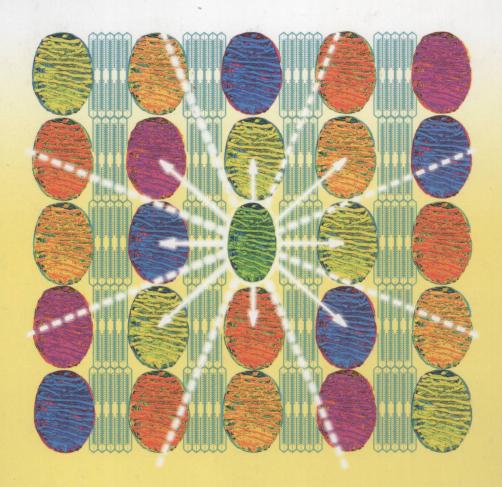
Molecular System Bioenergetics

Energy for Life



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Edited by Valdur Saks







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Preface

When Thucydides wrote his famous book *The History of the Peloponnesian War* in Athens in 460–400 BC, he supplied it with the following commentary: "My work is not a piece of writing designed to meet the taste of an immediate public, but was done to last forever." We could borrow this comment for our book, whose intention is to survey the results of more than 200 years of research in cellular bioenergetics, from the discovery that respiration is a process of biological oxidation by Lavoisier and Laplace in the 18th century, to the latest achievements of molecular system bioenergetics in explaining the mechanistic basis of its regulation. Respiration is *la raison de être* of cells, and a knowledge of the mechanisms associated with biological oxidation, free energy transduction, and regulation of cellular respiration implies understanding how cells obtain energy for life. The scope of cellular energetics, however, is much broader than studying the mechanisms involved in respiratory regulation, because all biochemical processes are inseparable from free energy transduction, thus including the whole metabolism and the description of all kinds of work performed by cells.

At present, the biological sciences are witnessing a radical change in paradigms. Reductionism – which used to be the philosophical basis of biochemistry and molecular biology, when everything from genes to proteins and organelles were studied in their isolated state – is making way for systems biology, which favors the study of integrated systems at all levels: cellular, organ, organism, and population. Reductionism was justified in the initial stages of biological research, giving a wealth of information on system components. It is timely to put them together and analyze them in interaction, to understand the principles of functioning of the whole. These paradigmatic changes also concern bioenergetics. Unraveling the mechanisms of regulation of cellular energetics only appears to be possible by using an integrated approach based on computational models, which we call molecular system bioenergetics.

Not everybody, however, was taken by surprise following these paradigmatic changes. There have been pioneers in the systemic approach to biochemistry and metabolism. The roots of systems biology can be traced back to the works of Pasteur, Claude Bernard, Meyerhof, Cori, and Krebs, among others, and its theoretical basis can be found in the work of Norbert Wiener, the founder of cybernetics. Regarding cellular energetics, an important line of research of metabolic

networks, energy transfer, and metabolic regulation has always existed, particularly emphasizing the significance of structure-function relationships for the integrated regulation of metabolic networks.

The aim of this book is to describe the "state of the art" of these investigations by the authors who have been most actively committed to developing integrated approaches to studying energy metabolism. In our pursuit we follow the historical unfolding of these developments, emphasizing the most important achievements in the area during the last 100 years. We begin with basic information about mitochondrial structure and function and a general description of the theoretical bases of cellular metabolism and bioenergetics in open thermodynamic systems, including Schrödinger's principle of negentropy. This is followed by an analysis of mitochondrial behavior and processes in cells, taking into account macromolecular crowding and compartmentation phenomena. The most important part of the book is devoted to the description of compartmentalized energy transfer in muscle and brain cells. The experimental data gathered during the last several decades in many laboratories allow us to explain the mechanistic bases of two highly significant phenomena for physiological energetics: the Frank-Starling law of the heart, related to the regulation of respiration, and acute ischemic cardiac contractile failure. This approach explains the regulation of substrate supply in the heart as well.

The last part of the book analyzes the applied aspects of cellular bioenergetics the problems of mitochondrial pathology, exercise physiology, cancer research, and a new important area of research, the "metabolic syndrome" - related to the medical and socioeconomic problems of modern societies. Because these diseases, which are related to cellular and whole-body derailment of basic metabolism, are reaching epidemic proportions in the "civilized" world, the regulation of sugar and fat metabolism, once considered an old-fashioned discipline of physiological biochemistry, is back in the limelight again. Amazingly, these old disciplines and fields of metabolic regulation often are rediscovered and uncovered by young scientists, making it even more important to analyze the achievements of bioenergetics in historical perspective.

This effort intends to be a useful manual and valuable reference book for a large scientific audience, namely, in biology and medicine. We hope it will also be a resourceful tool for undergraduate and doctoral students, post-doctoral students, and research workers in bioenergetics, biophysics, biochemistry, cell biology, pharmacology, physiology, pathophysiology, and medicine.

Grenoble, May 2007

Valdur Saks

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