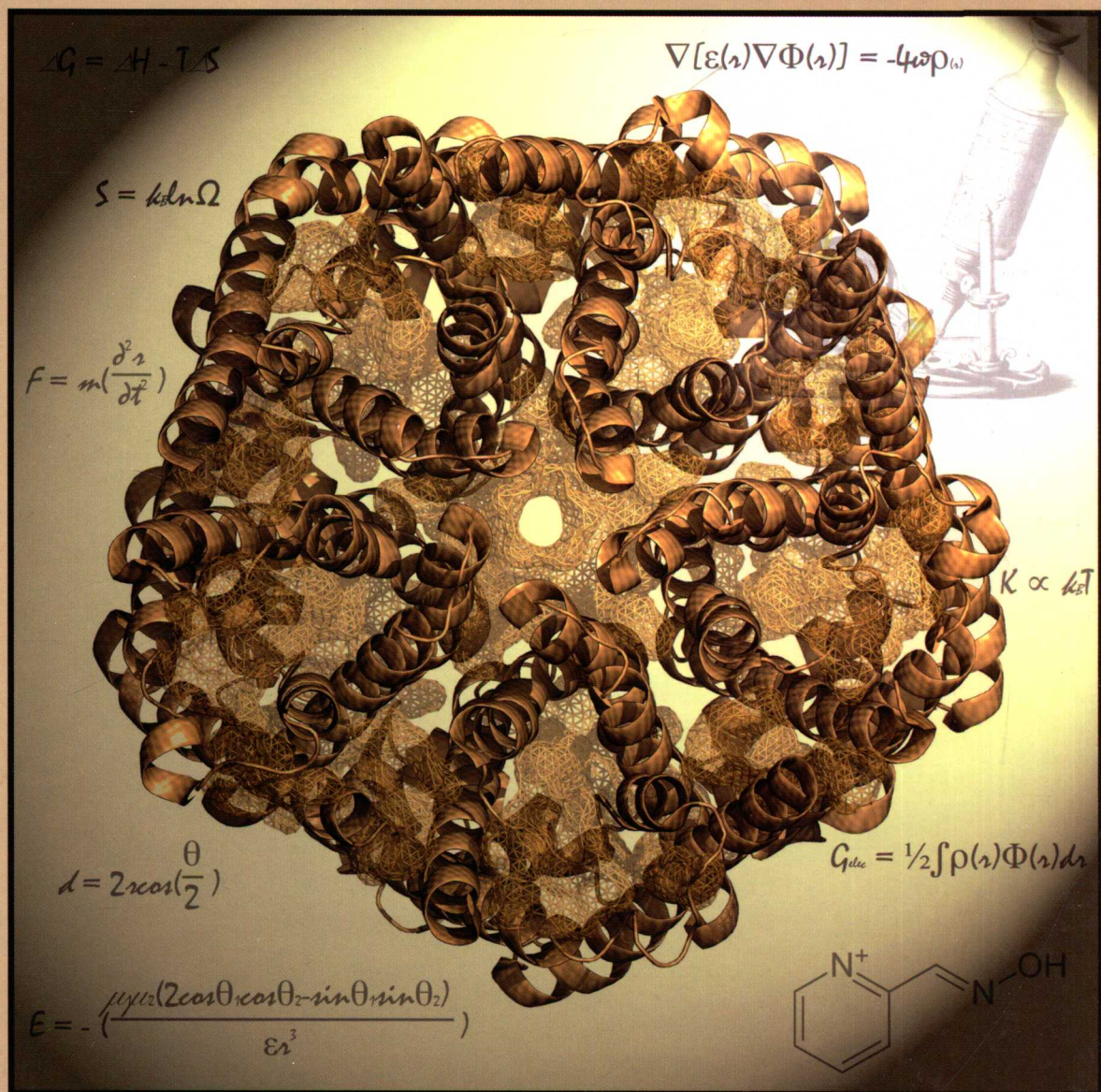


INTRODUCTION TO PROTEINS

STRUCTURE, FUNCTION, AND MOTION



AMIT KESSEL AND NIR BEN-TAL



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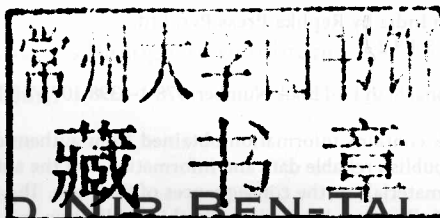
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Table of Contents

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Preface

Proteins are highly complex molecules that are actively involved in the most basic and important aspects of life. These include metabolism, movement, defense, cellular communication, and molecular recognition. Accordingly, protein science is at the very center of biological research and is applied to areas such as medicine, agriculture, biotechnology, and even unconventional warfare.

In the last few decades, with the development of accurate and sophisticated means of molecular structure determination, it has become clear that the functions of macromolecules in general and of proteins in particular result directly from their structures and structural dynamics. In addition, it has been realized that true understanding of these aspects requires both qualitative and quantitative characterization of the dominant physical forces acting on proteins at the atomic level. This understanding has prompted a new field in biological sciences, termed “Structural Biophysics.”

This book aims to provide the reader with a detailed description of protein structure and dynamics, combined with an in-depth discussion of the relationship between both these aspects and protein function. Adopting the structural–biophysical approach, we discuss these topics in relation to molecular interactions and thermodynamic changes that transpire in this highly complex system. There are several types of textbooks describing protein structure and function. Biochemistry textbooks emphasize the functional aspect of proteins and provide a rather general description of structure and structure–function relationship (SFR). Structural Biology textbooks provide an extensive description of protein structure and also refer to SFR with varying degrees of detail. However, energy-related aspects are often avoided. Molecular biophysics textbooks focus on molecular interactions and thermodynamic aspects of protein structure, but tend to lack detailed description of structural and dynamic aspects, as well as SFR. This book refers to all the aforementioned aspects and attempts to provide a unified view. Our energy-oriented approach is manifested throughout the book, whether we discuss structure, dynamics or specific functions of proteins. An extensive discussion of the energetics of protein structure is also given in a chapter dedicated to this topic.

Clarification of SFR in proteins is the ultimate goal of any book about proteins. Most textbooks describe it *via* specific examples or protein types. This gives the readers a wide view on protein activity, but general conclusions are often missing. Here we attempt to provide the readers with the very principles of protein action (as we understand it), in the form of guidelines, when possible. This is done throughout the book, but particularly in the

chapter describing protein–ligand interactions. We chose to elaborate on this issue since, in our view, it is the very basis of all protein functions.

The central dogma of structural biology is the dependence of function on structure. Yet, some proteins, termed “intrinsically unstructured proteins” (IUPs), are inherently devoid of regular three-dimensional structure, and still have numerous functions. IUPs have been extensively studied in the last few years, yet are not mentioned in most textbooks. We dedicated a chapter of the book to these proteins in order to provide a more complete and realistic view of the proteome, as well as to explore the full repertoire of protein functions.

Much of the knowledge on protein structure and function relationship became possible only after technologies for the determination or prediction of three-dimensional protein structure emerged. Accordingly, we provide a concise description of the main experimental and computational methods used today for studying protein structure and dynamics. In this respect, we mention various Internet-based resources, such as databases and algorithms, which are widely used and fully accessible to the reader. As mentioned above, protein science is not only of academic interest. Indeed, it has been applied in various industrial, medical, and agricultural fields. In our book we discuss two of these applications: the industrial use of enzymes and protein engineering, and the rational design of protein-targeting pharmaceutical drugs. Based on the above, we believe that the book will be of interest to both students and scientists in protein-related fields.

Proteins: Structure, Function, and Motion is intended for various audiences. First, it can be used by undergraduate or graduate students of biochemistry, structural biology, computational biophysics, bioinformatics, and biotechnology as an introduction to protein structure. In that sense, it may serve as a standalone textbook for basic-to-intermediate level courses in structural biology. For such purposes, we have included exercises on theory and practice. Second, we expect the parts of the book discussing in detail energetic, dynamic, and evolutionary aspects of proteins to be of special interest to post-graduate scientists and to industry professionals. To make it easier for these two groups of readers to find their texts of interest, we have, in some cases, separated the basic material from the more advanced material, by putting the latter in boxes. Finally, the book refers to many everyday issues related to proteins and enzymes, such as medical disorders, drugs, toxins, chemical warfare, and animal behavior. We hope these topics will create interest among non-professional science enthusiasts as well.

The following is a general outline of the book:

Chapter 1, “Introduction”, includes three parts. The first provides an overview of proteins’ main functions and their importance to various fields, e.g., medicine and the drug industry. The second explains the central “structure–dynamics–function” paradigm in proteins, thus providing the general rationale for the book. The third part describes the non-covalent forces acting on macromolecules, an overview that is needed for understanding the notions presented later on in the book. Finally, the general layout of the book is presented.

Chapter 2, “Protein Structure”, describes in detail the different levels of protein structure. The physico-chemical properties of amino acids are described at length. The description of secondary, tertiary, and quaternary structure that follows emphasizes the structural principles achieved by the observed architecture. Other factors affecting both protein structure and function, i.e., non-natural amino acids, enzymatic cofactors, prosthetic groups, and post-translational modifications, are also described, with emphasis on SFR. All of these topics are exemplified using specific proteins. For instance, *protein kinase A (PKA)*, a central enzyme in cellular communication, is used to demonstrate some of the main advantages of quaternary structure. *Pyruvate dehydrogenase*, a large enzyme complex involved in carbohydrate metabolism, is used to demonstrate the role of cofactors and prosthetic groups in protein function.

Chapter 3, “Methods of Structure Determination and Prediction”, describes the main methods used today for structure determination and their applications. First, methods based on particle/wave diffraction or scattering are described. These include *X-ray crystallography*, *neutron scattering*, and *electron scattering*. Then, spectroscopic methods, including *nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR) spectroscopy*, *electron paramagnetic resonance (EPR) spectroscopy*, and *circular dichroism (CD)*, are presented. This is followed by a description of computational methods for predicting protein structure. It refers to the two main approaches in this field. The first, “physical” approach relies on a mathematical description of the physical forces acting on the protein’s atoms. In this respect we describe well-known methods, such as *molecular dynamics* and *simulated annealing*. The second, “comparative” approach, the most prominent of which is *homology modeling*, relies on sequence comparisons and statistical data. We dedicate a great deal of this discussion to analyzing the advantages and disadvantages of each method, and the cases to which it is best applied. Finally, the current tools for comparing the different methods and evaluating their efficiency are presented.

Chapter 4, “Energetics and Protein Stability”, discusses the thermodynamic aspects of protein structure. It begins with an overview of the basic thermodynamic variables, the ways they can be measured or calculated, and their interpretation in molecular systems. In discussing the latter, we refer to biological processes that can be characterized using thermodynamic variables. This includes metabolic processes, protein folding, and protein–ligand interactions. The second section of the chapter discusses the main physical forces in the system with respect to their influence on protein structure. In the third and fourth sections we examine two cases in which the theoretical principles discussed are applied. The first is the adaptation of unicellular organisms to extreme environments, and the second is the use of protein engineering to enhance the industrial uses of enzymes.

Chapter 5, “Protein Structural Dynamics”, widens the structure–function paradigm by incorporating structural dynamics. Two aspects of protein dynamics are discussed: protein folding and folded (native) state dynamics. For the first, we present

the current views on how proteins acquire their three-dimensional structures. This area has been extensively studied, and we present the main conclusions. In addition, we discuss some well-known pathologies involving protein misfolding, such as *cystic fibrosis*, *Parkinson's disease*, and *mad cow disease*. The part that follows discusses changes that occur in the protein's native structure over time and illustrates their functional importance on different levels. In this respect, we elaborate on allostery, as a cellular approach for regulating proteins' function by manipulating their dynamic properties. We discuss different models and mechanisms of allostery and use specific proteins to demonstrate them. For example, we mention studies on the medically important enzyme *dihydrofolate reductase (DHFR)*, in which long-distance allosteric effects were discovered. The oxygen-carrying protein hemoglobin is used to demonstrate in detail multi-level changes in protein dynamics, induced by allosteric regulators.

Chapter 6, "Non-Globular Proteins", focuses on two groups of proteins that seem to deviate from the "globular" behavior presented in the previous chapters. The first group includes proteins that play relatively simple roles inside and outside cells, forming large fibrous structures. We discuss some well-studied examples, such as *collagen*, the principal protein of connective tissues, and *keratin*, a protein that provides toughness to horns, nails, and claws. The second group of proteins includes those that are characterized by the absence of regular tertiary structure. These interesting proteins have many different functions that do not seem to require a permanent structure. As in Chapter 2, we discuss the principal properties of fibrous and unstructured proteins, with emphasis on SFR.

Chapter 7, "Membrane Proteins", focuses on a subtype of globular proteins that are located near or inside cellular membranes. These proteins constitute 20–30% of the human genome and play numerous roles in cellular physiology. Surrounded by a lipid environment, they are subjected to different forces than are water-soluble globular proteins, and therefore behave differently. The first part of the chapter overviews the structure, organization, and function of biological membranes. In this respect, it discusses membrane asymmetry and the variability of membrane composition (and hence, its properties) among different organisms. The second part analyzes membrane proteins, emphasizing common sequence- and structure-related themes, as well as folding energetics. The third part discusses the important issue of protein-membrane interactions, which has implications for both structure and function of membrane proteins. Finally, to illustrate SFR in membrane proteins, we focus on *GPCRs*, a group of receptors that serve as targets of most pharmacological drugs. We discuss in detail the β -adrenergic receptor, the structure of which has been determined recently in its active state. Membrane proteins are notoriously difficult to crystallize, and are therefore a desirable target for structure prediction. Throughout the chapter we mention key computational approaches developed for locating membrane proteins within genomes, and for predicting their topology and full three-dimensional structure.

Chapter 8, “Protein–Ligand Interactions”, demonstrates SFR in proteins by addressing their most important ability, i.e., binding to other molecules. After a short overview of the functional aspects of this ability, we discuss past and present theories on binding, and its thermodynamic implications. We then analyze the binding on a molecular level, by focusing on the properties of protein-binding sites. One such property is the electrostatic potential, which we demonstrate using the example of *acetylcholine esterase* (AChE). AChE is a major enzyme responsible for the correct functioning of the nervous system, and is, therefore, also a major target for various nerve agents and toxins. It is extremely fast, in part thanks to the mechanism of “electrostatic steering,” which it uses to draw its natural substrate into the catalytic site. The following part in the chapter demonstrates the principles discussed above by addressing the example of protein–protein interactions. Finally, we discuss the rational design of pharmaceutical drugs, which is one of the most practical applications of protein–ligand interactions.

In this book, we use numerous proteins as examples, demonstrating the various topics and principles discussed. Some proteins are mentioned in different contexts, to reflect the multiple ways in which proteins can be studied and analyzed. For example, *hemoglobin* is used to demonstrate quaternary structure, pathologies stemming from structure-altering mutations, and the role of dynamics in allosteric regulation. Another example is the cancer-related protein *ras*, used to demonstrate different types of post-translational modifications.

Questions for each chapter are located in the “download” section of this book’s Web page on the CRC Press Web site (<http://www.crcpress.com/product/isbn/9781439810712>). Qualifying instructors can contact the publisher to obtain answers to these questions as well as slides.

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on various physicochemical aspects of protein-protein interactions. Today, he teaches protein biochemistry and biophysics at the Tel-Aviv Yaffo Academic College, and has recently co-founded *Fitis Technologies Ltd.*, a company that designs bioassays for the pharmaceutical industry.



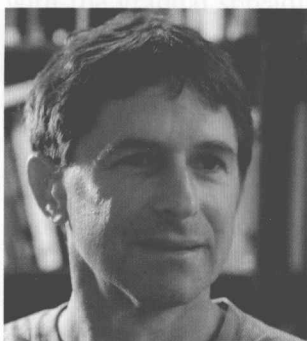
Professor Nir Ben-Tal obtained his bachelor's degree in biology, chemistry, and physics at the Hebrew University and his DSc in chemistry at Technion, Israel Institute of Technology. He carried out his post-doctoral training as a computational biophysicist at Columbia University and later joined the Department of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology at Tel-Aviv University, where he is currently a professor. His research includes various aspects in computational biology, focusing on structural bioinformatics. For example, he has successfully predicted the three-dimensional structure of proteins and protein-protein interactions, thereby providing molecular insight into their function. He also developed the Contact Web server for the detection of functional protein-protein interactions based on data on protein structures.

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membrane proteins, thereby providing molecular insight into their mechanisms. His lab also develops the ConSurf Web-server for the detection of functional regions by mapping evolutionary data on protein structures.

Table of Contents

List of Boxes, xvii

Preface, xix

Acknowledgments, xxv

Authors, xxvii

CHAPTER 1 ■ Introduction	1
1.1 THE IMPORTANCE OF PROTEINS IN LIVING ORGANISMS	1
1.1.1 Life, Proteins, and Mysterious Forces	1
1.1.2 The Molecular Organization of Living Organisms	2
1.1.3 Proteins Have Numerous Biological Roles	7
1.1.3.1 Catalysis of Metabolic Processes	7
1.1.3.2 Energy Transfer	20
1.1.3.3 Gene Expression	23
1.1.3.4 Transport of Solutes across Biological Membranes	24
1.1.3.5 Cellular Communication	24
1.1.3.6 Molecular Recognition	27
1.1.3.7 Defense	28
1.1.3.8 Forming Intracellular and Extracellular Structures	30
1.1.3.9 Cell/Tissue-Specific Functions	32
1.1.4 Physiological and Evolutionary Importance of Proteins	32
1.1.5 Medical, Industrial, and Social Importance of Proteins	33
1.1.5.1 Proteins as Drug Targets	33
1.1.5.2 Proteins as Toxin Targets	34
1.1.5.3 Industrial Applications of Proteins	35
1.2 STRUCTURAL COMPLEXITY AND ITS EFFECT ON PROTEIN FUNCTION	36

1.3	NON-COVALENT INTERACTIONS BETWEEN ATOMS IN BIOMOLECULES	40
1.3.1	Electrostatic Interactions	40
1.3.1.1	Introduction	40
1.3.1.2	Basic Principles	41
1.3.1.3	Hydrogen Bonds	48
1.3.1.4	Other Types of Electrostatic Interactions	53
1.3.2	van der Waals Interactions	54
1.3.3	Nonpolar Interactions and the Hydrophobic Effect	56
1.3.4	Conclusions	58
1.4	SUMMARY	58
1.5	ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK	59
	REFERENCES	59
CHAPTER 2	Protein Structure	67
2.1	INTRODUCTION	67
2.1.1	Hierarchy in Protein Structure	67
2.1.2	Co-Enzymes and Prosthetic Groups	68
2.2	PRIMARY STRUCTURE	73
2.2.1	Amino Acids and Their Properties	73
2.2.1.1	Amino Acid Structure	73
2.2.1.2	Configuration of Amino Acids	76
2.2.1.3	Side-Chain Properties	79
2.2.1.4	Amino Acid Derivates in Proteins	99
2.2.2	The Peptide Bond	100
2.3	SECONDARY STRUCTURE	103
2.3.1	α -Helix	106
2.3.1.1	Geometry	106
2.3.1.2	Intramolecular Interactions	111
2.3.1.3	Amphipathic α -Helices	113
2.3.2	Non- α Helices	114
2.3.2.1	3_{10} Helix	115
2.3.2.2	π Helix	116
2.3.2.3	Type II Poly-Proline Helix (PPII)	116
2.3.3	β Conformation	117
2.3.4	Why Helices and Sheets?	119

2.3.5	Reverse Turns	121
2.3.5.1	β -Turn	122
2.3.5.2	Loops	123
2.3.6	Secondary Structure Preference of Amino Acids	123
2.3.6.1	α Conformation	124
2.3.6.2	β Conformation	126
2.4	TERTIARY STRUCTURE	127
2.4.1	Basic Properties of the Tertiary Structure	129
2.4.1.1	Structural Properties Required for Complex Function	129
2.4.1.2	Core versus Surface	130
2.4.1.3	Stabilizing Forces	131
2.4.2	Architecture of Proteins	131
2.4.2.1	Simple Folding Motifs	132
2.4.2.2	Complex Folds	139
2.4.2.3	Domains	147
2.4.2.4	Protein Classification	152
2.4.3	Evolutionary Conservation of Structure and Function in Proteins	158
2.4.3.1	Interests of the Individual vs. Those of the Species	158
2.4.3.2	Structure Conservation: Evolutionary Mechanisms	160
2.4.3.3	Evolution of Function	162
2.4.4	Water Molecules inside Proteins	164
2.5	QUATERNARY STRUCTURE	165
2.5.1	Introduction	165
2.5.2	Characteristics	166
2.5.2.1	Dimensions and Complexity	166
2.5.2.2	Symmetry	167
2.5.2.3	Subunit Interactions	168
2.5.3	Advantages of Quaternary Structure	169
2.5.3.1	Active Site Diversity	169
2.5.3.2	Time and Space Coupling of Metabolically Related Processes	169
2.5.3.3	Regulation of Enzyme Activity	170
2.5.3.4	Stability	170
2.5.3.5	Formation of Large Structures	171
2.5.3.6	Enhancing Protein Translation Efficiency	171

2.6	POST-TRANSLATIONAL MODIFICATIONS	171
2.6.1	Introduction	171
2.6.2	Phosphorylation	172
2.6.3	Glycosylation	175
2.6.4	Acylation	178
2.6.4.1	ϵ -N-Acetylation	178
2.6.4.2	N'-Myristoylation and S-Palmitoylation	178
2.6.4.3	Ubiquitinylation	179
2.6.5	Alkylation	180
2.6.5.1	Methylation	180
2.6.5.2	S-Prenylation	181
2.6.5.3	Adenylation	181
2.6.6	Hydroxylation and Oxidation	181
2.6.7	Proteolysis	182
2.6.8	Amidation	182
2.6.9	Addition of Metal Ions	182
2.6.9.1	Stabilization of Protein Structure	183
2.6.9.2	Ligand Binding	183
2.6.9.3	Electron Transport	184
2.6.9.4	Substrate/Co-enzyme Stabilization and/or Activation	184
2.6.10	Mixed Modifications	185
2.6.11	Pathological Aspects of Post-Translational Modifications	187
2.6.11.1	Cancer	187
2.6.11.2	Age-Related Illnesses	189
2.6.12	Identifying Post-Translational Modifications	189
2.7	SUMMARY	190
	REFERENCES	191
CHAPTER 3	Methods of Structure Determination and Prediction	209
3.1	INTRODUCTION	209
3.2	DIFFRACTION/SCATTERING METHODS	210
3.2.1	X-ray Diffraction	210
3.2.1.1	Principles	210
3.2.1.2	Working Steps	212
3.2.1.3	Information Obtained from Crystallography	214
3.2.1.4	Problems of the Method	215