

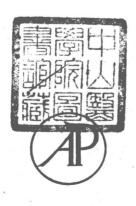
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HENRY FORD HOSPITAL
International Symposium

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ENZYMES: Units of Biological Structure and Function





1956

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PREFACE

Recorded in this volume are the proceedings of an International Symposium on Enzymes: Units of Biological Structure and Function, held at Henry Ford Hospital, Detroit, November 1–3, 1955.

There is a recurrent need for symposia in which representatives of many different scientific disciplines are brought together to discuss topics of common interest. The present Symposium was an event of this type. Among the participants were representatives of the basic sciences of the medical curriculum, as well as of many nonmedical departments interested in enzymes as structural and functional units. Devotees of another "unit," the gene, were also well represented. The proceedings should, therefore, be of interest in many fields, notably microbiology, biology, genetics, physiology, pharmacology, pathology, nutrition, biochemistry, and biophysics. It is also significant that this review of typical current enzyme studies was suggested by members of the clinical staff of the Hospital, who noted the growing impact of this field of investigation on medicine in the broader sense.

The "Introduction to the Purpose and Scope of the Symposium" includes a preview of the six sessions and two evening lectures, and there is an extensive review of the meeting [Science 123, 149 (1955)] containing brief comments on the individual contributions; it therefore seems unnecessary to repeat what has been said elsewhere.

Acknowledgments for initiative and effort are due to many. The idea of sponsoring a series of symposia was presented to the Medical Board of Henry Ford Hospital by Dr. Robin C. Buerki, Executive Director of the Hospital, on May 19, 1952. Consideration of enzymes as a future topic was suggested by Dr. R. H. Durham in July 1953. A year later, this emergent idea was presented in more specific form by Dr. C. E. Rupe and adopted.

The Advisory Program Committee, whose names appear on a following page, devoted a great deal of time to selection of topics and speakers. It is a pleasure to acknowledge their splendid services, and to voice the mutual satisfaction of the Advisory and Local Committees with the high scientific standards maintained by the participants, who ultimately contributed the Symposium itself.

Particular recognition is due to Dr. C. E. Rupe of the Local Committee for efficient handling of all matters pertaining to invitations, accommodations, and registration, which reached a total of 605. Not to be forgotten are other decidedly endergonic aspects of such meetings: administrative ones, to which Mr. William Nye, Mr. David L. Everhart, and Dr. J. T. Howell devoted a great deal of time; dietetic ones, for which acknowledgments are due to Miss Margaret King and her staff; secretarial ones, cheerfully and efficiently borne by Miss Dorothy Reid and Mrs. Eleanore Lugosky; and numerous well-rendered photographic, purchasing, and maintenance services.

Detroit, Michigan February, 1956 O. H. GAEBLER

The Symposium was jointly sponsored by the Henry Ford Hospital and the Edsel B. Ford Institute for Medical Research, Detroit, Michigan, and held at the Hospital, November 1, 2, 3, 1955.

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Introduction: Purpose and Scope of the Symposium

BERNARD D. DAVIS

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For at least two decades a large fraction of research on enzymes has been concerned with their role in intermediary metabolism, and this work has marched forward pretty much in a straight line. Biochemists have learned how to prepare extracts that will carry out many of the same chemical reactions as the intact cells. The enzymes involved have then been separated, purified often to the point of crystallization, and individually characterized in terms that are now quite standardized. This approach has brought biochemistry to a new level of precision, and it is still both necessary and highly rewarding. However, enzyme research has of late been tending to spread in a number of other directions. It is with these newer approaches that the present Symposium is concerned.

One reason for this shift of emphasis, it seems to me, is the following: the classical enzymatic approach to problems of intermediary metabolism has become so efficient and has attracted so many students that it is now rapidly consuming its own substrate. Thus simple and versatile methods (gasometric, spectrophotometric, and chromatographic) for chemical microanalysis have been developed; isotopically labeled compounds have been of great value in a number of ways; and genetic changes have been used to block metabolic paths at a single reaction with a cleanness and versatility that inhibitors could not reach. With the help of these methods investigators in literally hundreds of laboratories throughout the world have managed to organize an extraordinary amount of cosmos from the chaos of biochemical processes.

As an index of the extent of this progress, I estimate that roughly half the intermediates involved in the biosynthesis of the common amino acids have already been defined, and many of the corresponding enzymes have been studied in more or less detail. And as an index of the biological significance of this work it should be emphasized that the results obtained with extracts have for the most part been concordant with those furnished by isotopic and genetic studies on intact cells. There is, therefore,

good reason to believe that, in general, the reactions observed in isolated enzyme systems do reflect physiological events and are not artifacts of isolation.

A few years ago there seemed to be no visible limit to the number, variety, and complexity of the reactions to which one could apply the well-developed methodology of intermediary metabolism. It had become a mature discipline, analogous to organic chemistry. But meanwhile the picture has changed. For there has been a growing suspicion that highly specific macromolecules—proteins, DNA, and presumably RNA—do not attain their complexity through a summation of simple enzyme-controlled reactions, each adding one building block at a time, but rather are formed through some quite different mechanism, involving a multiheaded template. If this be so, then the number of simple reactions that are carried out by enzymes is finite after all; and of these the number that are widely distributed in biological systems may be surprisingly small. Indeed, I suspect that this limitation in the number of available enzymes, combined with the standardization of approach, is largely responsible for the competitiveness and duplication of effort that are so striking in contemporary biochemistry. I refer to this state of affairs because I am convinced, from having worked in other fields such as microbial genetics, that it is not an inevitable state in science. The obvious cure for such crowding in our community is, of course, further suburban development; and this is one reason for exploring in this Symposium the more outlying territories of enzyme research.

But I do not wish to emphasize too much the importance of such a negative reason. For clearly an enormous amount of work remains to be done before the reservoir of simple enzyme-controlled reactions is exhausted. A much more important reason for our orientation is the inherent interest of recent studies on other aspects of enzymes, and the exciting prospects they offer for the future. The techniques now available make it possible to tackle at a molecular level of organization certain problems that until lately could be studied exclusively by physiologists or geneticists, at quite a different level. It is the purpose of this Symposium to gather together a group of people to discuss such attempts, groping in some cases and well advanced in others, to relate enzymes to some of the more complex aspects of cell physiology.

These aspects are clearly revealed in the program of Symposium. The

These aspects are clearly revealed in the program of Symposium. The first day will be concerned with the mechanism of enzyme formation. This problem converges with that of the form and function of DNA and RNA, and with the essentially identical problem, approached from another angle, of gene action.

In addition, since we tend, erroneously, to think of the mutable units of the geneticist as being the only factors that determine the inheritable properties of a cell, it has been considered advisable to include a discussion of the other large class of heredity-determining mechanisms. These are the environmentally directed changes in the inheritable properties of cells that go variously under the name of differentiation, morphogenesis, or epigenetics. This process is at present as mysterious to the biologist as to the biochemist, and the importance of giving it much more attention is underscored by the likelihood that the origin of neoplasms lies in aberrations of differentiation.

A second major area of interest concerns the mechanisms that regulate metabolic activities. These mechanisms include the action of various hormones, the adaptive aspects of enzyme formation, and the relation of enzymes to the structural organization of the cell. The most prominent of these structural features at present are two: the grouping of enzymes into particles, and the presence of membranes exhibiting selective permeability and concentrating power. This development might be summed up by saying that biochemists, having found useful the simplified model of the cell as a bag of enzymes, are now increasingly inquiring into the nature of the bag. And where a few years ago many investigators were careful to avoid making further acquaintance with an enzyme unless it could be purified of the taint of its former associations, the tide is now turning and the trick is to get multienzyme systems out of the cell with a minimum of disorganization. These topics of regulation and organization will come up repeatedly during the second and third days.

Also spread through these two days will be a third major topic: transduction between the chemical energy of enzymatic reactions and other forms of energy. These include mechanical work, the osmotic work of excretory processes and intracellular concentration, emission of light, the uptake of light in photosynthesis and in vision, and electrical activity,

especially of nerve cells.

In the time available it will not be possible to provide complete coverage of the stated subject of the Symposium, enzymes in relation to biological structure and function. It will therefore be necessary to forego detailed discussion of the more chemical aspect of enzyme research, which probably has the widest interest of all, since it aims at elucidating the intimate mechanism of enzyme action. However, I am sure we shall hear some provocative suggestions on this subject when Dr. Pauling conducts us on an excursion into the future.

I have already emphasized that this Symposium is particularly concerned with bringing into prominence the newer directions of enzyme research. Accordingly, the participants have been encouraged to engage in judicious projection of stimulating hypotheses, even where the experimental support may be scant. At the same time, to die by drowning in a flood of loose talk is hardly more pleasant than to die of thirst in a desert of facts. I hope we will be able to maintain a nice, comfortable, middle range of humidity!