

Giant polyketide synthase enzymes biosynthesize a giant marine polyether biotoxin.

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Abstract

Prymnesium parvum are harmful haptophyte algae that cause massive environmental fish-kills. Their polyketide polyether toxins, the *prymnesins*, are amongst the largest nonpolymeric compounds in nature, alongside structurally-related health-impacting “red-tide” polyether toxins whose biosynthetic origins have been an enigma for over 40 years. Here we report the ‘PKZILLAs’, massive *P. parvum* polyketide synthase (PKS) genes, whose existence and challenging genomic structure evaded prior detection. PKZILLA-1 and -2 encode giant protein products of 4.7 and 3.2 MDa with 140 and 99 enzyme domains, exceeding the largest known protein titin and all other known PKS systems. Their predicted polyene product matches the proposed pre-prymnesin precursor of the 90-carbon-backbone A-type prymnesins. This discovery establishes a model system for microalgal polyether biosynthesis and expands expectations of genetic and enzymatic size limits in biology.

Introduction

Large-scale fish deaths caused by harmful algal blooms are global health, environmental, and food security problems (1). Anthropogenic causes continue to hasten the severity and frequency of toxic blooms in freshwater and marine ecosystems, including the massive fish kill along the Odra River in 2022 by the golden alga *Prymnesium parvum* (Haptophyta) that decimated half of the river’s fish population through Poland and Germany (2). Oceanic blooms of the red-tide algae *Karenia brevis* (Dinoflagellata), experienced annually off US southeastern coastlines, are similarly devastating to fish and marine mammals (3). Their respective poisons, prymnesin and brevetoxin, are just two of many notable examples of marine microalgal biotoxins that share giant, polycyclic polyether structures that are amongst the largest nonpolymeric carbon chain molecules in nature (4).

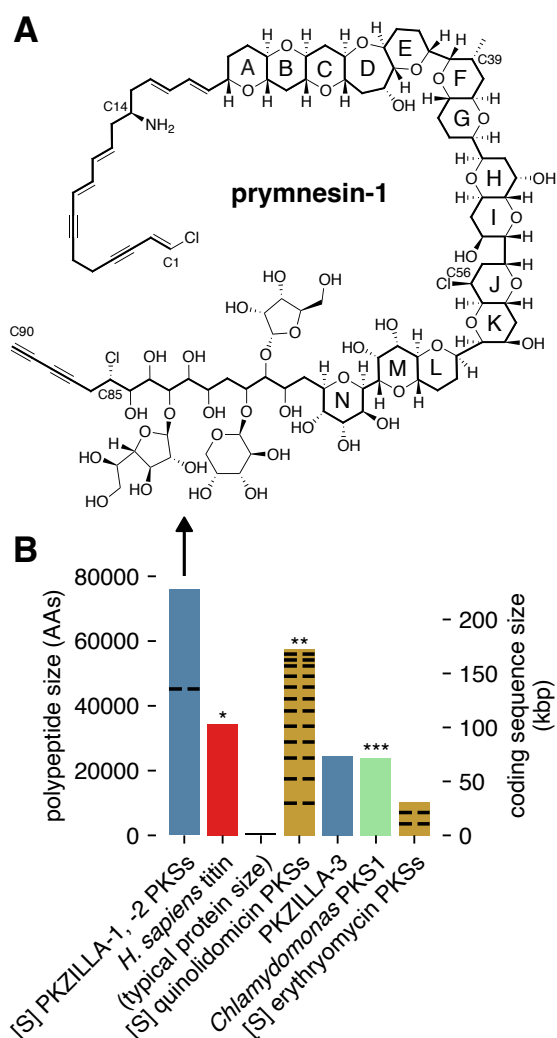
The massive and stereochemically-rich microalgal polyketide biotoxins prymnesin-1 (Fig. 1A) (5), palytoxin (6), and maitotoxin (7) contain 90, 115, and 142 contiguous carbon atoms, respectively, and pose significant human and environmental health risks. Their chemical structures imply a biosynthetic assembly line construction of two-carbon chain length iterations to a polyene intermediate that undergoes epoxidation followed by a nucleophilic reaction cascade to assemble their distinctive trans-fused (“ladder-frame”) polyether frameworks (8, 9). However, the biosynthesis

45 of these massive microalgal toxins has remained an enigma despite a wealth of intimate knowledge
46 of polyketide biochemistry from decades of research in bacteria and fungi (10) and recent
47 transcriptomic studies identifying biosynthetic gene candidates in multimodular type I polyketide
48 synthases (PKSs) from toxic microalgae (11, 12). The sheer size of microalgal polyether biotoxins
49 present significant experimental challenges and are accompanied by a lack of methods to study
50 their genetic origin. The model green alga *Chlamydomonas reinhardtii*, for instance, hosts a single
51 large ~80 kbp PKS, known as PKS1 (Fig. 1B), and while genetic knockout experiments established
52 that PKS1 participates in formation of the zygospore cell wall, its polyketide product remains
53 unknown (13). Furthermore, unlike bacteria and fungi that organize their PKS encoding genes into
54 polycistrons and biosynthetic gene clusters (BGCs), other eukaryotes typically employ
55 monocistronic mRNAs and infrequently functionally co-localize most genes, thus greatly obfuscating
56 gene discovery efforts (14).

57 Herein we report the application of a customized gene annotation strategy which enabled the
58 discovery of two massive PKS genes, PKZILLA-1 and -2, from *P. parvum* strain 12B1 that we
59 propose are responsible for the complete backbone assembly of its notorious ladder-frame
60 polyether toxin, prymnesin-1. Not only are the two giant PKZILLA “gigaproteins” organized
61 consistently with the long-anticipated polyene intermediate structure of a microalgal ladder-frame
62 polyether, but PKZILLA-1 is larger than titin (15), the presently largest known protein in life (Fig.
63 1B).

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Fig. 1. Prymnesin, its source PKZILLA polyketide synthases (PKSs), and other large proteins and PKS systems. (A) Molecular structure of prymnesin-1 (16). (B) Comparison of polypeptide and coding nucleotide sizes from representative PKSs or computationally summed PKS systems. Blue=PKZILLAs from *P. parvum* 12B1 (this work). [S]=Computationally summed lengths for independent PKS proteins that participate in the same biosynthetic system. Black dashed lines=Divisions of PKS systems into independent proteins. Red/=largest known protein (non-PKS) (15). Gold=Representative bacterial PKS systems, including the quinolidomicin (**=previous largest known PKS system) (17) and erythromycin (18) PKSs. Green/***=previous largest genetically studied microalgal PKS (13).

Results

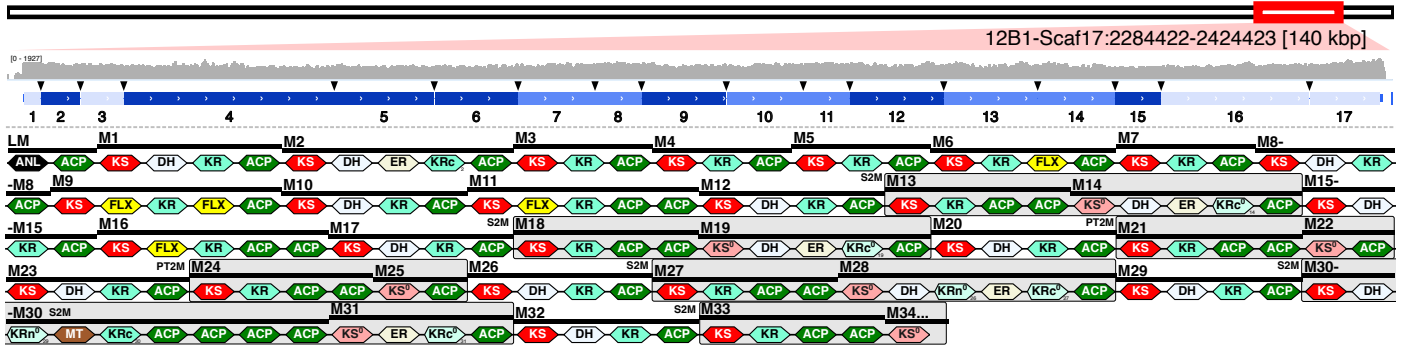
Genomic and transcriptomic evidence for the PKZILLA gigasynthases

We selected the A-type prymnesin (19) producing *P. parvum* strain 12B1 as a model system to resolve microalgal polyether biosynthesis, as its 116 Mbp genome and our recently published near-chromosome-level genomic assembly (20) makes strain 12B1 relatively tractable amongst microalgae and other toxic *P. parvum* strains. By contrast, polyether toxin-producing marine dinoflagellates have genomes ~100X larger at 25+ Gbp with extreme tandem gene repeat structures

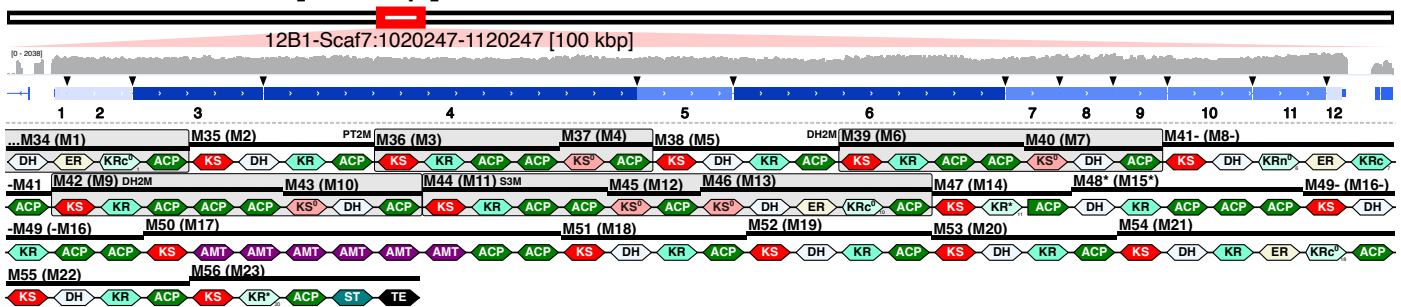
84 (21, 22) that have prevented even draft genome assemblies. We first cataloged PKS genes
85 potentially involved in prymnesin biosynthesis within our automated gene annotation (20),
86 identifying 44 PKS genes encoding relatively small proteins with 1-3 *trans*-acyltransferases (*trans*-
87 AT) PKS modules. However, confirmatory tblastn queries using PKS domains unveiled three
88 seemingly contiguous and strikingly large PKS “hotspot” loci that stood apart at 137, 93, and 74 kbp
89 on pseudo-chromosomes 17, 7, and 10, respectively. These hotspots showed a high concentration
90 of visible coding regions that were only partially captured by 25 fragmented PKS gene models, thus
91 we hypothesized they represented massive and mis-annotated single-genes. Upon manual
92 revision, we successfully constructed single-gene models from each hotspot, as described below,
93 and dubbed the resulting genes PKZILLA-1, -2, and -3 (Fig. 1, Fig. 2, table S1). At final count, we
94 annotated 22 PKS genes distributed across 16 of 34 pseudo-chromosomes that dramatically ranged
95 in size from 3 to 137 kbp (table S1).

96 Constructing the PKZILLA gene models from their candidate hotspots required several
97 manual gene annotation interventions. Initial realignments of our Oxford Nanopore Technologies
98 (ONT) long genomic DNA reads (20) to the PKZILLA hotspots revealed an assembly collapse of a
99 tandem repetitive region within the coding N-terminus of PKZILLA-1 that was fixed by targeted
100 reassembly. After that revision, we found no further PKZILLA assembly concerns (fig. S1). To test
101 for and classify transcriptional activity at these hotspots, we next analyzed coverage from a *P.*
102 *parvum* 12B1 oligo-dT mRNA enrichment/poly-A tail pulldown Illumina RNA sequencing (RNA-seq)
103 dataset (23) to localize the putative PKZILLA mRNA 3'-ends. This dataset indicated one
104 transcriptional termination site (TTS) per hotspot (fig. S2), however as established for poly-A
105 pulldown RNA-Seq datasets, the coverage was negligible beyond ~10 kbp to the 5'-end and thus
106 uninformative to 5' transcriptional activity (fig. S2). To evaluate if the full PKZILLA hotspots were
107 transcriptionally active and consistent with single genes, we applied mRNA length-unbiased rRNA-
108 depletion Illumina RNA-seq by generating and sequencing two dUTP-stranded libraries from
109 exponentially growing *P. parvum* cultures from the day and night phases. The low relative
110 expression of the PKZILLAs required four independent sequencing runs to accumulate sufficient
111 coverage. Ultimately, we calculated that the PKZILLA transcript expression levels were uniformly
112 low with transcripts per million (TPM) values of 1, 2, and 0.5 for PKZILLA-1, -2, and -3, respectively,
113 in both day and night phases (table S1). These rRNA datasets further showed contiguous and
114 sense-stranded transcriptional activity across the three PKZILLA gene models indicating one
115 transcriptional start site (TSS) per PKZILLA hotspot (Fig. 2, fig. S2). Critically, the rRNA depletion
116 data identified the presence and location of the 34 PKZILLA introns, all of which showed canonical
117 eukaryotic GT-AG splice sites (table S2, fig. S3, S4, S5). The translated PKZILLA polypeptide
118 sequences show near-contiguous sequence similarity to known PKS domains, with limited evidence
119 for internal breaks (fig. S6, S7). Thus, we concluded that PKZILLA-1, -2, and -3 are single genes
120 that each encode a single major transcriptional and translational product (Fig. 2). Remarkably, the
121 calculated size of the PKZILLA-1 transcript at 136,071 nucleotides and the associated protein at
122 45,212 amino acids would make it about 25% larger than the presently largest known protein, the
123 mammalian muscle protein titin (15) (Fig. 1B, table S5).

A PKZILLA-1 [137 kbp] pseudo-chromosome 17 [2.5 Mbp]



B PKZILLA-2 [93 kbp] pseudo-chromosome 7 [3.7 Mbp]



C PKS domain abbreviations & key

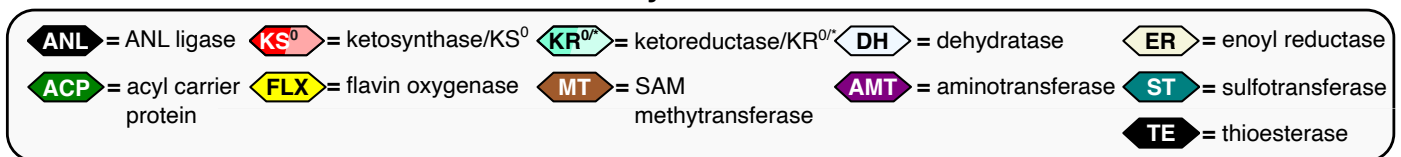


Fig. 2. Genomic, transcriptomic, and proteomic evidence for the PKZILLAs. Genomic PKS hotspot loci with gene models and PKS domain and module annotations for **(A)** PKZILLA-1 and **(B)** PKZILLA-2. **(A, B)** Red boxes denote chromosomal locations and relative sizes of the PKZILLA genes. The contiguous log-scale forward-stranded read coverage from the stranded rRNA-depletion RNA-Seq (in gray) is shown across the PKZILLA gene models (in blue). Introns are highlighted with black arrows, while exons are numbered 1-17 for PKZILLA-1 and 1-12 for PKZILLA-2. See fig. S2 for an alternative view and fig. S3, S4 for a detailed view of each intron. The numbered protein-coding exons are colored light blue, medium blue, or dark blue based on whether supporting proteomic peptides from that exon were not detected, detected by protein-multimatch peptide matches alone, or detected by protein-unique plus exon-unique peptide matches, respectively (See *Proteomic evidence for the PKZILLAs* in Results; fig. S9). Domain and module annotations (starting with the loading module (LM) and module 1 (M1) of PKZILLA-1 and ending with M56 of PKZILLA-2) are shown below the gene models, see key in **(C)**. The bi/tri-modules are boxed in gray and categorized as S2/3M=saturating bi/tri-module, PT2M=pass-through bimodule, and DH2M=dehydrating bimodule. See fig. S6, S7 for non-length-normalized domains.

Proteomic evidence for the PKZILLAs

To validate the PKZILLA proteins predicted by our gene models, we analyzed lyophilized *P. parvum* 12B1 biomass using an optimized bottom-up proteomics method. We identified and

145 confidently validated 43 and 38 proteomic peptides from PKZILLA-1 and -2, respectively, yet none
146 for PKZILLA-3. Only 9 and 6 peptides from PKZILLA-1 and -2, respectively, were single-copy
147 (*single-match*) within a single predicted PKZILLA polypeptide (*protein-unique*). Instead, most of the
148 detected peptides were *multimatch peptides* present in multiple copies, either *protein-unique* to a
149 given PKZILLA, or present in both PKZILLA-1 and -2 polypeptides (*protein-multimatch*) (fig. S8,
150 S9). This high proportion of multimatch peptides highlights the internally repetitive nature of the
151 “giga-modular” PKZILLAs, both within and across proteins. These peptides were only present in the
152 PKZILLA gene models and were not found anywhere else in 6-frame translations of the 12B1
153 genome.

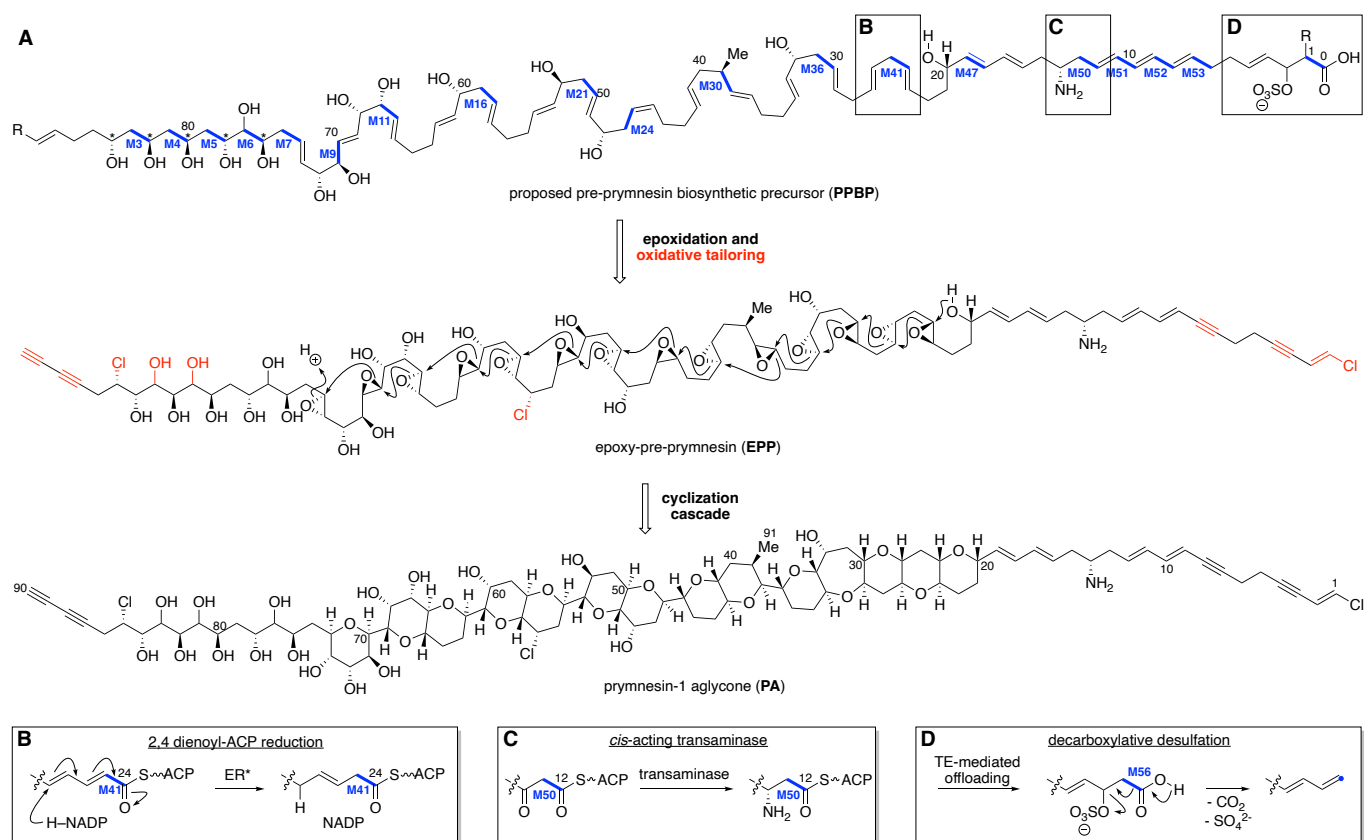
154 We next established which regions of the PKZILLA polypeptides were supported by
155 proteomics. A complication is that most of the *P. parvum* proteomic data were multimatch peptides,
156 which are rare in proteomic analyses of typical non-large, non-repetitive proteins. Since they cannot
157 be unambiguously assigned to a single polypeptide region, multimatch peptides are often ignored
158 in downstream analyses, in favor of simpler protein-unique single-match peptides (24). We judged
159 that overlooking the multimatch peptides, while a simple solution, needlessly limited our analysis
160 and discarded valuable data. We adapted to this challenge by sub-classifying each protein-unique
161 yet multimatch peptide that also only arose from the translation product of a single exon as *exon-*
162 *unique* (fig. S9), thus localizing proteomic support to the *exon* rather than the residue level. Of the
163 43 PKZILLA-1 proteomic peptides, 14 met both the protein-unique and exon-unique criteria, and
164 thus established unambiguous proteomic support for translation of 7 out of 17 PKZILLA-1 exons
165 (41%), bounded upstream and downstream by exons 2 and 15, respectively (Fig. 2). When
166 considering the remaining 29 tryptic peptides despite their exon-multimatch or protein-multimatch
167 ambiguity (fig. S9), we established increased proteomic support for 76% of the PKZILLA-1 exons
168 (Fig. 2). Applying the same criteria to PKZILLA-2, we measured proteomic support of 16 exon-
169 unique peptides from 3 of the 12 exons (25%), bounded by exons 3 and 6, which increased to 75%
170 of PKZILLA-2 exons after considering all PKZILLA matching peptides (Fig. 2). Overall, these results
171 confidently validate the translation of the PKZILLA-1/-2 transcripts into proteins and are consistent
172 with a single translational product per gene.

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174 *Annotation of PKZILLA domain & modular structures and their compatibility with prymnesin*

175 With proteomics-validated PKZILLA gene models in hand, we next tested their possible role
176 in prymnesin biosynthesis by annotating the PKS domains and evaluating their modular-
177 arrangement against the chemical structure of a proposed pre-prymnesin biosynthetic precursor
178 (PPBP; Fig. 3A). We identified 140 and 99 protein domains for PKZILLA-1 and -2, respectively (table
179 S3, S4, S5), using InterProScan (25). We also cataloged 30 candidate domains of unknown function
180 (cDUFs), however none of these cDUFs showed strong evidence of being unannotated enzyme
181 domains (table S6, S7). The first two domains of PKZILLA-1, an Acy-CoA synthetase/NRPS
182 adenylation domain/Luciferase (ANL) superfamily ligase adjacent to an acyl-carrier-protein (ACP)
183 domain (Fig. 2), comprise an unconventional, yet precedented (26), loading module (LM) to initiate
184 polyketide chain elongation. PKZILLA-2 lacked any recognizable N-terminal loading domains;
185 however, it does possess a C-terminal thioesterase (TE) domain, consistent with polyketide chain
186 termination. In the end, we organized the combined 239 domains into 56 *trans*-AT PKS modules,

187 including module-34 (M34) split across the C-terminus of PKZILLA-1 and the N-terminus of
 188 PKZILLA-2 (Fig. 2, table S5, S8, S9).
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190
 191 **Fig. 3. Alignment of PKZILLA PKS modules with the proposed prymnesin biosynthetic**
 192 **precursor. (A)** Structure of the pre-prymnesin biosynthetic precursor (PPBP) inferred from
 193 retrobiosynthetic analysis of a structurally compatible poly-epoxide cyclization cascade from the
 194 prymnesin-1 aglycone (PA) (16), and its end-to-end alignment with the assembly line modules of
 195 the PKZILLA-1/-2 gigasynthase. Select hypothesized reactions are called out in subpanels (B, C,
 196 D). See fig S20 for further detail.

197
 198 Prymnesin is devoid of standard polyketide termini and had an unknown direction of chain
 199 elongation. We resolved its biosynthetic directionality by first correlating the diagnostic polyol
 200 segment at C84–C76 with the five adjacent modules M3–M7 that contain a ketoreductase (KR) as
 201 the terminal reductive domain. Based on this observation, we could infer the directionality of
 202 biosynthesis, with the PKZILLA-1 LM initiating the polyketide biosynthetic pathway with a three-
 203 carbon carboxylate of yet unknown origin followed by chain extension with seven malonate
 204 molecules via M1–M7 with interceding KR reduction to produce a hexol intermediate (fig. S20).
 205 While five of the “ β ”-hydroxyls originate from malonate extender units, the out-of-sequence “ α ”-
 206 hydroxy group at C77 is instead likely installed by the α -hydroxylase flavoprotein (FLX) domain (27,
 207 28) contained in M6. PKZILLA-1 harbors two additional FLX-domain containing modules, M9 and
 208 M11, both of which align with the installation of the further α -hydroxylations at C71 and C67,
 209 respectively. The absence of domains corresponding to additional C–H oxygenations (C81 and
 210 C83) and halogenation (C85) is suggestive that these functionalities are installed by intermodular-

211 or *trans*-acting enzymes during chain elongation or post polyketide assembly via oxidative enzymes
212 (29).

213 The PPBP region spanning prymnesin's polyether rings (C74–C20) coincides with a break
214 from canonical *trans*-AT modular architecture with 11 non-elongating ketosynthase (KS⁰) containing
215 modules interspersed amongst 16 canonical *trans*-AT PKS modules (Fig. 2, 3A, table S8, S9). Two
216 of the KS⁰s are found as part of "dehydrating bimodules" (Fig. 2; M39/M40, M42/M43) first
217 characterized in bacterial *trans*-AT pathways (30), wherein the first module (KS-KR(-ACP_n))
218 catalyzes chain elongation and ketone reduction, and the second module, consisting of a (KS⁰-DH-
219 ACP), performs the corresponding dehydration to yield an α,β -alkene thioester intermediate (fig.
220 S20). Three other KS⁰s are integrated into simple "pass-through bimodules" (Fig 2.; M21/M22,
221 M24/M25, M36/M37), also found in bacterial *trans*-AT BGCs (31), whose minimal KS⁰-ACP
222 architecture preserves the β -hydroxy group generated by the upstream module. The remaining
223 KS⁰s reside in unprecedented "saturating" bi- and trimodules (Fig. 2; M13/M14, M18/M19,
224 M27/M28, M30/M31, M33/M34, and M44/M45/M46). In these systems, the second and third
225 modules contain the full complement of reductive domains which convert the β -hydroxy group to a
226 saturated methylene at positions C64, C56, C44, C40, C36, and C22 (Fig. 3A, fig. S20). Notably,
227 saturating bimodule M30/M31 also contains the only methyltransferase (MT) domain in the entire
228 assembly line and is positioned to install prymnesin's lone methyl group at C39 (Fig. 3, fig. S20).
229 We further confirmed the module-to-precursor alignment throughout this C74–C20 region by
230 applying *trans*-AT ketoreductase precedent (32) to bioinformatically predict the stereochemical
231 outcome of reduction for each KR domain (table S11). These bioinformatic predictions matched
232 with 6 of the 7 known configurations from the most recent structure revision of prymnesin-1 (16),
233 with the C32 hydroxyl as the exception (table S12, fig. S20). By extrapolating these predictions, we
234 propose β -hydroxy stereochemical assignments for the yet unassigned C84–C76 region of
235 prymnesin (Fig. 3A, table S12).

236 Finally, the polyene segment (C19–C1) contains several distinguishing structural features,
237 all of which align with the final ten modules of PKZILLA-2. The M49 dehydratase is positioned to
238 catalyze a precedented (33) vinylogous dehydration to reconfigure the C19–C16 diene out of
239 conjugation relative to the ACP-tethered thioester, and the six consecutively arranged pyridoxal 5'-
240 phosphate (PLP) dependent aminotransferase (AMT) domains in M50 are located at the precise
241 position to incorporate the sole primary amine at C14 (Fig. 3D) as in mycosubtilin biosynthesis (34).
242 Much like the initial modules in PKZILLA-1, the final modules in PKZILLA-2, M51–M55, possess
243 traditional *trans*-AT domain architecture, and generate the C12–C7 triene and a transient C4–C3
244 alkene that must undergo further desaturation to give prymnesin's observed alkyne. The final
245 module, M56, is preceded by the terminal PKS module from curacin biosynthesis (35) wherein
246 an unusual sulfotransferase (ST) domain sulfates the β -hydroxy, and TE-mediated offloading
247 initiates simultaneous decarboxylation and sulfate elimination to give a terminal alkene (Fig. 3D).
248 As prymnesin terminates in a vinyl chloride, an additional halogenase must act pre- or post-chain
249 offloading to install the third and final chloride at C1 (36).

250 While much of the prymnesin assembly line conforms to *trans*-AT PKS biochemistry, there
251 are a few unique module-to-precursor alignments that may signal new enzymology. In the case of
252 M40 and its dienoyl intermediate, we propose that the adjacent M41 module elongates the growing
253 polyketide chain to a 2,4-dienoyl-ACP intermediate before reduction (Fig. 3B, S20) by a

254 phylogenetically distinct enoyl reductase “ER2” (table S9, fig. S14, S19) to generate a β,γ -alkene
255 out of conjugation with the thioester carbonyl. This type of reduction has precedence in fatty acid
256 biosynthesis on acyl-CoA intermediates (37). Furthermore, while we anticipate the KRs from M47
257 and M56 are active per our model (Fig. 3, S20), these domains are phylogenetically distinct (fig.
258 S12, S17) and show unprecedented active site residues (table S9) that may suggest a novel
259 mechanism or substrate. Similarly, module M48 is unique in missing an explicit KS domain (Fig. 2,
260 S7, table S9), and instead harbors the 186-residue sequence-unique cDUF9 in the analogous
261 upstream position (table S7, S9) that may help recruit a restorative *cis*- or *trans*-acting KS enzyme
262 (Fig. 3A). Finally, based on the currently revised structure of prymnesin-1 (16), our biosynthetic
263 model requires a (*Z*)-ene at C45–C46 to accommodate the stereochemical outcome of the
264 prymnesin aglycone, despite the M26-DH/KR pair predicting an (*E*)-ene product (table S11). This
265 may suggest further refinement of prymnesin-1’s configuration is warranted (16). Taken together,
266 the sequence of the assembly line operation strongly supports a causal role for PKZILLA-1/2 as the
267 “gigasynthase” responsible for synthesis of the prymnesin backbone, and suggests future focus
268 areas to identify the remaining biosynthetic enzymes for the polyether cascade.
269

270 Discussion

271 The characterization of brevetoxin B as the causative agent of the toxic red-tide dinoflagellate
272 *Karenia brevis* over four decades ago (38), established microalgae as exquisite producers of
273 polycyclic polyether toxins. Over 150 members with their five- to nine-membered cyclic ethers,
274 including maitotoxin as the largest with 32 fused rings, have since been discovered (39) and have
275 helped shape the field of marine natural products due to their toxic and drug-like properties (40).
276 The discovery and initial characterization of the prymnesin PKZILLA gigasynthases now sheds light
277 on the long-standing question about how microalgae biosynthesize their giant polyketide biotoxins.

278 The domain composition of the PKZILLA-1 and -2 gigasynthases are impeccably aligned
279 with the cooperative assembly of the prymnesin carbon scaffold, and support decades-old
280 hypotheses that ladder-frame polyethers are constructed from all (*E*)- linear polyene intermediates
281 (8, 9). Our discovery identified several unexpected features of the prymnesin assembly line. The
282 sizes of the PKZILLA enzymes are stunning, with the 140-domain protein PKZILLA-1 being larger
283 than the presently largest recognized protein in life. Second, only two modular PKS proteins are
284 required for the construction of the 90-carbon long prymnesin molecule. In contrast, the longest
285 known bacterial polyketide, quinolidomicin at 68 carbons (17), is assembled by 13 PKS gene
286 products (Fig. 1B). The remarkable size of the PKZILLAS expands our imagination on the
287 capabilities of enzymes in the construction of complex molecules. And finally, the unprecedented
288 abundance of non-elongating KS⁰s are featured in modules associated with the construction of the
289 polycyclic interior of prymnesin, which may contribute to the timing and mechanism of polyether
290 assembly.

291 No comparable PKS system has yet been identified from a toxic dinoflagellate, however,
292 numerous studies have established that dinoflagellates encode large numbers of modular and
293 single-domain type I PKSs (41), including a promising, yet reportedly incomplete 35-knt 7-module
294 PKS transcript candidate from the ciguatoxin-producing *Gambierdiscus polynesiensis* (12). If
295 dinoflagellates similarly encode giant PKSs reminiscent of the PKZILLAs, then common
296 transcriptomic practices involving poly-A pulldown RNA sequencing may bias against giant

297 transcripts and instead require length-unbiased rRNA-depletion RNA-seq alongside customized
298 assembly and annotation as performed in this study. Notably, the PKZILLAs went unreported from
299 recent *P. parvum* transcriptomic (11) and genomic (42) analyses, highlighting the challenges of
300 assembling and annotating giant PKS genes with their highly repetitive sequences.

301 Dinoflagellate polyketides also share a distinctive biosynthetic feature involving the irregular
302 incorporation of intact and C1-deleted acetate building blocks as illuminated by isotope labeling
303 studies (43). The prymnesin biosynthetic model, on the other hand, supports the intact incorporation
304 of 43 contiguous malonate units, which is standard in most bacterial systems. The α -hydroxylating
305 FLX domains and “pass-through” modules found within the PKZILLA modules provide a tantalizing
306 hypothesis for this yet to be described dinoflagellate PKS biochemistry: Assembly line oxidation to
307 the α -ketone followed by transacylation by a KS⁰ may lead to excision of single carbon atoms by
308 decarbonylation as preceded in the biosynthesis of marine polyketides enterocin (44) and
309 barbamide (45).

310 Though PKZILLA-1 and -2 are responsible for the construction of the majority of the
311 prymnesin molecule, additional enzymes (acyltransferases, desaturases, hydroxylases,
312 chlorinases, epoxidases, glycosyltransferases) are needed to complete the full biosynthetic
313 pathway and install prymnesin’s remaining functional groups and sugar moieties. In contrast to the
314 only other microalgal toxin with a fully resolved genetic basis, the small alkaloid domoic acid with
315 its clustered causal genes (46), the distribution of the PKZILLA-1 and -2 genes across separate
316 pseudo-chromosomes indicates prymnesin biosynthesis is not encoded within a single biosynthetic
317 gene cluster, and suggests that its tailoring enzymes may also not be clustered. The discovery of
318 the PKZILLAs and their role in prymnesin biosynthesis lays the foundation for the development and
319 implementation of alternative linked ‘omics approaches to fully uncover the complete suite of
320 prymnesin biosynthetic enzymes. Moreover, the PKZILLAs now offer the opportunity to dissect the
321 enzymology of ladder-frame polyether biosynthesis and will serve as a model to capture and dissect
322 giant genes, transcripts, and proteins in specialized metabolism.

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491

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496 can be accessed with the following credentials upon login to the PRIDE website
497 (<https://www.ebi.ac.uk/pride/archive/login>): Username: reviewer_pxd044632@ebi.ac.uk ,
498 Password: ERk9Y0kO .]] Other extended datasets and analysis code (scripts) are available on
499 zenodo.org and/or github.com and are both cited in-line throughout the manuscript and listed in
500 table S14.

501 **Supplementary Materials**

502 Materials and Methods

503 Figs. S1 to S20

504 Tables S1 to S14

505 References (1–94)

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