyphenated to charge detection MS ²⁰³. Finally, this level of hyphenation and automation is essential within the biopharmaceutical setting where sample numbers are high ⁶.

Concluding Remarks

Herein we have described the early pioneering high m/z CsI FT-ICR MS data acquisitions and then the first ever native-MS acquisitions in the form of myoglobin and ADH. We then discussed the first and essential Q-ToF bespoke modifications (source, quadrupole, collision cell and associated gases and oaToF pusher frequency modifications) that enabled the gentle transfer of proteins and protein complexes into the gas phase of the MS, and their detection. We discussed the concept of axial and radial ion collisional cooling and its critical importance to high m/z preservation, transmission and detection. We then discussed the newer generation of Orbitrap-based MS instrumentation specifically focused on high m/z transmission, detection and importantly the dramatically improved native-MS spectral data quality. Also discussed is how current and standard MS instrumentation are more than capable of retaining non-covalent complexes, transmitting, detecting these high m/z ions in the gas-phase of the MS. In the future instrumental section, we discuss recent ultra-high m/z detection on traditional MS platforms (ao-ToF and Orbitrap) but also consider newer charge detection-based instruments. We also highlight sample introduction improvements and the clear need for native chromatographic hyphenation that will enable a more “platformed” approaches to native-MS.

Over the past two decades there has been a clear realization from MS instrument manufacturers that high m/z transmission and detection by MS users is an important field for both research and applied applications. Therefore, MS instrumentation has evolved from bespoke modifications through to higher volume specific instruments, that are capable of both small and large ion analytics.

What was perceived as an art-form some two and a half decades ago, high m/z generation, transmission, detection (native-MS) has become far more attainable to more scientists, in more laboratories across a more diverse range of functions, because of the aforementioned instrument and sample introduction developments and associated methods.

Finally, let us not forget about negative ion polarity. Groups have demonstrated that negative ion mode nESI is more than capable of producing useable native-MS spectra, recording ions higher in the m/z range than the equivalent positive ion mode spectra for multimeric protein complexes²⁰⁴. For example, the negative ion nESI GroEL displays well resolved charge states at m/z 14,000⁹⁷ (Figure S6, Supporting Information) and the negative ion nESI of CsI displays measured ions above m/z 18,000⁹⁷ (Figure S7, Supporting Information).

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Supporting Information

Additional and Personal Observations for: Noncovalent Complexes become Larger and m/z Values Higher; What is High m/z Now? Ion Declustering and Time-of-Flight Optics; A quadrupole RF-transmission profile plot; NanoESI analysis of the CYP3A4 loaded nanodisc on a solariX 15 Tesla FT-ICR MS; Bruker, Thermo Scientific and Waters Z-Spray sources; the solariX 15 Tesla FT-ICR schematics; Is the Term High Resolution Native-MS Accurate or

Appropriate; Future Instrument Developments? A theoretical resolution comparison between the Orbitrap UHMR and the solariX 15 Tesla FT-ICR MS instruments; Comparisons of CsI acquired on the solariX 15 Tesla FT-ICR and the Orbitrap UHMR.; Negative ion mode nESI of GroEL; Positive versus negative ion mode nESI comparison of CsI.

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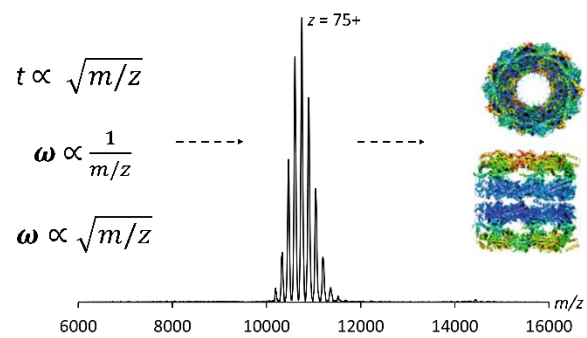
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Graphical Abstract



Supporting Information

The Evolution of Mass Spectrometers for High m/z Biological Ion Formation, Transmission, Analysis and Detection: A Personal Perspective

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Additional Notes and Personal Observations

Noncovalent Complexes become Larger and m/z Values Higher

On this first iteration of the Q-ToF, there was not a direct pressure readout (Pirani gauge) of the source backing region). The hexapole collision cell pressure was carefully optimized from 8.0×10^{-4} Pa to 9.0×10^{-3} Pa, using argon as the collision gas. The source cone voltage was operated at 150 V for optimal desolvation and transmission.

What is High m/z Now?

Inorganic salt clusters such as cesium iodide (CsI) are typically singly charged, therefore the large highly stable clusters such as $[\text{CsI}_{43}]^+\text{Cs}^+$, $[\text{CsI}_{53}]^+\text{Cs}^+$, $[\text{CsI}_{62}]^+\text{Cs}^+$, $[\text{CsI}_{72}]^+\text{Cs}^+$, $[\text{CsI}_{85}]^+\text{Cs}^+$ that appear high in the m/z scale ($>m/z$ 10,000)^{1, 2, 3}. Although multiple charged CsI clusters do exist, but at lower intensities², that was not evident in the earlier work by Amster and Lebrilla. H

Ion Declustering

Finally, depending on the specific protein Mw and stoichiometry, and as long as the acceleration voltage threshold is not exceeded (typically in the collision cell) declustering will increase without subunit ejection and/or fragmentation (GroEL, based on PDB 4V43; $\text{C}_{34622}\text{H}_{57738}\text{N}_{9660}\text{O}_{11159}\text{S}_{350}$, has 340,587 degrees of freedom, based on $3N$, allowing for effective translational energy distribution).

Time-of-Flight Optics

This is performed automatically, based on the spectral acquisition range, however, on the Waters Q-ToF, one has the option to specifically select the pusher frequency (down the single μs granularity) therefore the upper measured flight time. From a personal observation, we have experienced that operating MCP detectors at a higher gain (voltage; Waters Q-ToFs) is advantageous, for high m/z detection.

Xenon (Xe) bleeding into the oa-ToF analyzer: this observation was also recently made during the 72nd Annual ASMS conference by Ebberink⁴, when performing CD-MS using Xe as the HCD cooling gas.

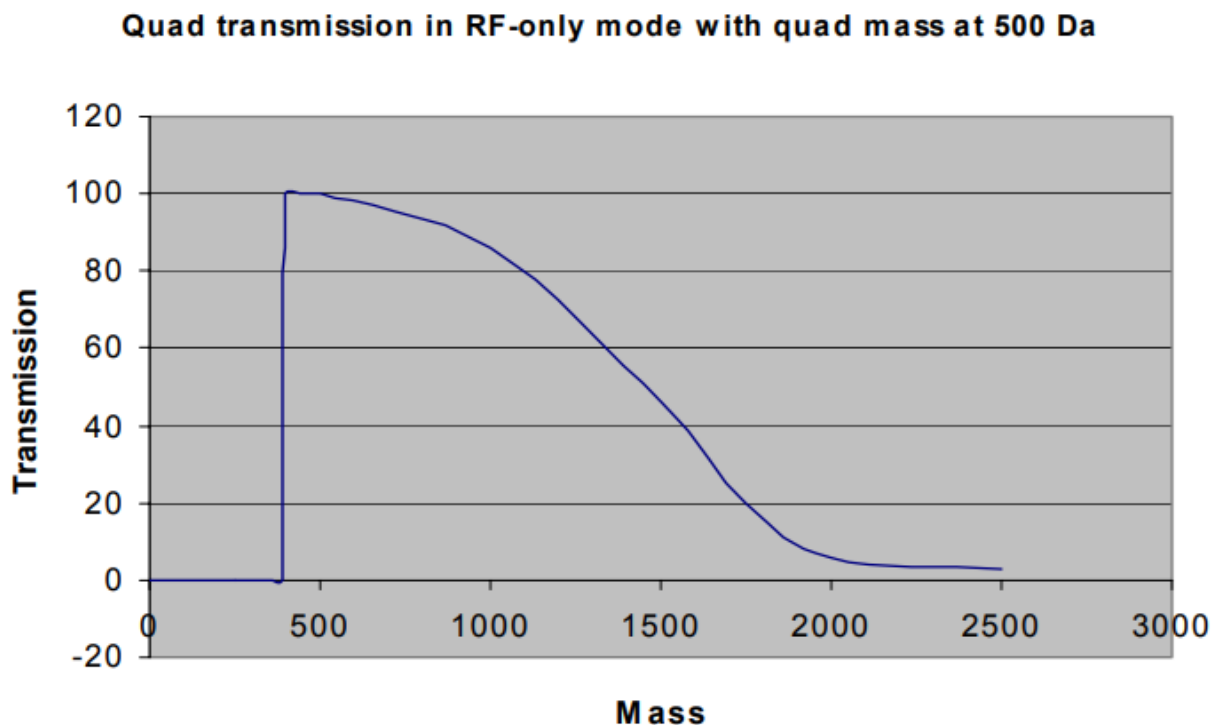


Figure S1. A quadrupole RF-transmission profile plot, reproduced from the Q-ToF Premier Technical Support Notes (32692_1; page 298; Project 910021), with permission from the Waters Corporation, MS Technologies Center, UK. The figure shows that for a set RF value specific for m/z 500 transmission, there is a sharp cut off in transmission in the low mass range and a gradual loss of transmission at the high mass range. When performing high m/z analyses, its typical to set up an MS Profile, that scans the RF-voltages over a wide m/z range, therefore transmitting a wide and high m/z range through the quadrupole, subsequent ion optics and in to either the oa-ToF or the Orbitrap analyzer. Scanning the quadrupole RF is also discussed by SCIEX, and can be found here: https://www.sciex.com/support/knowledge-base-articles/how-does-the-quadrupole-transmission-function-in-the-qtof-systems-work_en_us

Nanodiscs and Membrane Proteins

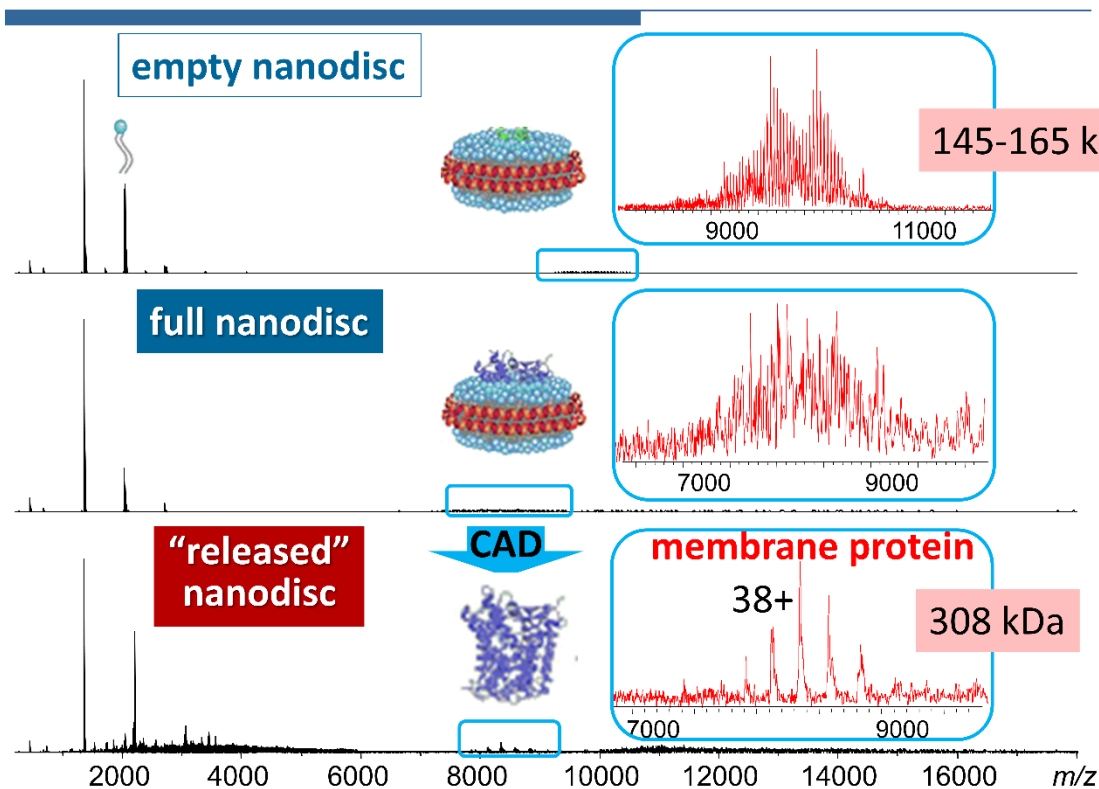


Figure S2. NanoESI analysis of the CYP3A4 loaded nanodisc on a solariX 15 Tesla FT-ICR MS. This data was one of the first tandem-MS acquisitions of a loaded nanodisc, under native-MS conditions (*circa* 2013) as part of the Amgen-UCLA collaboration. The displayed figure is reproduced from the ASMS presentation described in reference ⁵ and is also discussed in detail in reference ⁶.

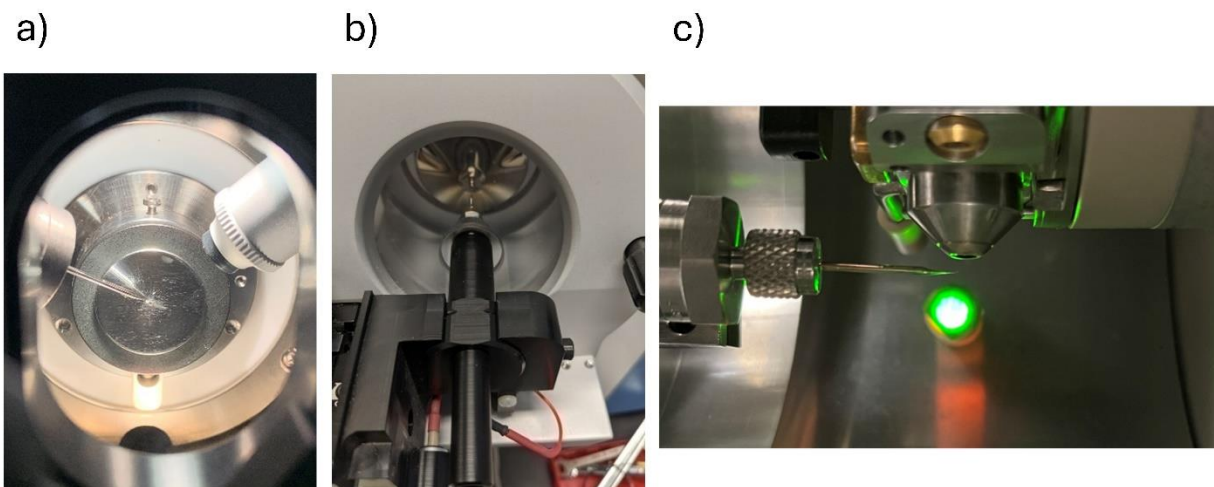


Figure S3. A selection of different nESI sources. a) the UCLA Bruker solariX 15 Tesla FT-ICR source. The nESI needle is mounted at an approximate 45° angle to the sampling orifice, which is the direct entrance of the heated transfer capillary. For all the nESI experiments acquired on this 15 Tesla FT-ICR, described by Campuzano and Loo, the capillary was typically set to 100°C . Upon exit of the ion from the transfer capillary, there is a single orthogonal sampling stage which then directs the ion into the first ion funnel; b) the Amgen Orbitrap EMR source. The nESI needle is mounted in an in-line configuration, pointing directly into the source transfer capillary, which is typically set to 200°C ; c) the Micromass/Waters Z-Spray source of the Amgen Synapt G2 HDMS, viewed from above and illuminated from below. The nESI needle is positioned in an orthogonal position next to the Sample Cone. Once the ions enter the Sample Cone there is a second orthogonal sample stage that directs the ions through the Extraction Cone. There is no transfer capillary in the Z-Spray source. For most nESI native-MS experiments, the Z-Spray source is typically operated at ambient temperatures.

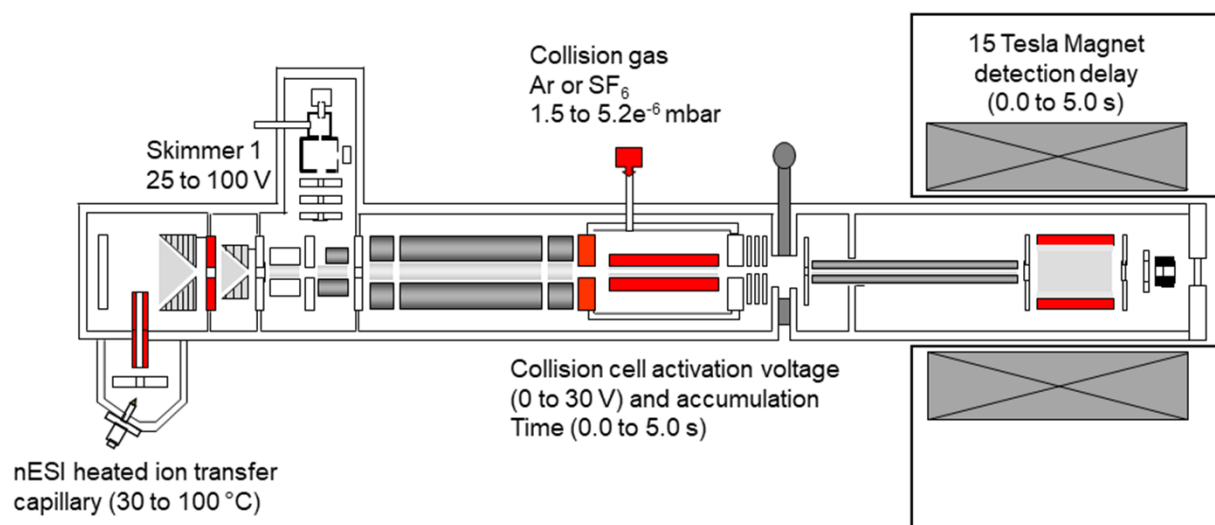


Figure S4. The solariX 15 Tesla FT-ICR schematics. Note the orthogonal ion sampling once the ions leave the heater transfer capillary. Reproduced and modified from reference³, with permission from the American Chemical Society, Copyright 2020.

Is the Term High Resolution Native-MS Accurate or Appropriate?

If one considers the term “high resolution” for smaller ionic species, then it typically refers to the “narrowness” of the m/z peak and therefore the ability to resolve two species. This can be defined by two different and subtly different descriptions, that are described below.

Defined by Equation 1, where resolution is a measure of the peak width at 50% (FWHM) of its height, reproduced from Murray ⁷:

$$\text{Resolution FWHM} = \frac{m/z}{m/z \text{ width at FWHM}} \quad (1)$$

Defined by Equation 2, at a specific defined valley, often 10%, whereby two adjacent ions can be separated, based on the MS instrument resolving power, reproduced from Murray ⁷:

$$\text{Resolving Power} = \frac{m/z}{\text{delta } m/z} \quad (2)$$

Where delta m/z refers to two adjacent peaks on the m/z scale that are resolved at 10% valley.

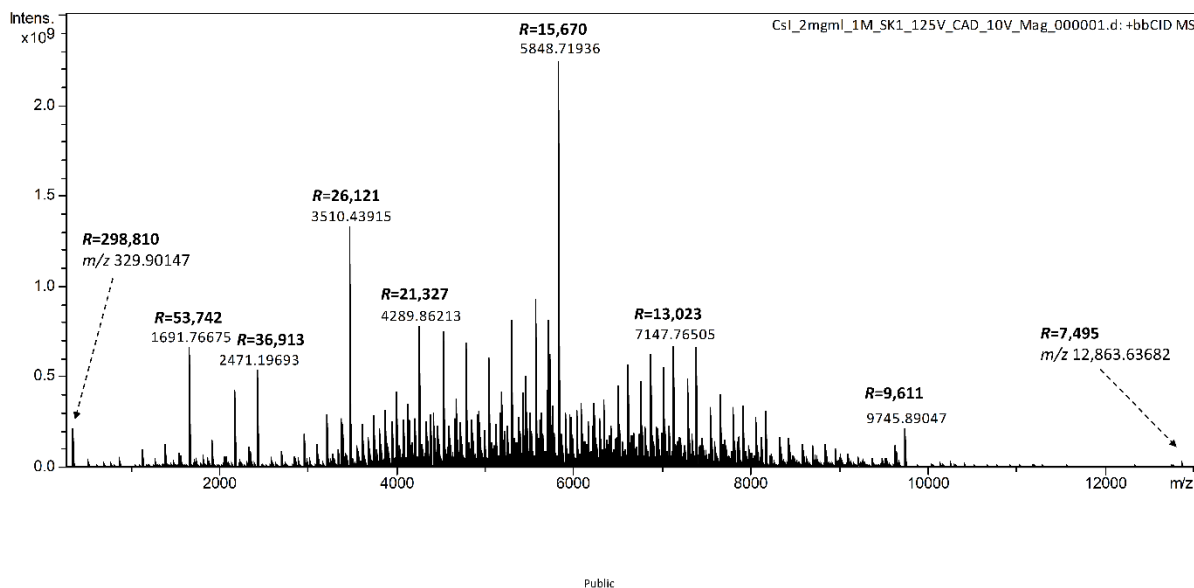
Future Instrument Developments

Native-MS and high m/z analysis has become much more routine, useable and accessible due to the development of ESI^{8,9} enabling generation of gas-phase native-like biological ions, subsequent detection and exquisite characterization by the MS technologies described herein. MS instrumentation also offers multiple fragmentation techniques, such as electron ionization, collision induced dissociation (CID¹⁰), higher-energy collision induced dissociation (HCD¹¹), electron transfer dissociation (ETD¹²), electron transfer higher-energy collision induced dissociation (EThcD¹³) electron capture dissociation (ECD¹⁴), infrared multiphoton dissociation (IRMPD¹⁵) and ultraviolet photo dissociation.¹⁶ to further characterize ions, as a function of tandem-MS¹⁷ or multiple stages of MS (MSⁿ¹⁸) and surface induced dissociation¹⁹. We argue that for high m/z and native-MS analyses, all of the above fragmentation methods and ion mobility capabilities such as drift tube²⁰, travelling wave^{2, 21} and trapped ion mobility^{22 23}, have been enabled by ESI, and benefitted from the source and detector modifications described above, therefore will not be described further.

m/z	Orbitrap UHMR Resolution (FWHM)		
400	25000	50000	100000
800	17730	35461	70922
1600	12575	25150	50299
3200	8918	17837	35673
6400	6325	12650	25300
12800	4486	8972	17943
	solariX 15 Tesla FT-ICR Transient Size		
	256k	512k	1M
m/z	Resolution		
400	49000	98000	200000
800	24500	49000	100000
1600	12250	24500	50000
3200	6125	12250	25000
6400	3062	6125	12500
12800	1531	3063	6250

Table S1. A theoretical resolution comparison between the Orbitrap UHMR and the solariX 15 Tesla FT-ICR MS instruments. The Orbitrap and FT-ICR resolution reduces as a function of the square root of the m/z and the inverse of the m/z , respectively.

a)



b)

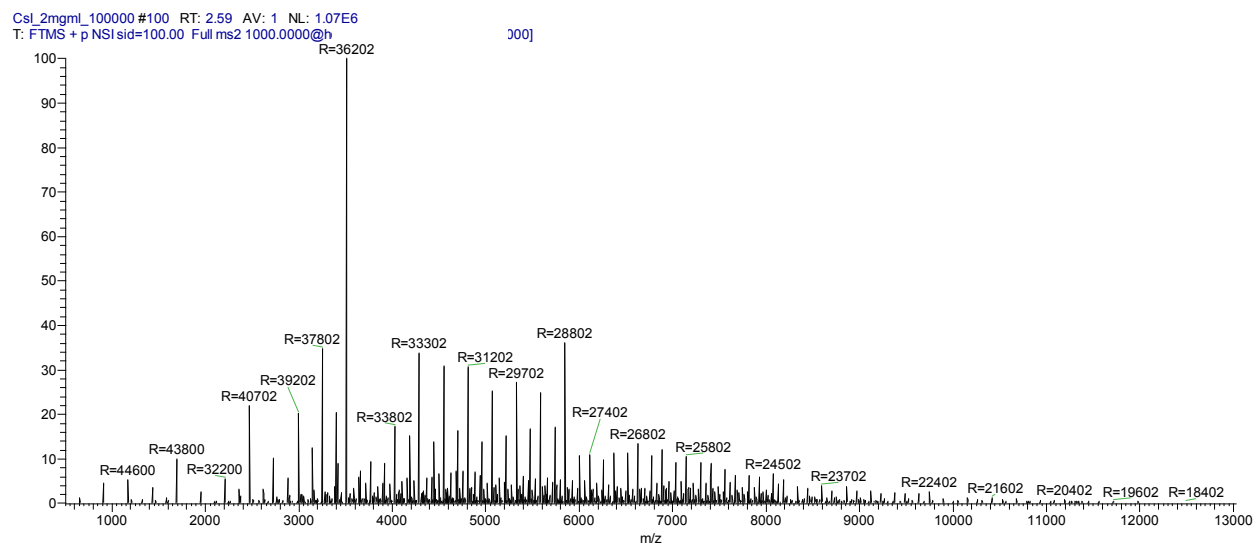


Figure S5. Comparisons of CsI acquired on the a) solarix 15 Tesla FT-ICR, operating at a 1M transient size, equating to a resolution value of 200,000 at m/z 400, and b) the Orbitrap UHMR operating at an instrument resolution of 100,000 at m/z 400. As can be seen, m/z peak width FWHM resolution reduces on the FT-ICR as a function of $(m/z)^{-1}$ and on the Orbitrap, as a function of $(m/z)^{1/2}$.

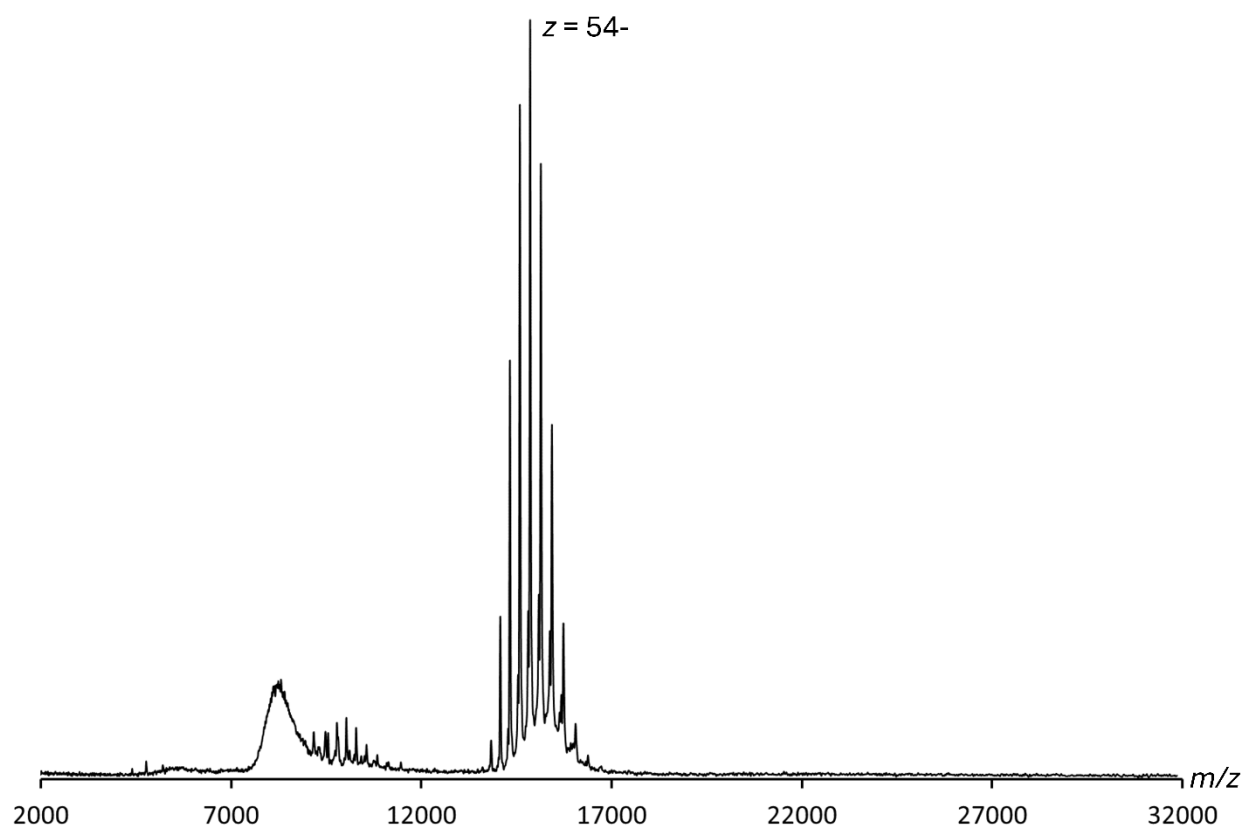


Figure S6. GroEL (5 μ M, 200 mM ammonium acetate) analyzed by negative polarity nESI, using a Synapt G1 Q-ToF mass spectrometer (Waters Corporation, MS Technologies, UK). Reproduced and modified from reference ²⁴, with permission from the American Chemical Society, Copyright 2019.

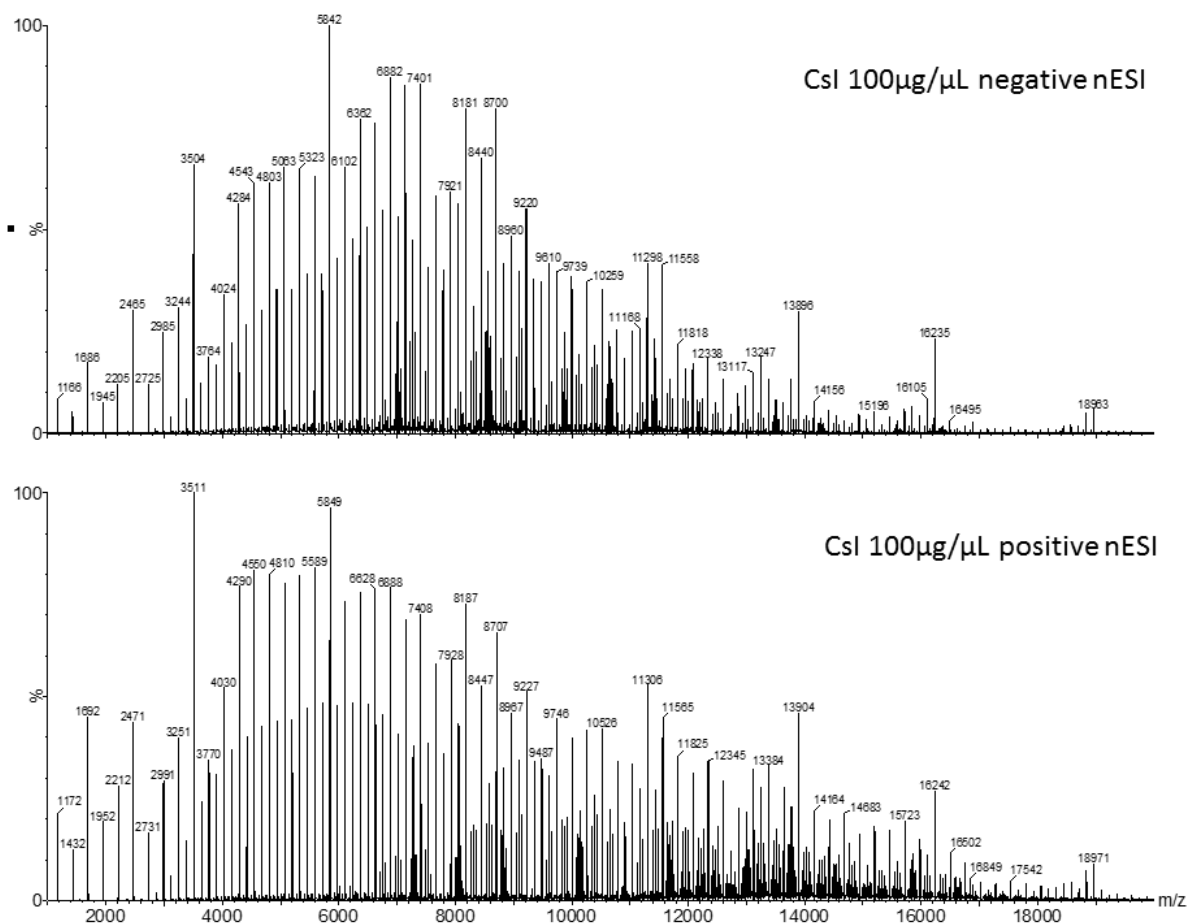


Figure S7. A comparison of positive and negative mode nESI CsI (100 μ g/ μ L, 50% v/v acetonitrile) acquisitions, performed on a Synapt G1 Q-ToF mass spectrometer (Waters Corporation, MS Technologies, UK). Reproduced from reference ²⁴, with permission from the American Chemical Society, Copyright 2019.

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