

MAPPING THE CYTOCHROME *C* FOLDING LANDSCAPE

Thesis by

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

California Institute of Technology

Pasadena, California

2003

(Defended March 20, 2003)

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## Acknowledgements

“You get a desk and everyone pretty much forgets about you for five years,” I heard from a Caltech biochemistry alumnus I met before coming to Caltech. What was it like for me to be a graduate student at Caltech? I had my share of independence and trust. A ‘Harry’s student’ in addition meant freedom, encouragement for self-motivation and initiative, parties, meetings with speakers and lots of fun.

There have been many people at Caltech that helped me very much and had an influence on my character over the years. Two of my advisors, Harry B. Gray and Jay R. Winkler, have shaped my personality greatly in the past five years. Both of them are very special people and I am proud that I had an opportunity to work under their direction. Thank you, Harry, for your kindness, generosity, optimism and words of encouragement when I needed them. And Jay: there is hardly anyone whose opinions, scientific drive, curiosity and ability to succeed I respect more. I thank my third advisor, Jack Richards, for being a strong supporter of my project and for many of his valuable inputs regarding it. I also thank him for making available the space needed to do my molecular biology work.

My first half a year in the Gray group I worked with Jason Telford. I had a great start in protein science and laser spectroscopy while working with him. Jason, I wish you would have stayed around longer. It was so much fun to have you around.

Kevin Hoke, Mike Machczynski, Ivan Dmochowski, F. Akif Tezcan and Adrian Ponce were the ‘seniors’ of the group when I came. It made such a difference to have all of you guys around. Kevin Hoke had managed the third floor of Noyes until he went on for a postdoc at Oxford in the Summer of 2001. Kevin always knew where various things could be found. Mike Machczynski was willing to teach me bits and pieces of molecular biology he learned on his own. Ivan patiently helped me with nanosecond experiments early on while I bombarded him with lots of questions. Ivan was a great role model and offered much advice on how to succeed in the Gray group.

Will Wehbi was my officemate for many years and a great person to talk to. Thanks to Will for always willing to lend a hand or suggest an idea. Michele McGuirl came to the group as a postdoc and managed to help a great deal in molecular biology to all of us. She was one of the greatest people I’ve met in the Gray group. Alex Meier and Cindy Quezada I must thank for simply being around and being available for long conversations about life and things.

It also would not be the same without my two to three hour lunches with Vadym Kapinus. Vadym, you are a great and very optimistic person. I feel very fortunate our paths have crossed.

Not a single accomplishment would be possible without my family. My interest in science I own to my father. Somehow it made sense to him to explain to a four-year-old kid why ships float, planes fly and how the solar system is organized. Perhaps that was his way to get out of house chores. My mom has always been an unmatched source of enthusiasm, advice and unsolicited opinions. She worked so hard to fulfill my father’s wish to seek that both my brother and I have a higher education. I must also thank my 13-year-old airdale Daisy who have taught me caring and patience early on.

Of course my greatest inspirations were and are my husband, Russell Shane, and my baby boy David. Russ brought dinners over to 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of Noyes and Beckman Institute subbasement when I worked late. And David took many sweet naps inside and outside my tummy while I was writing.

## Abstract

The solution to the riddle of how a protein folds is encoded in the conformational energy landscape for the constituent polypeptide. Employing fluorescence energy transfer kinetics, we have mapped the *S. cerevisiae* iso-1 cytochrome *c* landscape by monitoring the distance between a C-terminal fluorophore and the heme during folding. Within 1 ms after denaturant dilution to native conditions, unfolded protein molecules have evolved into two distinct and rapidly equilibrating populations: a collection of collapsed structures with an average fluorophore-heme distance ( $\bar{r}$ ) of 27 Å and a roughly equal population of extended polypeptides with  $\bar{r} > 50$  Å. Molecules with the native fold appear on a timescale regulated by heme ligation events (~300 ms, pH 7). The experimentally derived landscape for folding has a narrow central funnel with a flat upper rim on which collapsed and extended polypeptides interchange rapidly in a search for the native structure.

Nonnative states of proteins are involved in a variety of cellular processes, including translocation of proteins across membranes and formation of amyloid fibrils. Probes that report on the structural heterogeneity of a polypeptide ensemble could resolve ambiguities in the classification of these states. We have shown that added anions shift the equilibrium between the compact and extended polypeptide structures that are present during refolding of *Saccaromyces cerevisiae* iso-1 cytochrome *c*. Specifically, at high salt concentrations ( $\geq 700$  mM), all the polypeptides are compact with a mean C-terminal fluorophore-heme separation quite close to that in the native protein (25 Å). Addition of chemical detaturants, on the other hand, tends to shift the equilibrium towards unfolded structures.

Folding of modified Fe(II) cyt *c* was probed by fluorescence in presence of imidazole with NADH as photochemical sensitizer. At very high imidazole concentrations (400 mM),

protein was still found to fold but the rate that coincides with Met80 ligation was slowed down significantly.

Reductive flash-quench/scavenge experiments, in which ascorbic acid was used to scavenge MeODMA<sup>•+</sup>, were shown to keep ferrocyst *c* reduced for up to 500  $\mu$ s. Electron injection into unfolded modified yeast Fe(III)cyt *c* was fast in comparison to injection using NADH as photochemical sensitizer. The overall electron transfer process was reversible. This photoreduction system could be used to trigger folding of Fe(II) cyt *c* to monitor the changes in dansyl fluorescence intensity on  $\mu$ s time scales.

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*To*  
*my son David Gregory Shane*  
*and*  
*my entire family*