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FB820

Lecture 9

Interpretation of cryo-EM maps

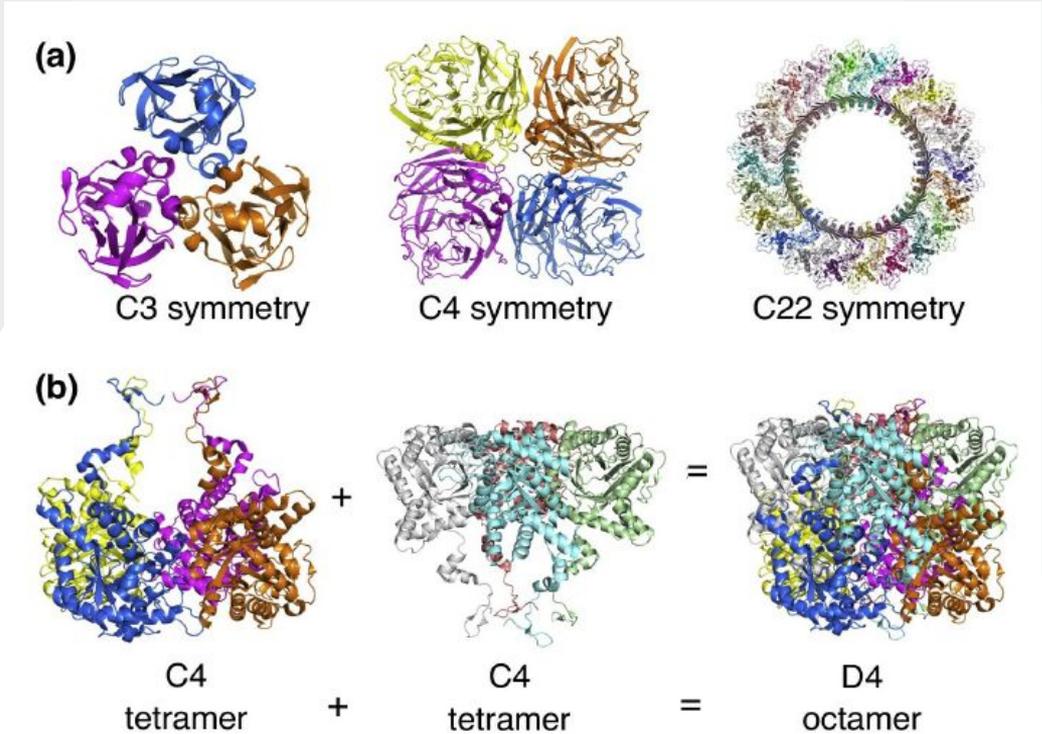
*Jiri Novacek*

# Content

- symmetries
- map validation
- map interpretation
- model building
- map improvement

# Symmetries

- regular assemblies of protein oligomers are common in nature
- oligomeric protein structures obey certain rules  
→ no mirror symmetry
- understanding symmetry rules may prevent incorrect interpretation of the data
- presence of symmetry generally facilitates determination of the density map

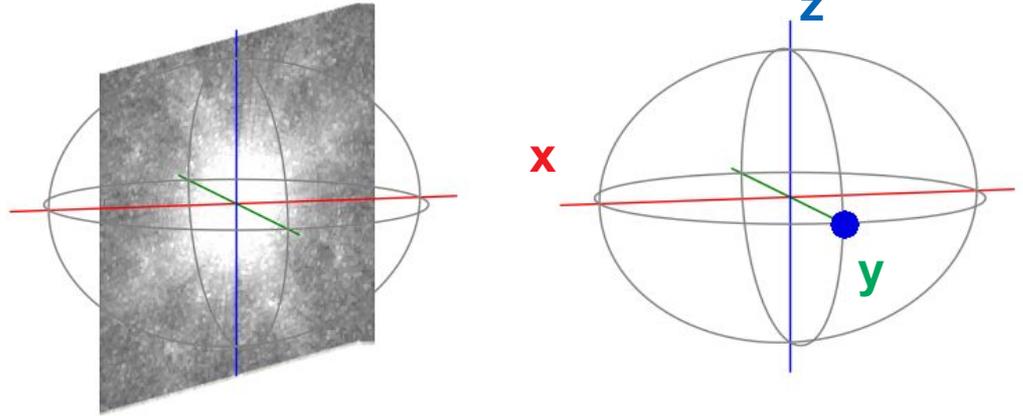


(Xu et al., Curr Opin Struct Biol 2019)

# Symmetries

## Projection Theorem, Euler angles

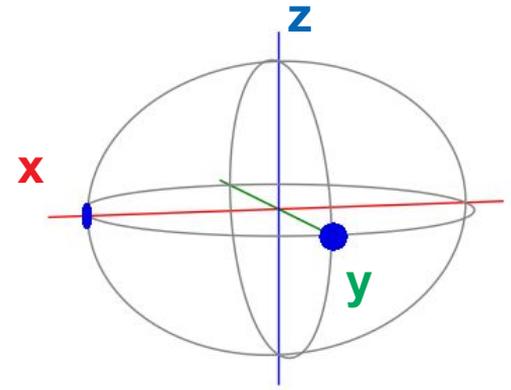
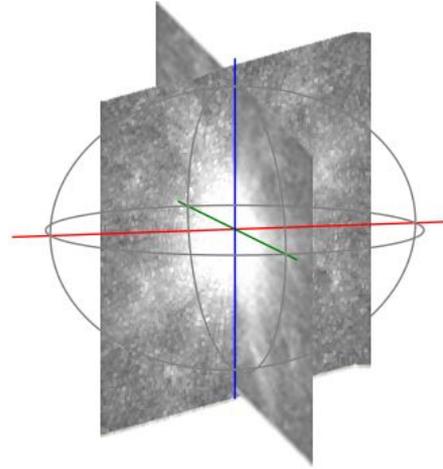
- A central section through the 3D Fourier transform is the Fourier transform to the projection in that direction



# Symmetries

## Projection Theorem, Euler angles

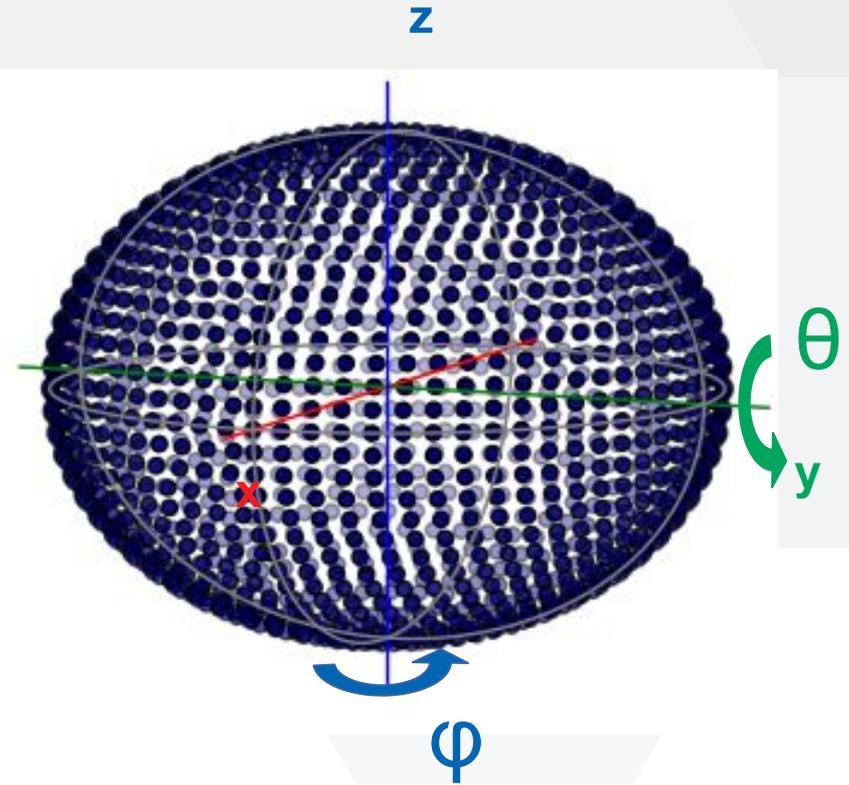
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- Images for all possible projection directions are required to obtain structure with homogeneous resolution in all directions



# Symmetries

## Projection Theorem, Euler angles

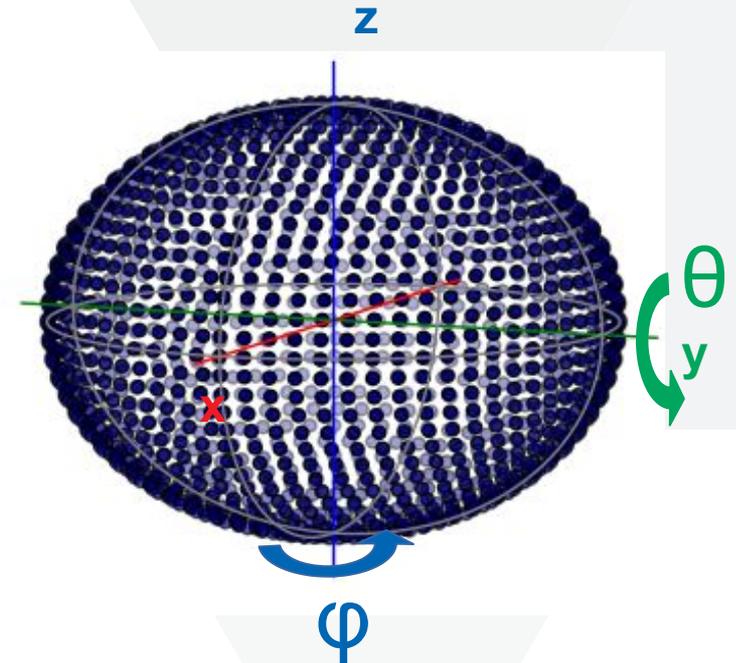
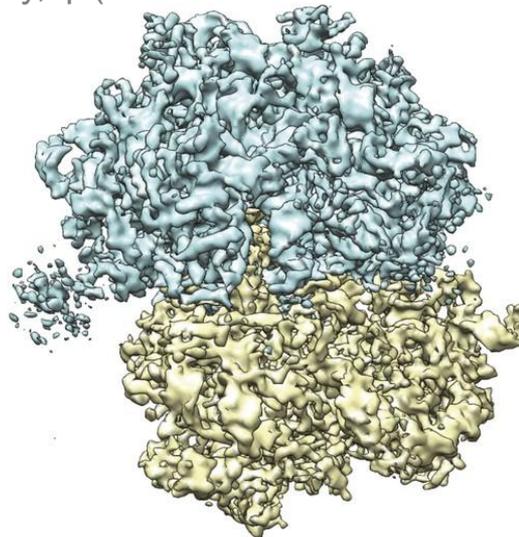
- A central section through the 3D Fourier transform is the Fourier transform to the projection in that direction
- Images for all possible projection directions are required to obtain structure with homogeneous resolution in all directions
- Euler angles  $\varphi$  and  $\theta$  cover ranges of  $(0^\circ - 360^\circ)$  and  $(-90^\circ - +90^\circ)$



# Symmetries

## Rotational (cyclic) symmetries

- one symmetry axis (usually molecules oriented with the symmetry axis alongside z)
- Asymmetric unit – the smallest portion of the angular space to which symmetry operation can be applied in order to completely fill the angular space
- C1 – the most trivial case, no symmetry,  $\varphi$  ( $0^\circ - 360^\circ$ ),  $\theta$  ( $-90^\circ - +90^\circ$ )



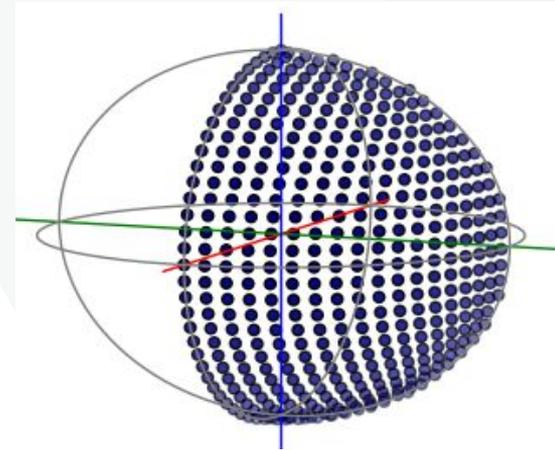
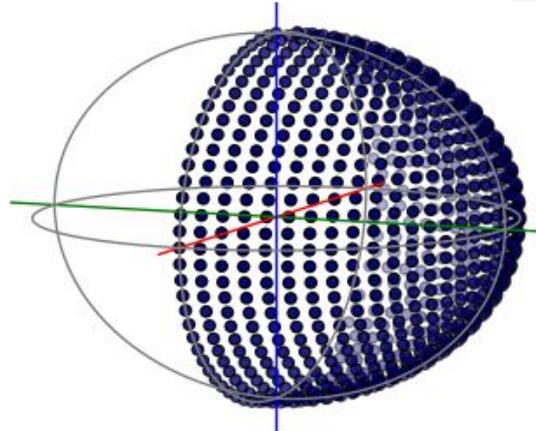
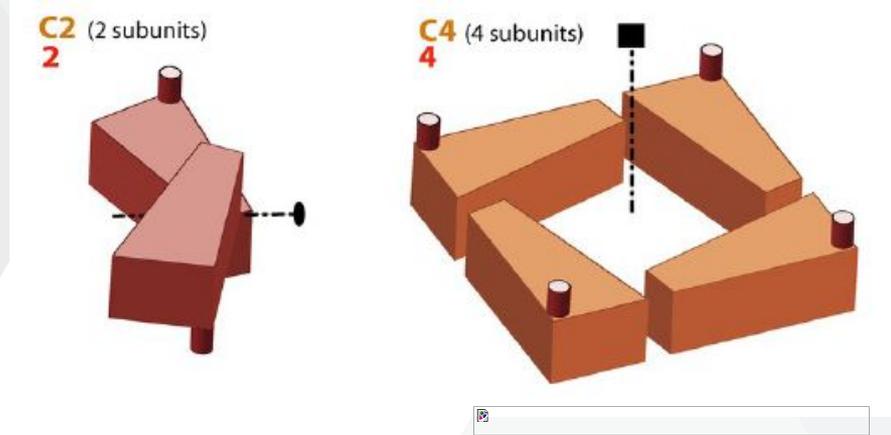
# Symmetries

## Rotational (cyclic) symmetries

- one symmetry axis (usually molecules oriented with the symmetry axis alongside z)

- Asymmetric unit – the smallest portion of the angular space to which symmetry operation can be applied in order to completely fill the angular space

- C2 –  $\varphi$  ( $0^\circ - 180^\circ$ ),  $\theta$  ( $-90^\circ - +90^\circ$ )
- C3 –  $\varphi$  ( $0^\circ - 120^\circ$ ),  $\theta$  ( $-90^\circ - +90^\circ$ )
- C4 –  $\varphi$  ( $0^\circ - 90^\circ$ ),  $\theta$  ( $-90^\circ - +90^\circ$ )
- C6 –  $\varphi$  ( $0^\circ - 60^\circ$ ),  $\theta$  ( $-90^\circ - +90^\circ$ )



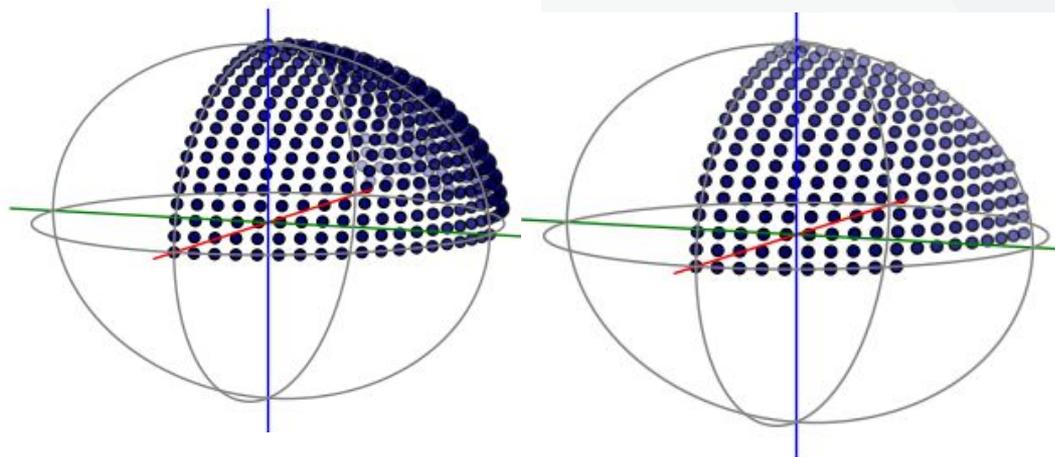
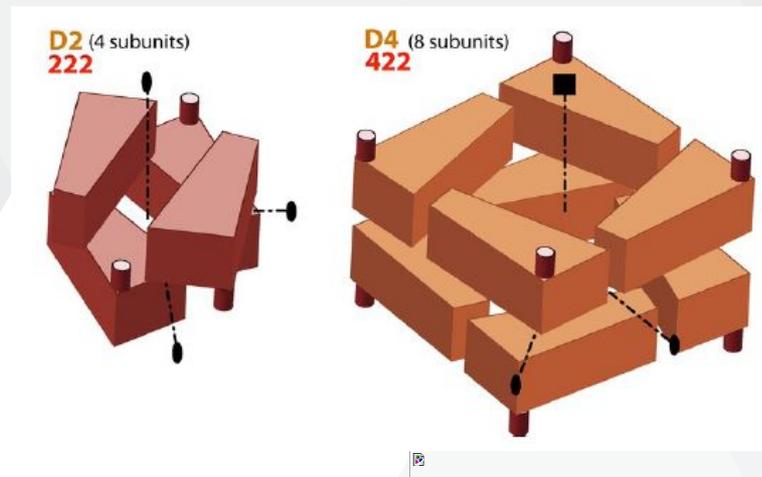
# Symmetries

## Dihedral symmetries

- one n-fold rotational axis and two-fold axis perpendicular to it

- Asymmetric unit

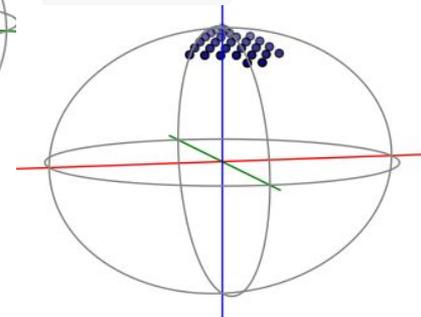
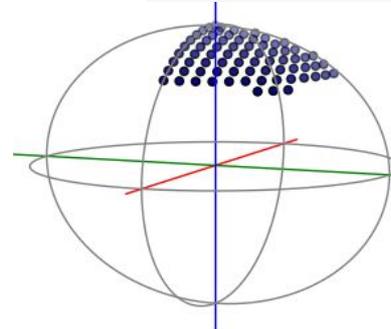
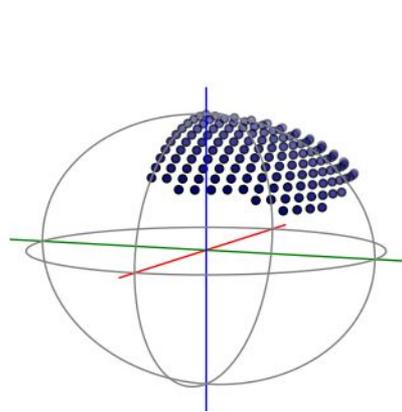
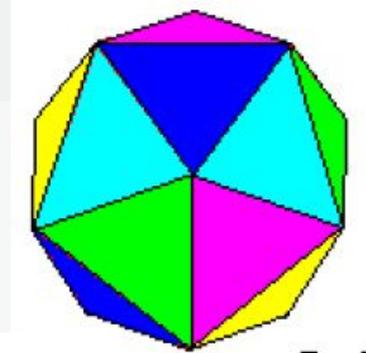
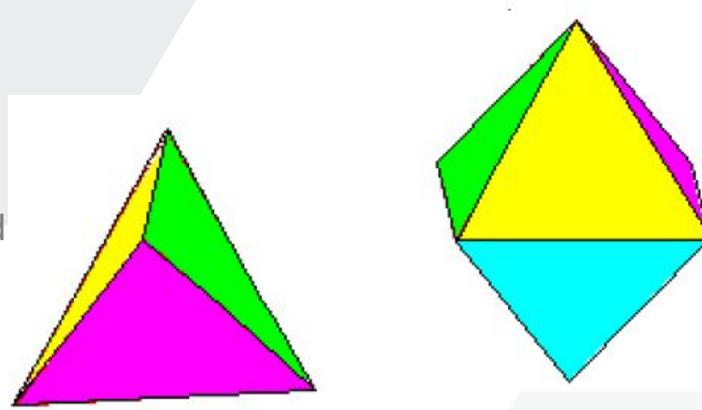
- D2 –  $\varphi$  ( $0^\circ - 180^\circ$ ),  $\theta$  ( $0^\circ - +90^\circ$ )
- D5 –  $\varphi$  ( $0^\circ - 72^\circ$ ),  $\theta$  ( $0^\circ - +90^\circ$ )
- D7 –  $\varphi$  ( $0^\circ - \sim 51^\circ$ ),  $\theta$  ( $0^\circ - +90^\circ$ )



# Symmetries

## Platonic symmetries

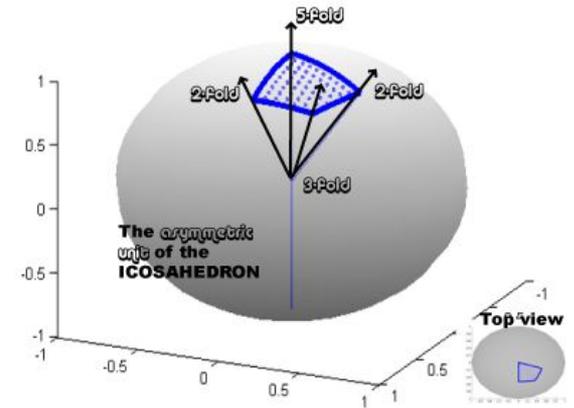
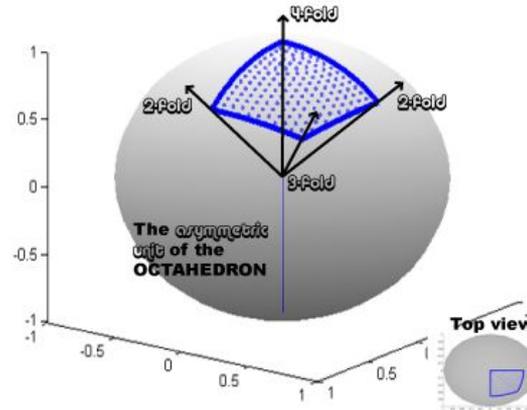
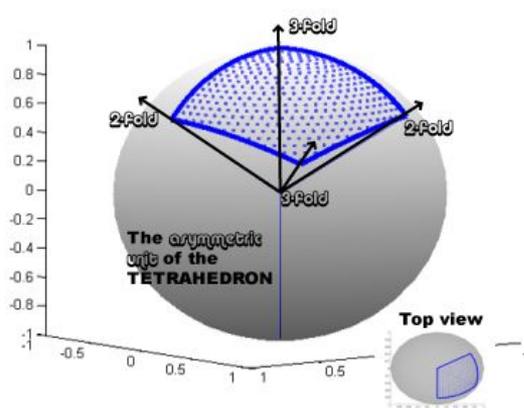
- faces, edges, and corners are related by symmetry operations
- tetrahedral – 4 3-fold axes and 3 2-fold axes
- octahedral – 3 4-fold axes of symmetry, 4 3-fold axes of symmetry, and 6 2-fold axes
- icosahedral – 6 5-fold, 10 3-fold and 15 2-fold axes



# Symmetries

## Platonic symmetries

- faces, edges, and corners are related by symmetry operations
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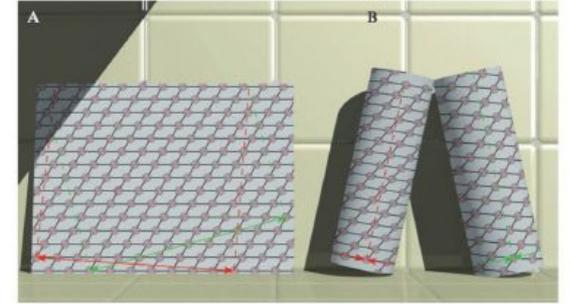
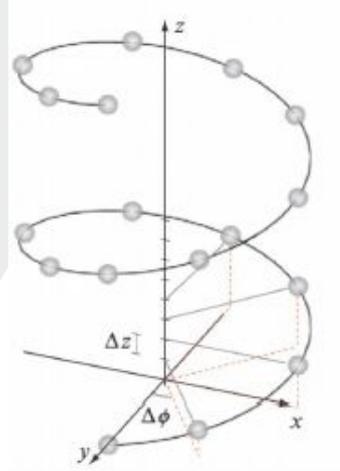


EMAN2

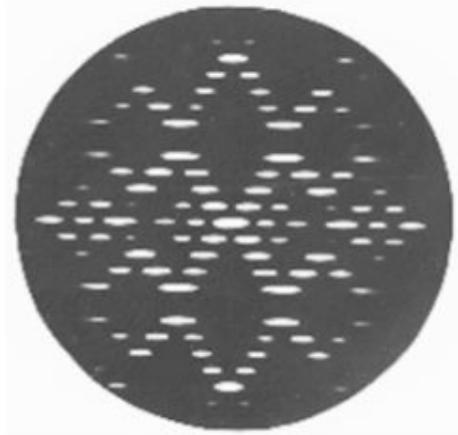
# Symmetries

## Helical symmetry

- A single view contains all the necessary info for 3D reconstruction
- 2D surface lattice rolled into 3D
- 3D reconstruction approaches:
  - Fourier-Bessel analysis
  - Iterative Real-Space Refinement (IHRSR)



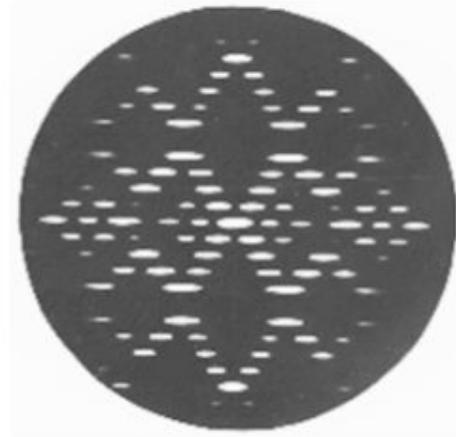
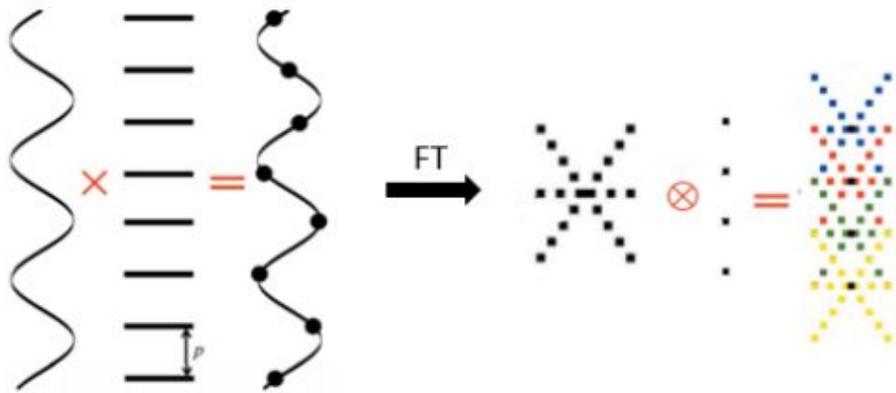
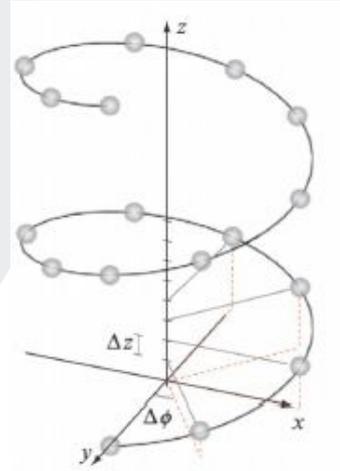
(Diaz et al. Methods in Enzymology 2010)



# Symmetries

## Helical symmetry

- A single view contains all the necessary info for 3D reconstruction
- 2D surface lattice rolled into 3D
- 3D reconstruction approaches:
  - **Fourier-Bessel analysis**
  - Iterative Real-Space Refinement (IHRSR)



- small inaccuracies in indexing lead to incorrect structure
- requires strict helical symmetry
- requires flat straight helices
- laborious

# Symmetries

## Helical symmetry

- A single view contains all the necessary info for 3D reconstruction

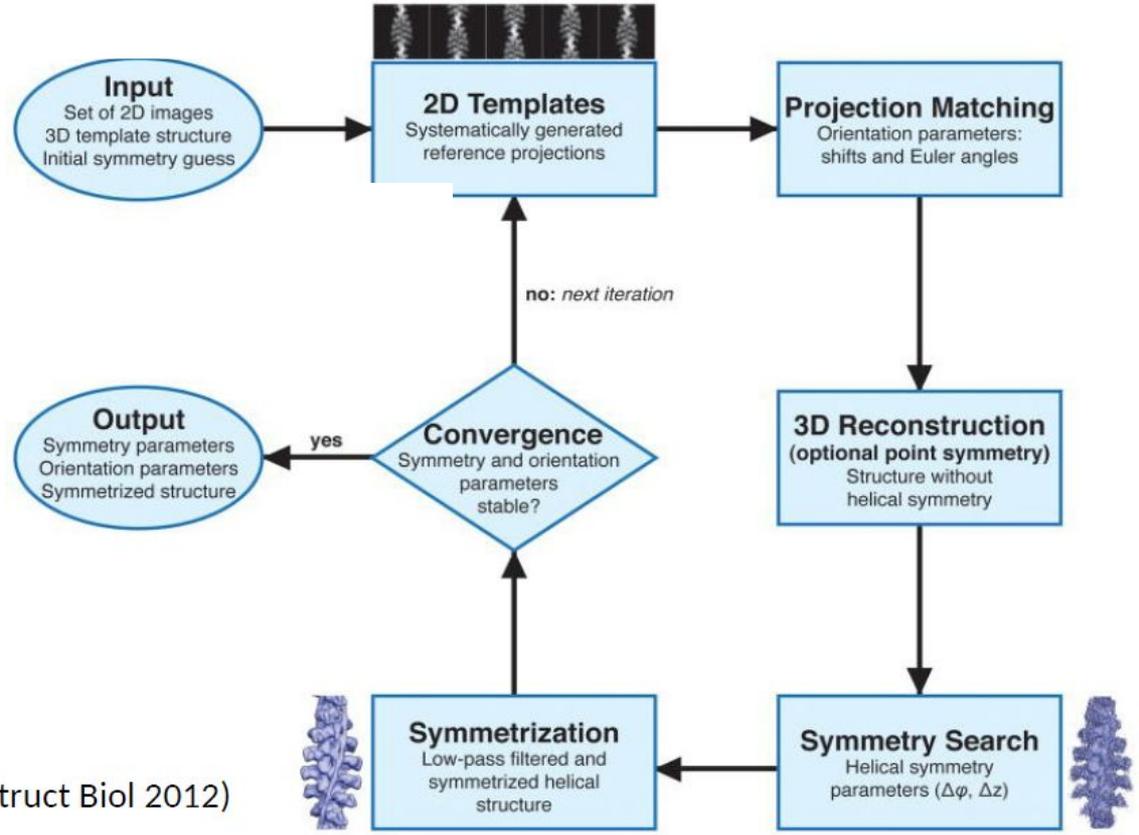
- 2D surface lattice rolled into 3D
- 3D reconstruction approaches:

- Fourier-Bessel analysis
- **Iterative Real-Space Refinement (IHRSR)**

- requires fairly good estimate of the cylinder diameter, rise, and twist

- can cope with heterogeneous data

- manages to reconstruct weakly diffracting filaments (where layer lines are not visible)



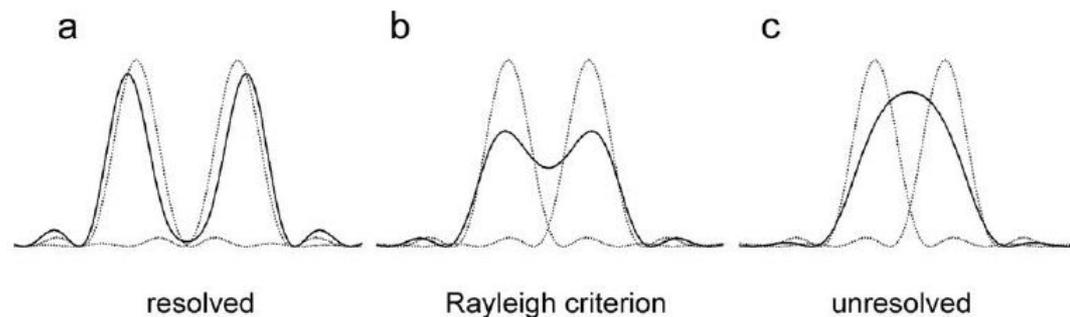
(Behrmann et al., J Struct Biol 2012)

# Symmetries

- Smaller asymmetric unit
- Decreased computational demands
- Improved signal to noise due to better averaging
- Lower number of particles required

# Map validation

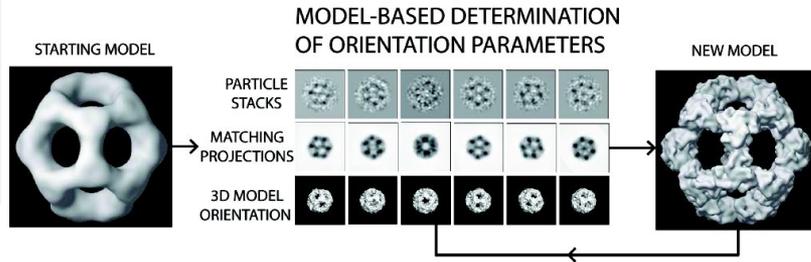
## Resolution



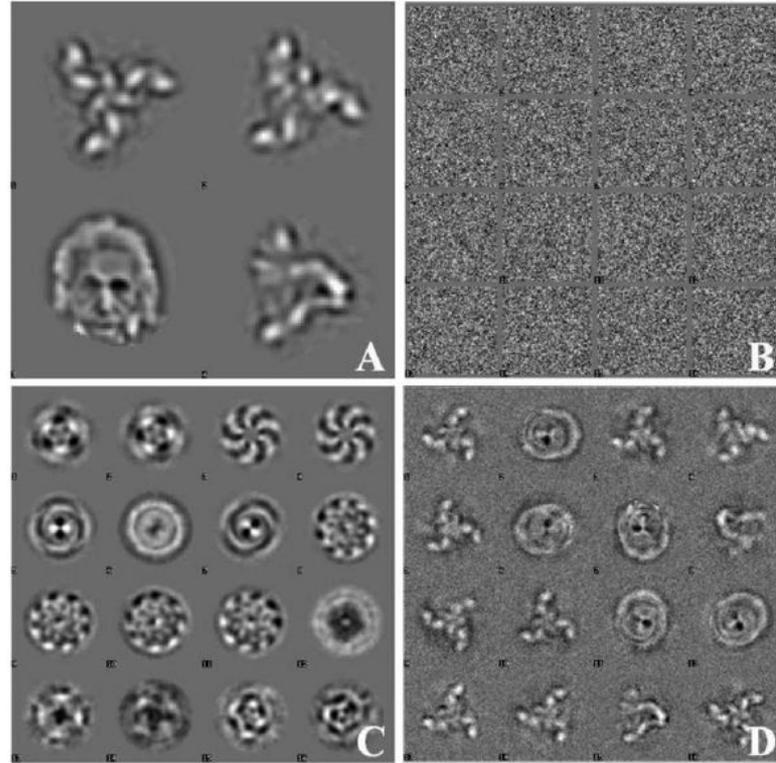
Resolution definition by separation of features. (a) When two points are far apart, there is a deep trough of density between them. (b) Two points are regarded as just resolved when the peak of one point spread function overlaps the first minimum of the other (Rayleigh criterion), see ref 60. (c) The point spread functions of two dots close together overlap to form one maximum, so that the points are not resolved.

# Map validation

- cryo-EM data – low signal to noise (VERY)
- model bias – persistence of an incorrect map or map features during refinement



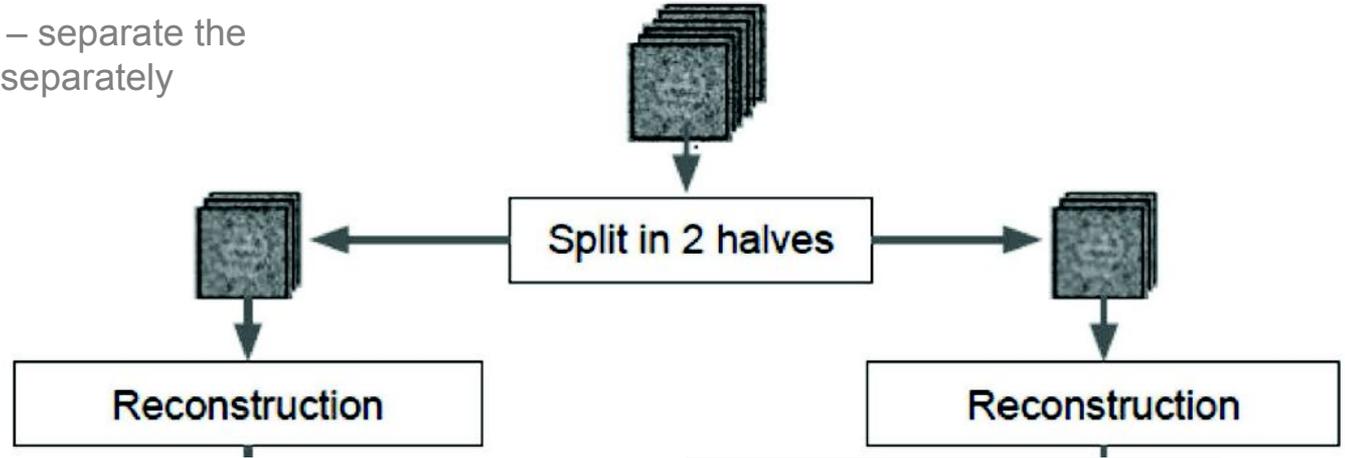
**(A) Four reference images (each  $64 \times 64$  pixels) used for picking from 1,024 random noise images (of  $1,024 \times 1,024$  pixels).**



van Heel M PNAS 2013;110:E4175-E4177

## Map validation

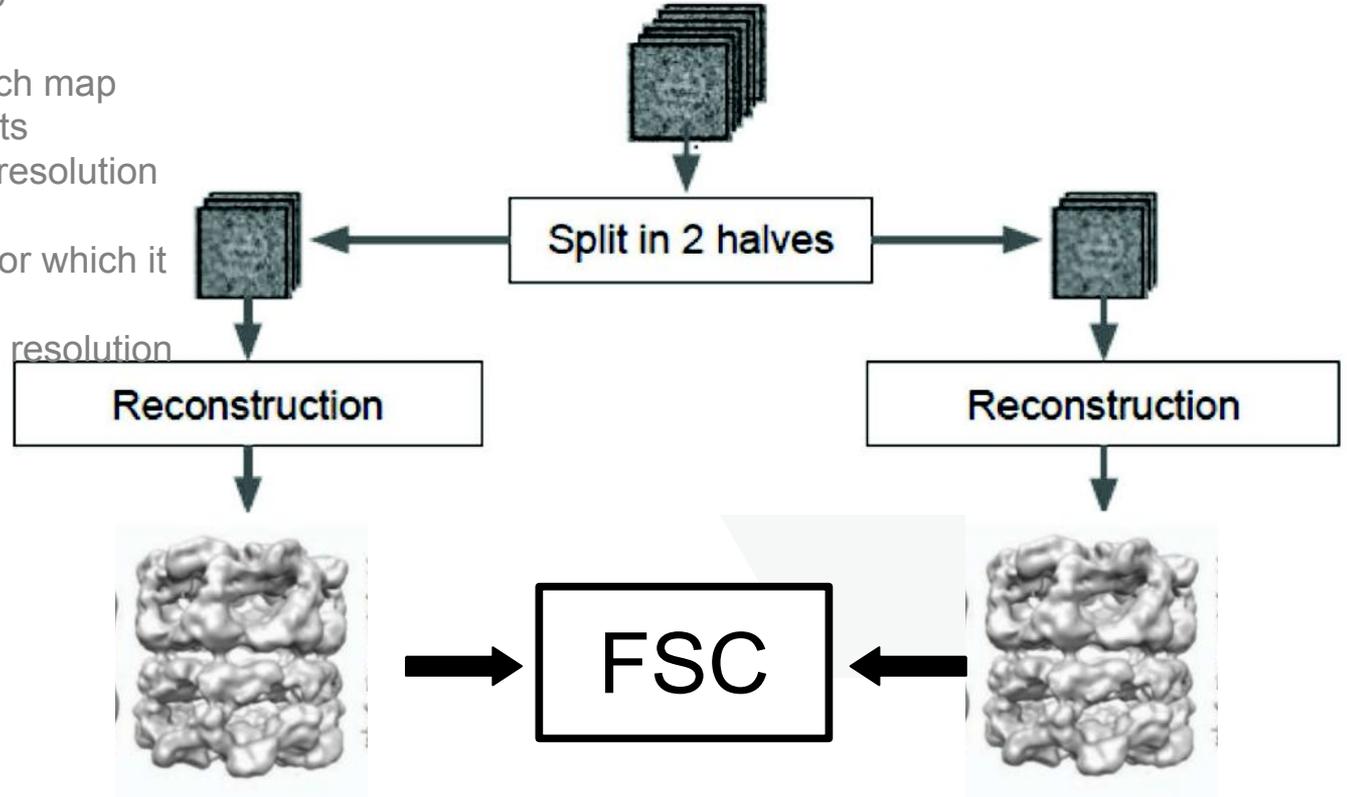
- in order to minimize the model bias – separate the data into two halves, refine each half separately using the standard SPA protocol



# Map validation

## Fourier shell correlation

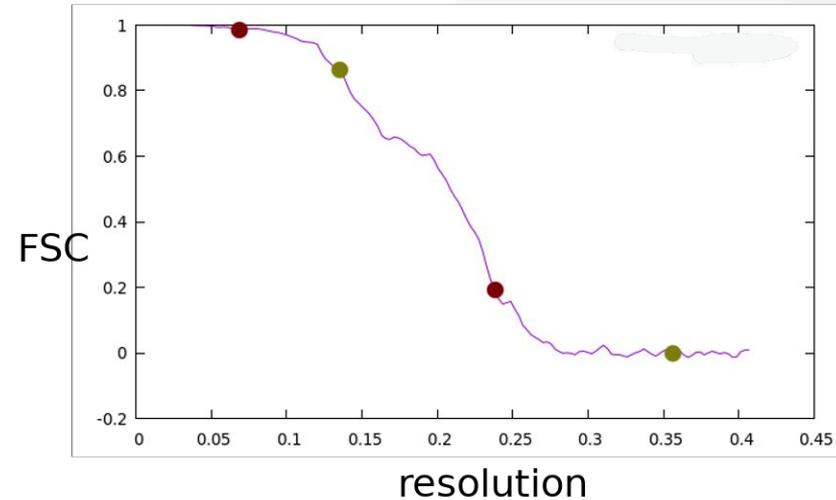
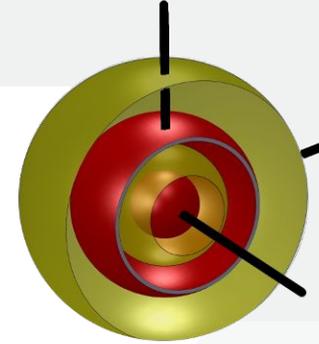
- nowadays used as a metrics for map resolution estimation
- calculate 3D Fourier transform of each map
- calculate cross-correlation coefficients between the two 3D FTs for individual resolution shells
- plot the CCC against the resolution for which it was calculated
- determined CCC threshold for which resolution is reported



# Map validation

## Fourier shell correlation

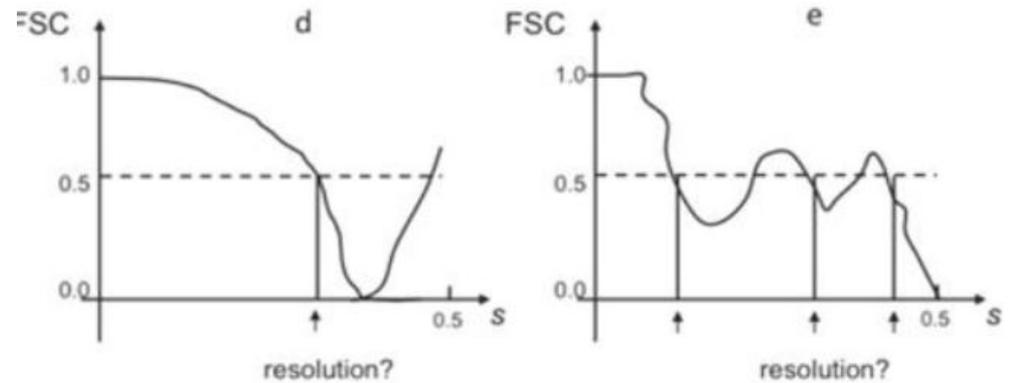
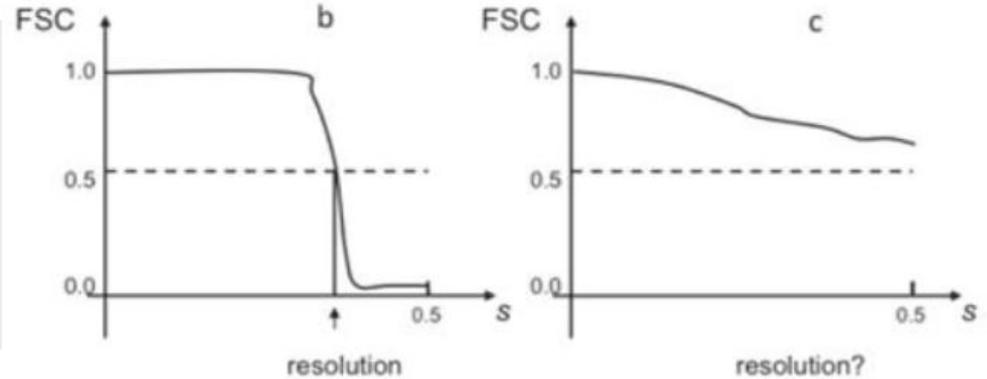
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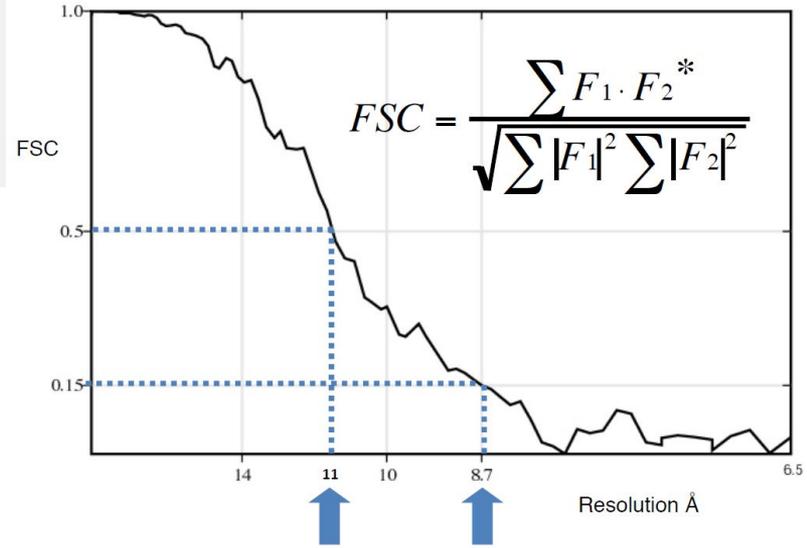
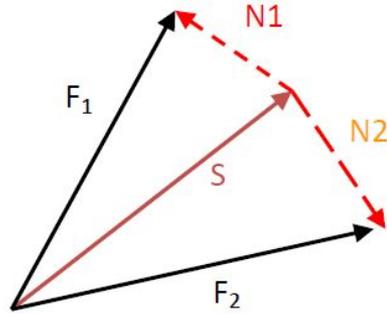
Penczek (2010), Meth. Enzym.

# Map validation

## Fourier shell correlation

- which FSC value to report?

$$\frac{\sum (S + N1) \cdot (S + N2)^*}{\sqrt{\sum |S + N1|^2 \sum |S + N2|^2}}$$



$$FSC = \frac{\sum |sf|^2}{\sum |S^2 + N^2|}$$

S~N FSC=0.5

- Figure of merit ( $C_{ref}=0.5$ )

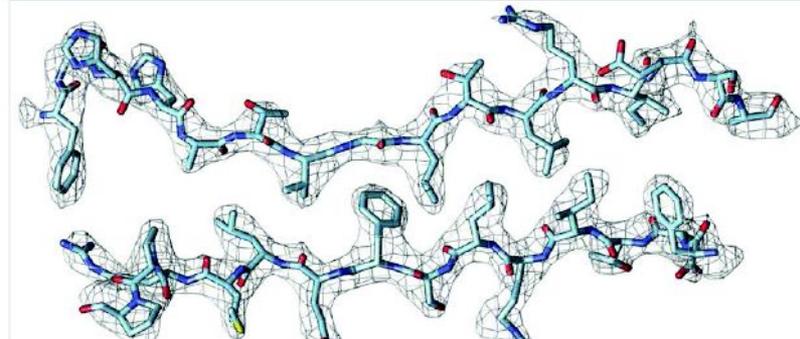
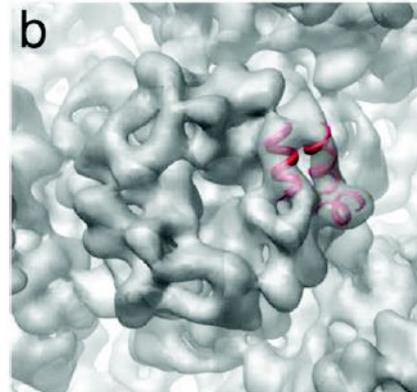
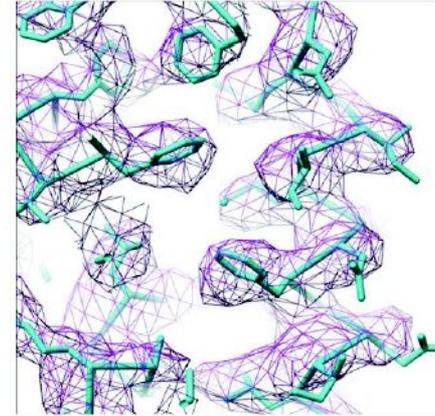
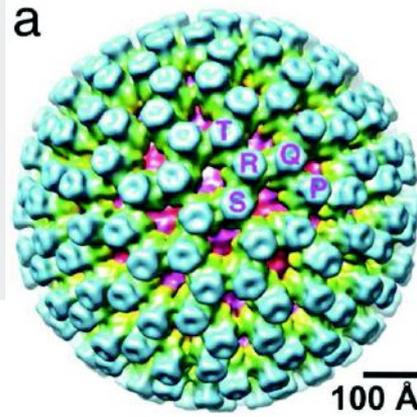
$$C_{ref} = \frac{\sum F_1 \cdot F_{ref}}{\sqrt{\sum |F_1|^2 \sum |F_{ref}|^2}} = \frac{\sum |F_1| |F_{ref}| \cos(\Delta\varphi)}{\sqrt{\sum |F_1|^2 \sum |F_{ref}|^2}}$$

Looks like figure-of-merit (Blow and Crick, 1959)

FSC	FSC <sub>FULL</sub>	C <sub>REF</sub>	PHASE ERROR	S/N <sub>1/2</sub>
0.50	0.67	0.82	35°	1.00
0.33	0.50	0.71	45°	0.71
0.14	0.25	0.50	60°	0.41

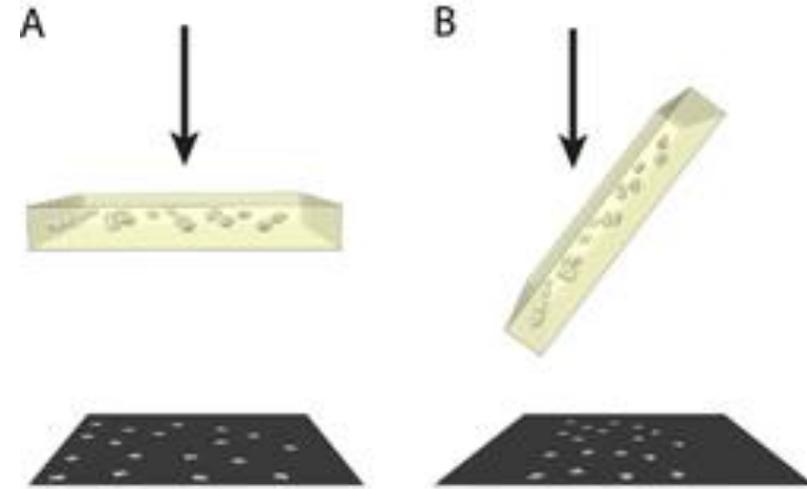
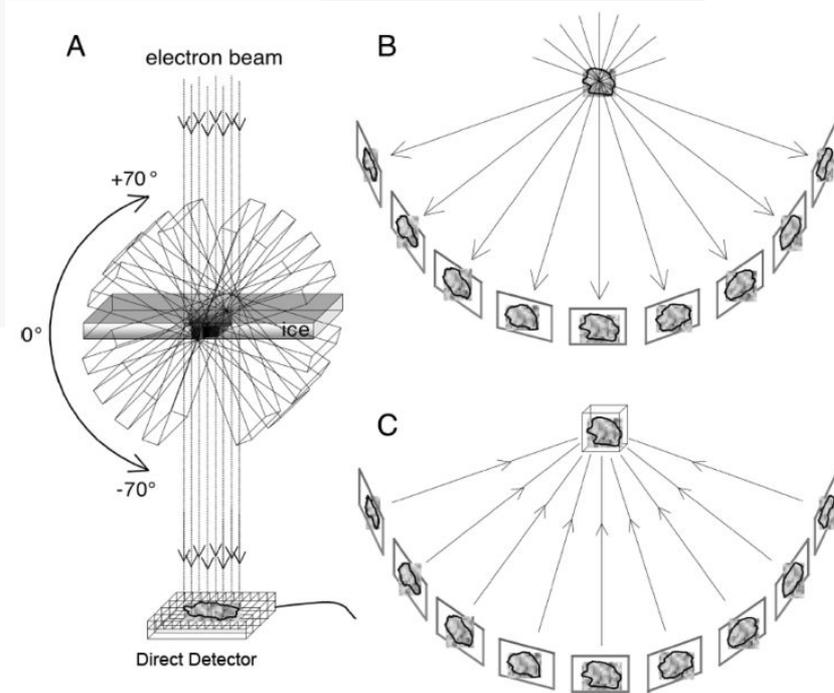
# Map validation

- observed features of the map should be consistent with the resolution assessment
- visibility of expected structural features
  - helices visible at 8Å
  - strands separated at 4.8Å
  - side-chains visible beyond 4Å



# Map validation

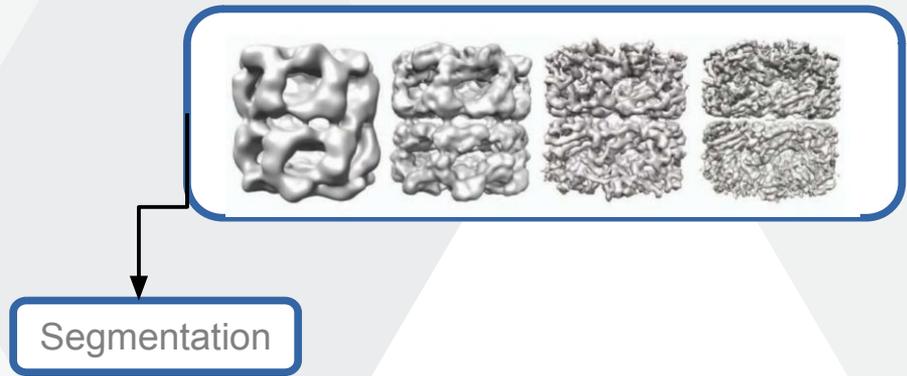
- experimental
  - cryo-ET
  - tilt pairs (common-lines)



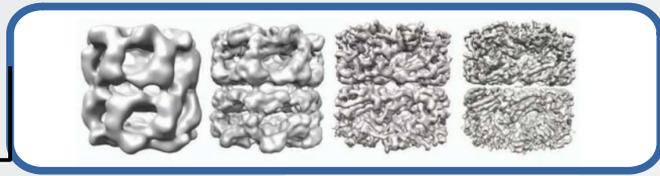
## Map validation

- Steps:
  - map is correct at low resolution
  - spurious noise features are not present (noise overfitting, over-refinement)
  - FSC curve has a proper shape
  - resolution estimate corresponds to the observed structural features
  - acquisition of complementary data to confirm the model (e.g. in low resolution)

# Map interpretation



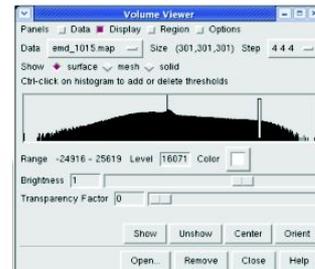
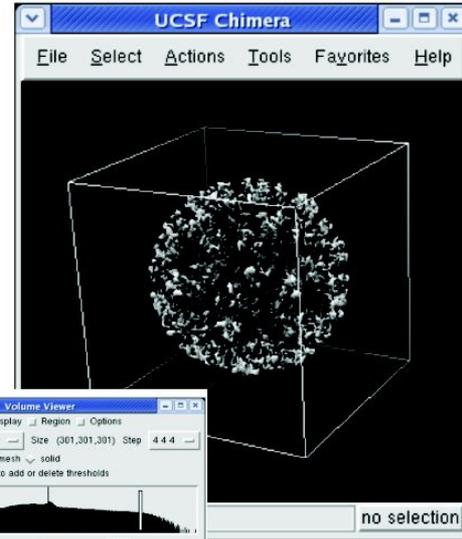
# Map interpretation



Segmentation

## Visualization tools

- Chimera/ChimeraX
- Coot
- PyMol
- VMD
- Amira (Commercial)
- ...

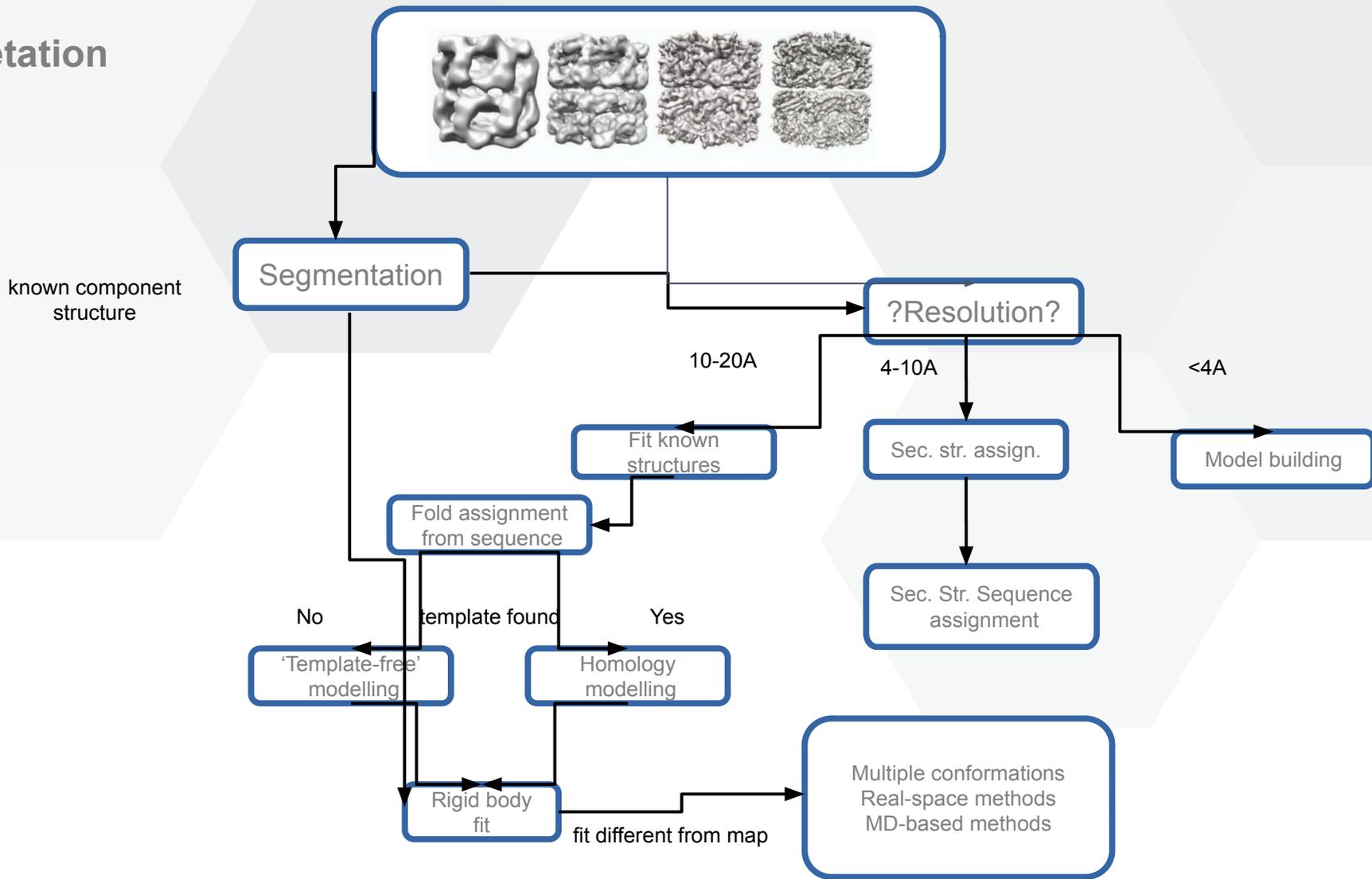


## Segmentation

- identify boundaries map regions which represent different structural components
- component structures can be positioned into the identified segments
- the size of the segmented components is related to the map resolution
- manual segmentation | automated segmentation | knowledge-based segmentation



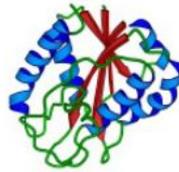
# Map interpretation



# Map interpretation

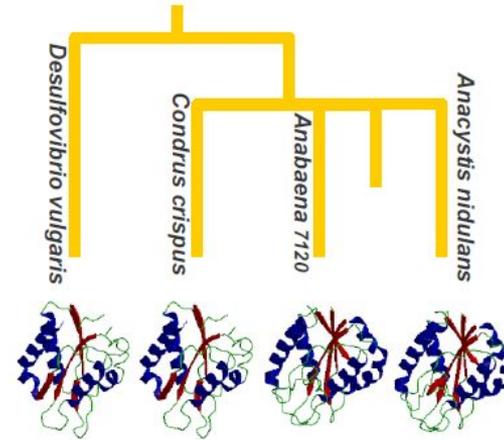
Structure determination from amino acid sequence

GFCHIKAYTRLIMVG...



Template-free

*Ab initio (de novo) prediction*  
Fragment Assembly  
Evolutionary Couplings



Template-based

Threading  
Comparative (Homology) Modelling

AlphaFold 2



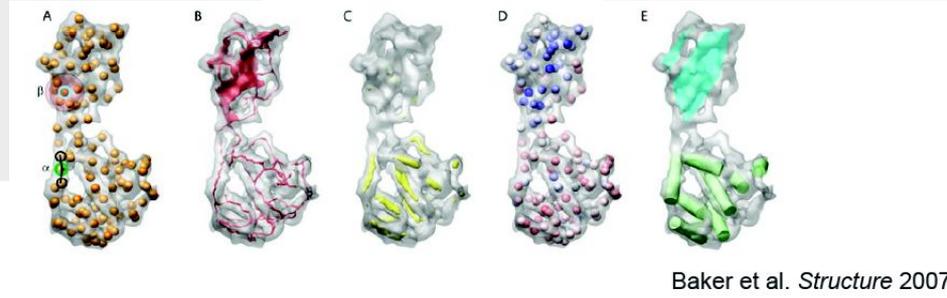
CEITEC

- programs: MODELLER, SWISS-MODEL, Phyre2, RaptorX, I-TASSER, Rosetta, EVfold

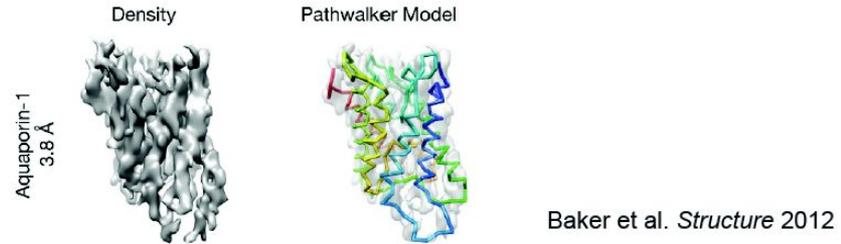
# Map interpretation

## Fold recognition from density

- 4.5-10Å: secondary structure detection



- 4.5Å and better: de novo CA tracing and model building

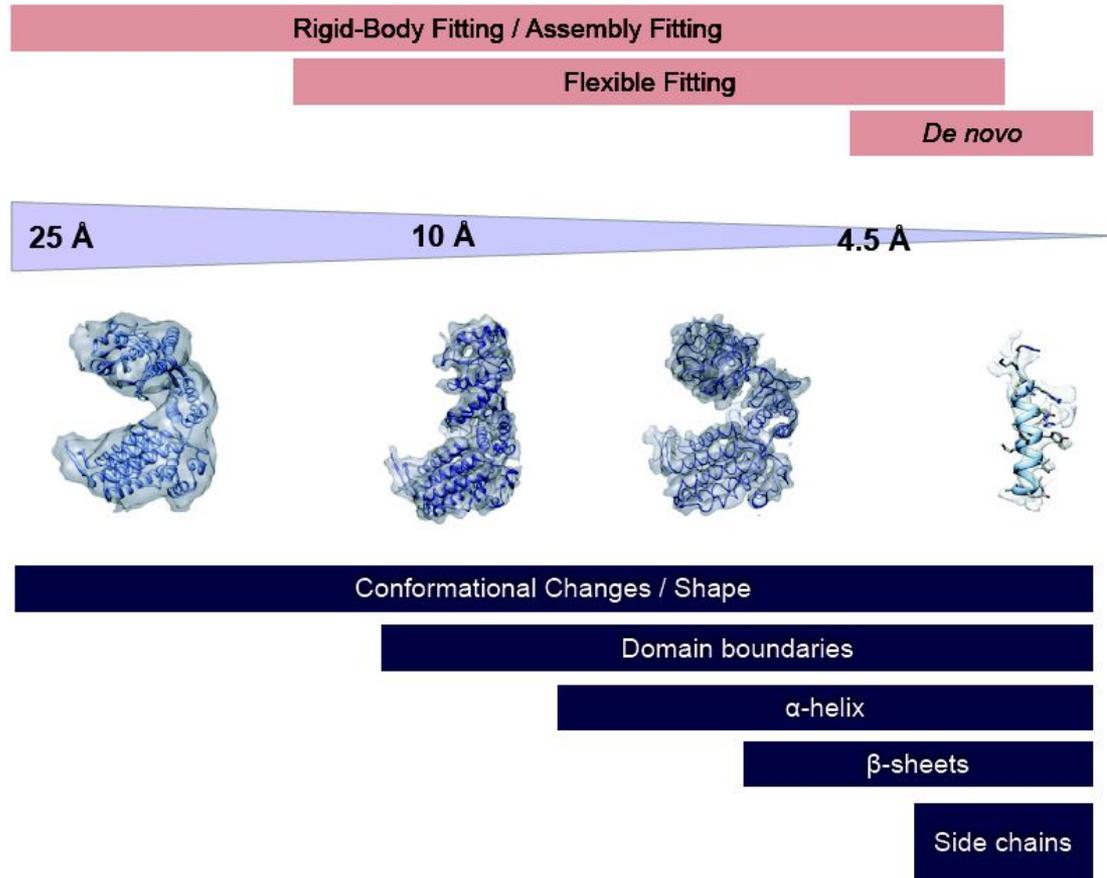


- programs: SSEhunter, SSEtracer, Ematch, Pathwalker, Coot, Buccaneer, EM-fold, Rosseta, Phenix, ARP/wARP

ModelAngelo

# Map interpretation

## Density fitting



# Map interpretation

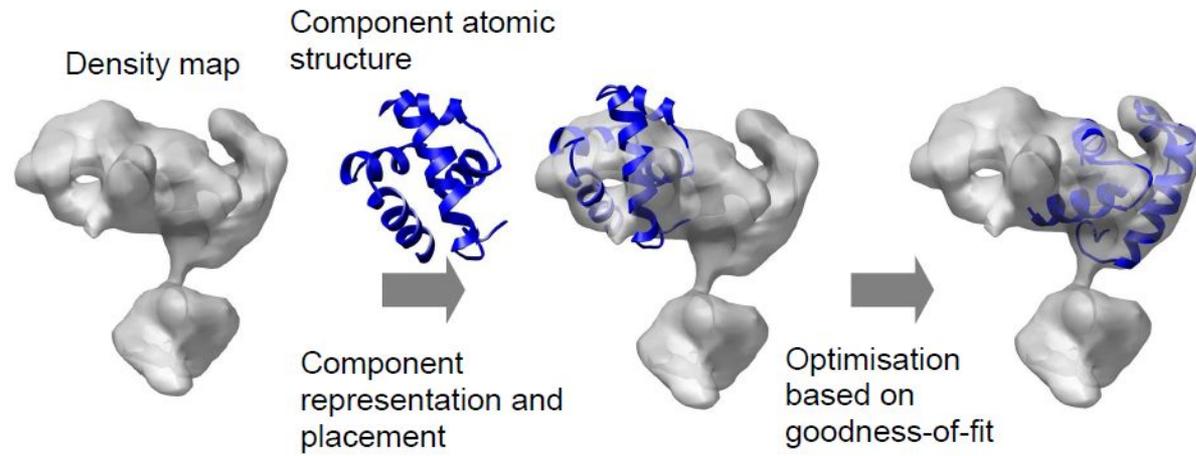
## Density fitting

- manual fitting
  - positioning of the atomic structure into the cryo-EM density using visualization programs
  - usually efficient (human brain efficient in pattern recognition)
  - direct feedback
  - good for initial placement of the component in to the map
  - high level of subjectivity may lead to errors
  - depends on contour level at which the map is visualized
  - conformational rearrangements cannot be modelled

# Map interpretation

## Density fitting

- automated fitting
  - requires common representation of both the structure and the density map
- measure of the quality of the fit
- optimization protocol for fit improvement

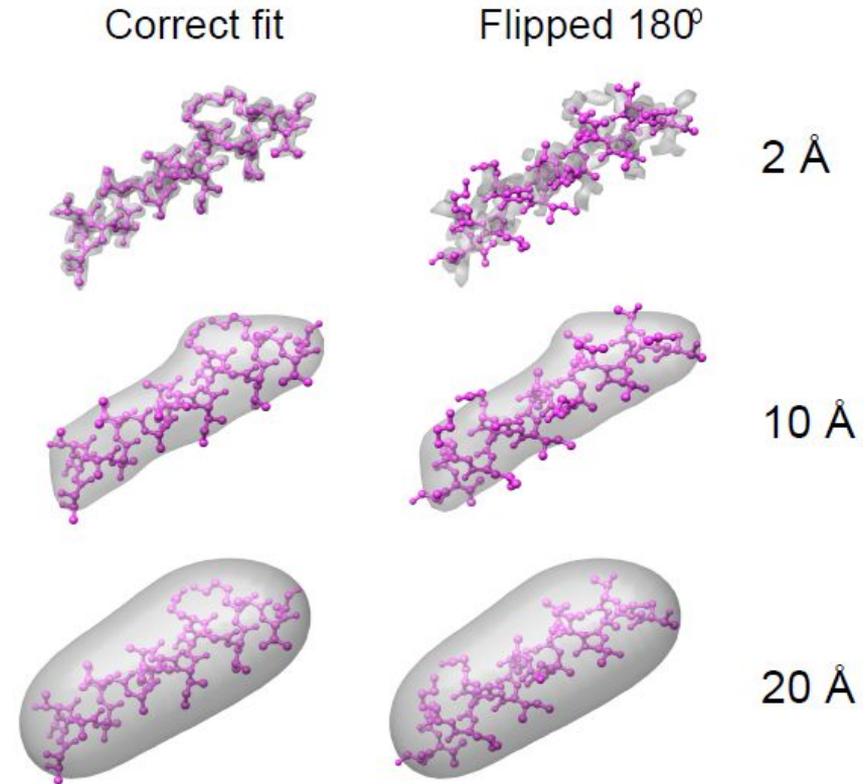


# Map interpretation

## Problems of density fitting

- limited resolution
  - many local optima with similar numerical values at low resolution
- local resolution, noise, scaling, filtering, masking
- blurring of the atomic structure

- better resolution
- improve scoring for goodness-of-fit
- coarse-graining (change representation)
- fit/model validation

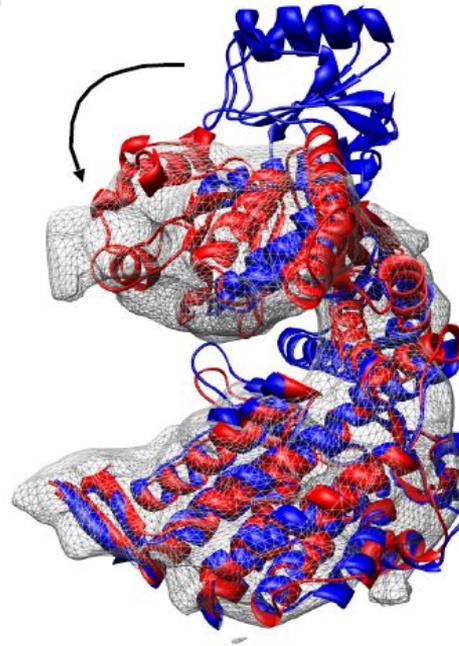


# Map interpretation

## Problems of density fitting

- conformational variability
  - many conformations which are observed in density maps deviate from the conformations of the atomic models which are fitted
- dynamics
- crystal packing effects
- errors in structure prediction

→ allow for the conformational changes during model fitting process = flexible fitting



# Map interpretation

## Model refinement

- without any restraints a model may fit well with a high score in near-atomic to low resolution density
- such a model will, however, not have standard protein geometry: backbone torsions (Ramachandran diagram), peptide planarity, chirality (trans/cis), bond lengths and angles, side chain torsions / rotamers
- refinement methods try to maintain standard geometry while fitting the model into the density map. The geometry restraints reduce the levels of freedom.
- map density contributes as an additional penalty in the scoring function

Programs: MDFF, **Refmac**, Rosetta, **Coot**, **Phenix**, **Isolde**, iMODFIT

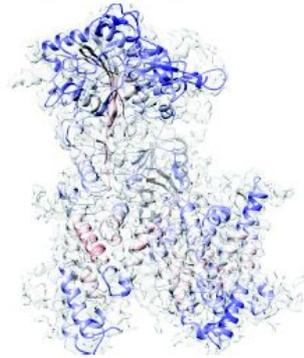
# Map interpretation

## Model validation

Model fit

Model geometry

peptide planarity  
backbone torsions (Ramachandran)  
bond lengths  
bond angles  
side chain rotamers



Molprobit: <http://molprobit.biochem.duke.edu/>

What check: <http://swift.cmbi.ru.nl/gv/whatcheck/>

PROCHECK: <http://www.ebi.ac.uk/thornton-srv/software/PROCHECK/>

# Map improvement

- in order to facilitate map interpretation, the data processing should correct for the imperfections of the imaging system to the highest possible level
- these imperfections comprise:
  - aberrations of microscope optical system (higher-order)
  - sample drift and distortions caused by interaction of the electrons with a matter
- the effect is primarily pronounced at high frequencies (resolution) → parameter optimization and additional data processing primarily concerns improving the quality of high resolution maps (<4.5Å resolution)
- the effect on medium and low resolution (>8Å) is limited and additional data processing usually does not result in any map improvement

# Map improvement

## Electron lens aberrations

- objective lens of the transmission electron microscope is really bad



$$B(\mathbf{k}) = \exp \left[ i \frac{2\pi}{\lambda} W(\mathbf{k}) \right]$$

### 2.2: Description of aberration constants to 6<sup>th</sup> order

- $A_0$  Lateral image shift
- $A_1$  Two-fold astigmatism
- $C_1$  Defocus
- $A_2$  Three-fold astigmatism
- $B_2$  Axial coma
- $A_3$  Four-fold astigmatism
- $S_3$  Axial star aberration
- $C_3 = C_s$  Spherical aberration
- $A_4$  Five-fold astigmatism
- $D_4$  Three-lobe aberration
- $B_4$  Fourth-order axial coma
- $A_5$  Six-fold astigmatism
- $S_5$  Fifth-order star aberration
- $C_5$  Fifth-order spherical aberration
- $R_5$  Fifth-order rosette aberration

$$W(\mathbf{k}) = \Re \{ A_0 \lambda \mathbf{k}^* \}$$

$$\begin{aligned} & + \frac{1}{2} A_1 \lambda^2 \mathbf{k}^{*2} + \frac{1}{2} C_1 \lambda^2 \mathbf{k}^* \mathbf{k} \\ & + \frac{1}{3} A_2 \lambda^3 \mathbf{k}^{*3} + \frac{1}{3} B_2 \lambda^3 \mathbf{k}^{*2} \mathbf{k} \\ & + \frac{1}{4} A_3 \lambda^4 \mathbf{k}^{*4} + \frac{1}{4} S_3 \lambda^4 \mathbf{k}^{*3} \mathbf{k} + \frac{1}{4} C_3 \lambda^4 \mathbf{k}^{*2} \mathbf{k}^2 \\ & + \frac{1}{5} A_4 \lambda^5 \mathbf{k}^{*5} + \frac{1}{5} D_4 \lambda^5 \mathbf{k}^{*4} \mathbf{k} + \frac{1}{5} B_4 \lambda^5 \mathbf{k}^{*3} \mathbf{k}^2 \\ & + \frac{1}{6} A_5 \lambda^6 \mathbf{k}^{*6} + \frac{1}{6} S_5 \lambda^6 \mathbf{k}^{*4} \mathbf{k}^2 + \frac{1}{6} C_5 \lambda^6 \mathbf{k}^{*3} \mathbf{k}^3 + \frac{1}{6} R_5 \lambda^6 \mathbf{k}^{*5} \mathbf{k} \end{aligned}$$

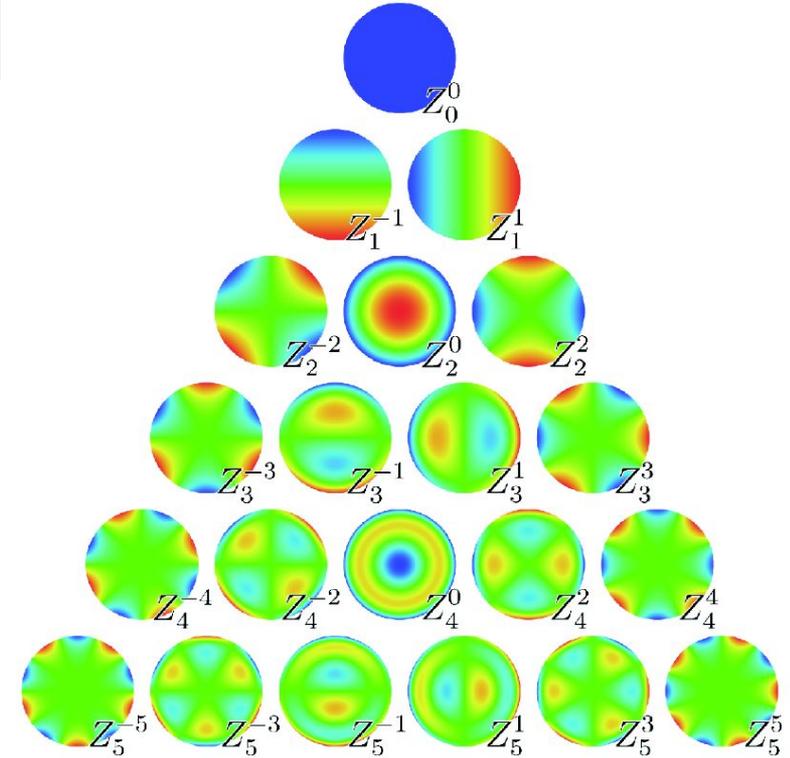
# Map improvement

## Zernike polynomials

- complete set of orthogonal functions
- Zernike transform analogous to Fourier transform
- can be used to visualize lens aberrations
- the aberrations can be corrected for by introducing additional lens to the microscope or by software during the image processing

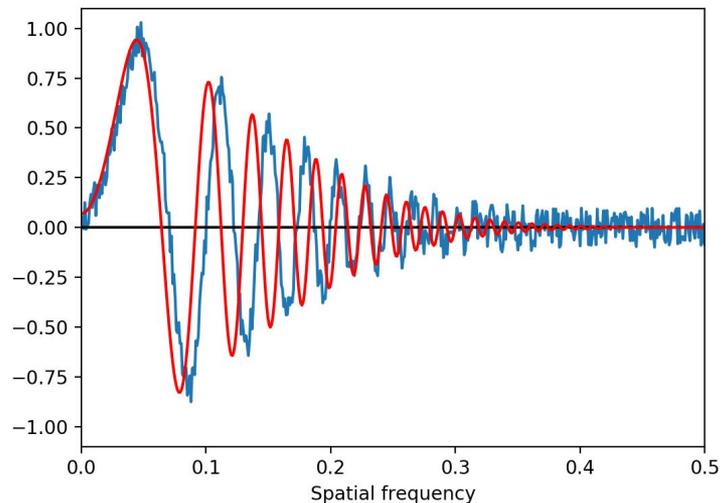


**Frits Zernike,**  
1953 Nobel Prize in Physics  
inventor of phase contrast  
microscopy

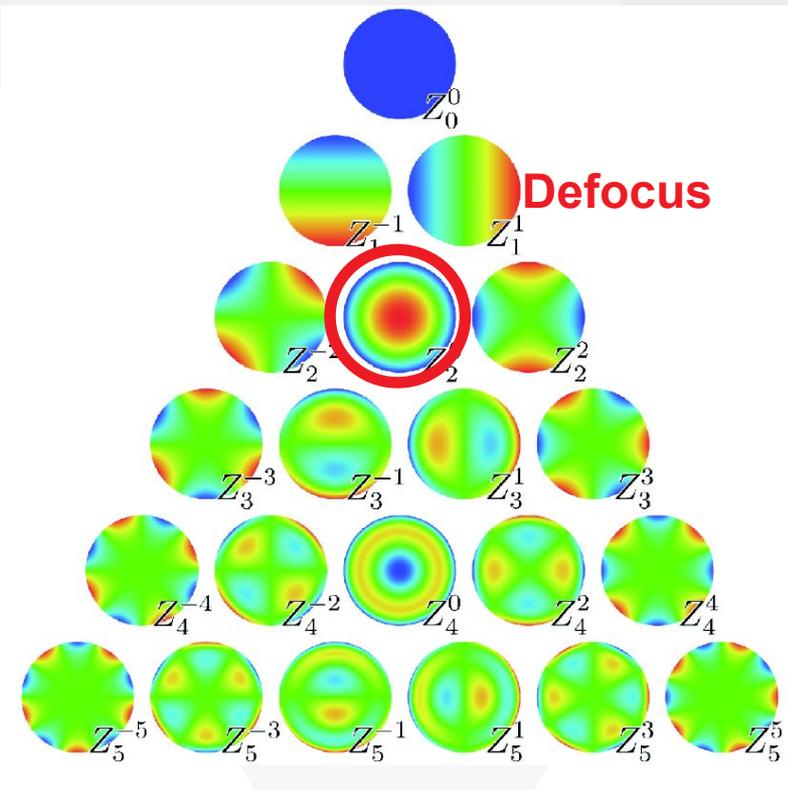
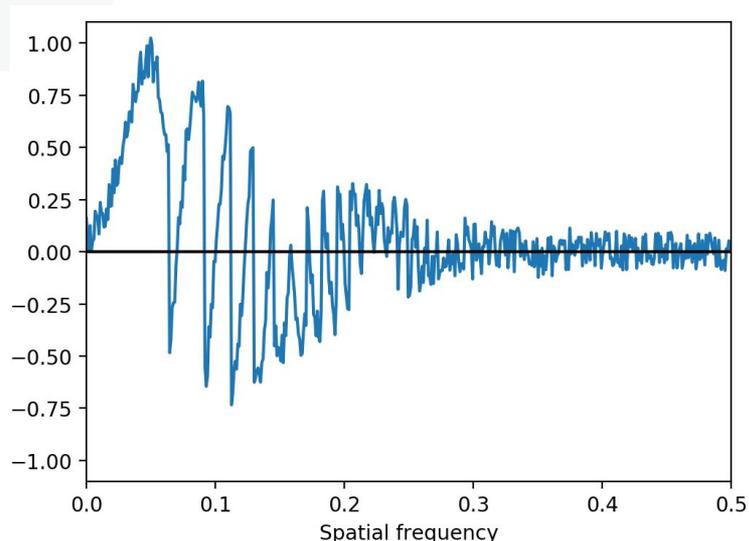


# Map improvement

## Lens aberrations

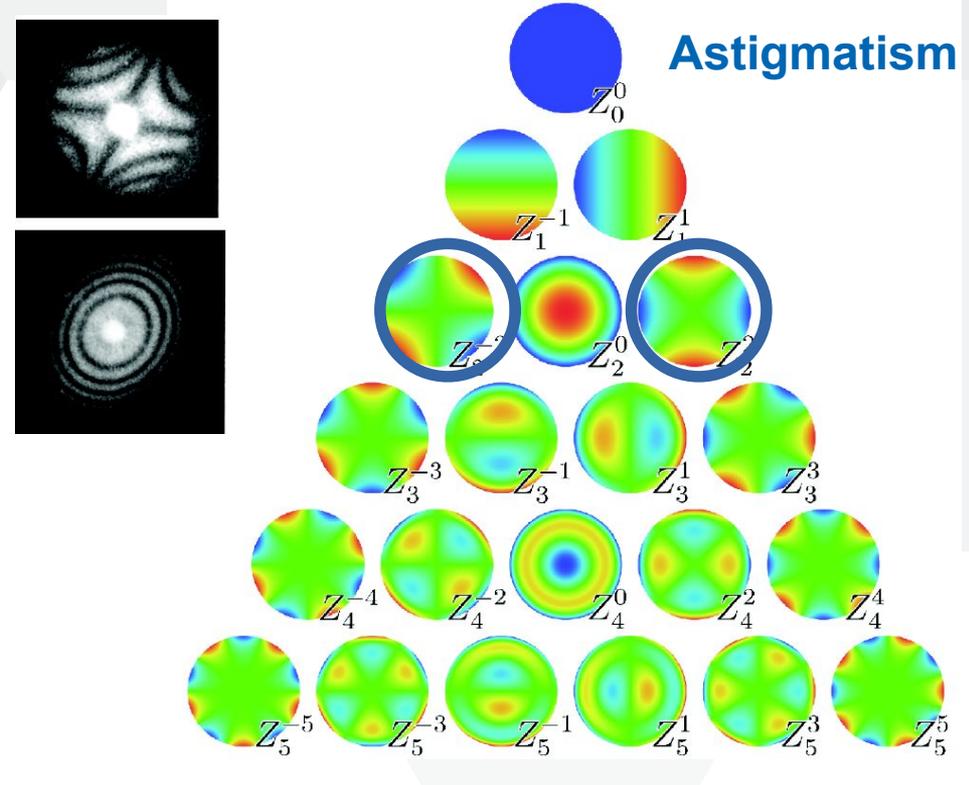
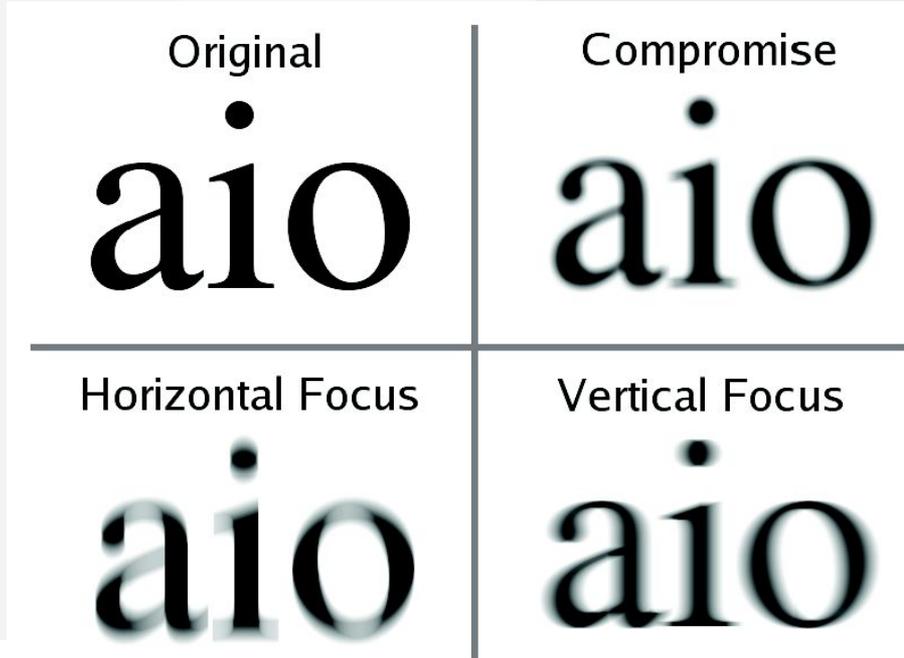


- 200nm error in defocus estimation (1.2um instead of 1.0um)



# Map improvement

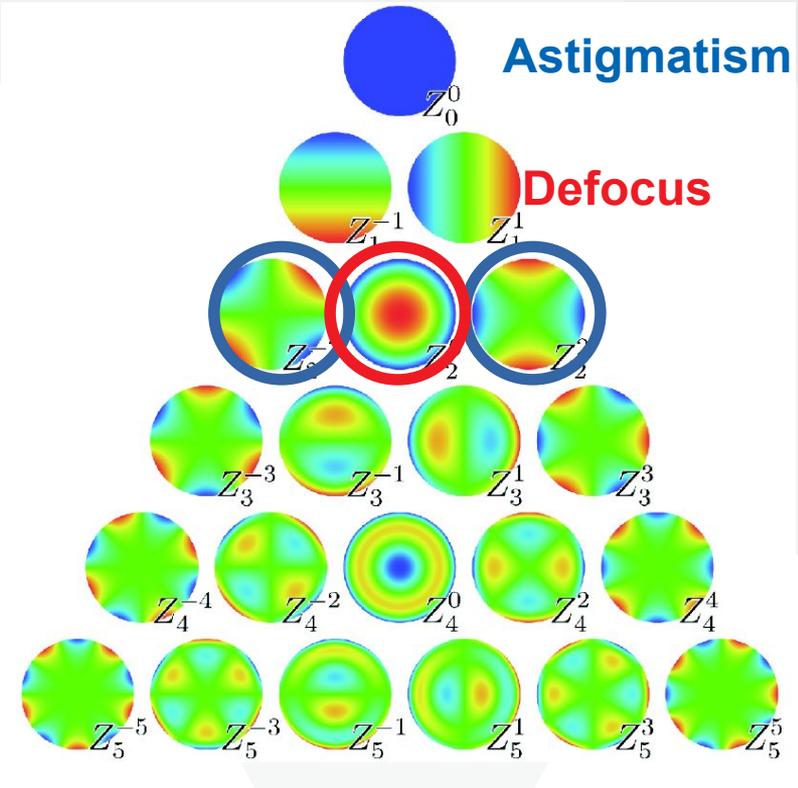
## Lens aberrations



# Map improvement

## Lens aberrations

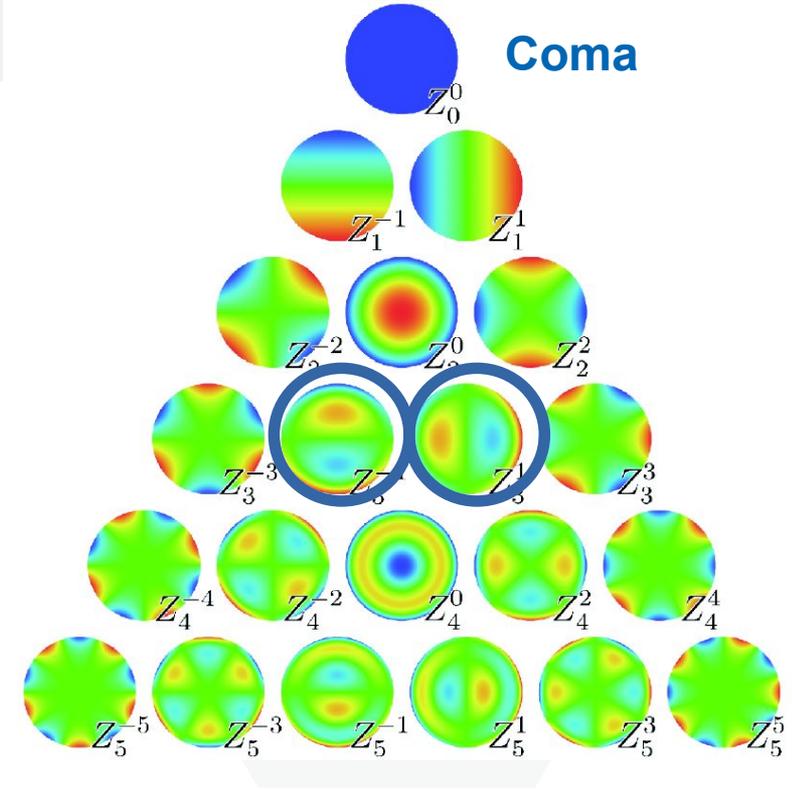
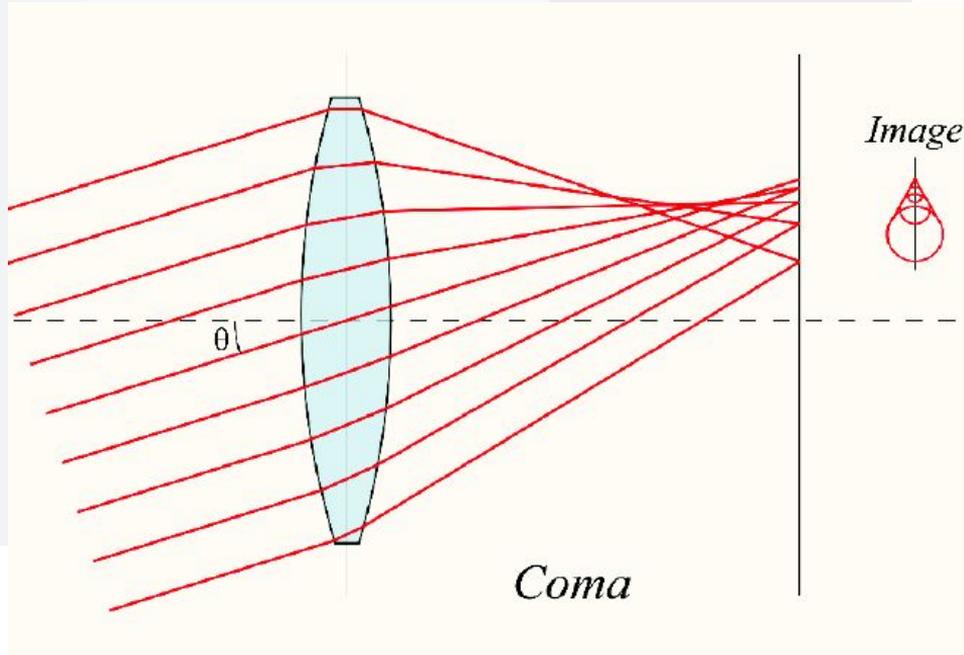
- certain level of underfocus is necessary during cryo-EM data collection  
→ corrected during CTF correction
- astigmatism can be eliminated to high extent by proper microscope alignment
- only aberrations which are relevant for the quality of medium and low resolution maps
- correct estimation of CTF parameters (defocus, astigmatism)  
→ quality control – goodness of fit



# Map improvement

## Lens aberrations

- dependence with third power of frequency
- can be primarily removed by proper microscope alignment and further during data analysis in software

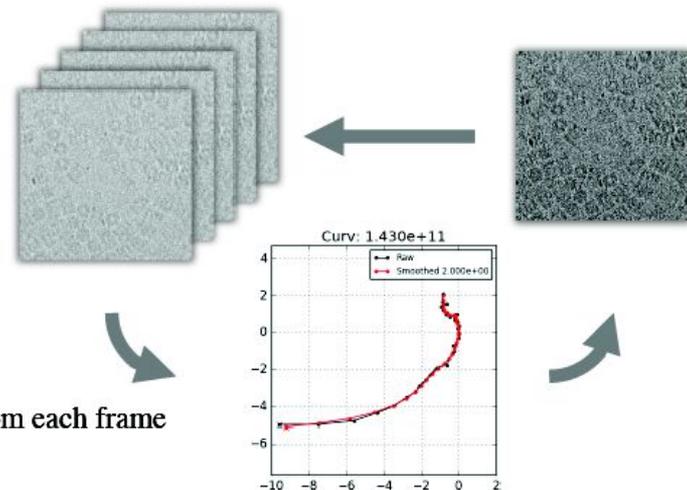




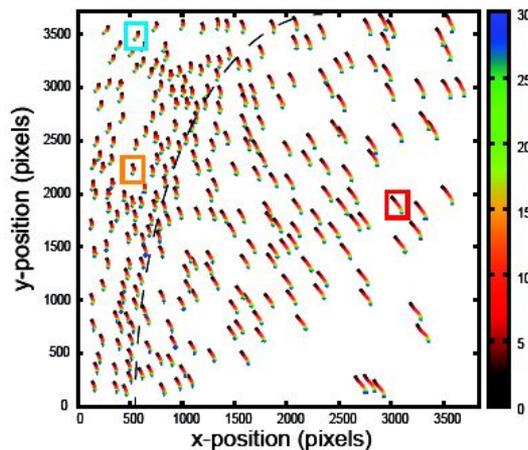
# Map improvement

## Sample distortions during imaging

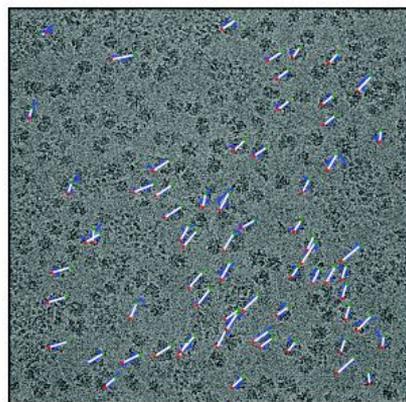
- local motion different in distinct parts of the image



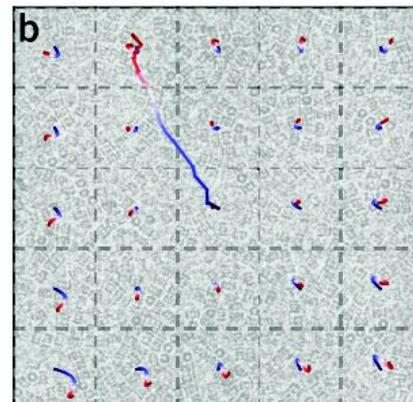
Compare particle in each frame  
to sum of frames



Compare particle in each frame  
to map



Compare patch from each frame  
to sum of frames



Alignparts\_Imbfgs (Rubinstein & Brubaker, 2015, *JSB* 192, 188-95)  
[improved version in cryoSPARC ver 2]

Relion Polishing (Scheres, 2014, *eLife* 3:e03665)  
[improved version with  
Alignparts-like smoothing in  
Bayesian polishing]

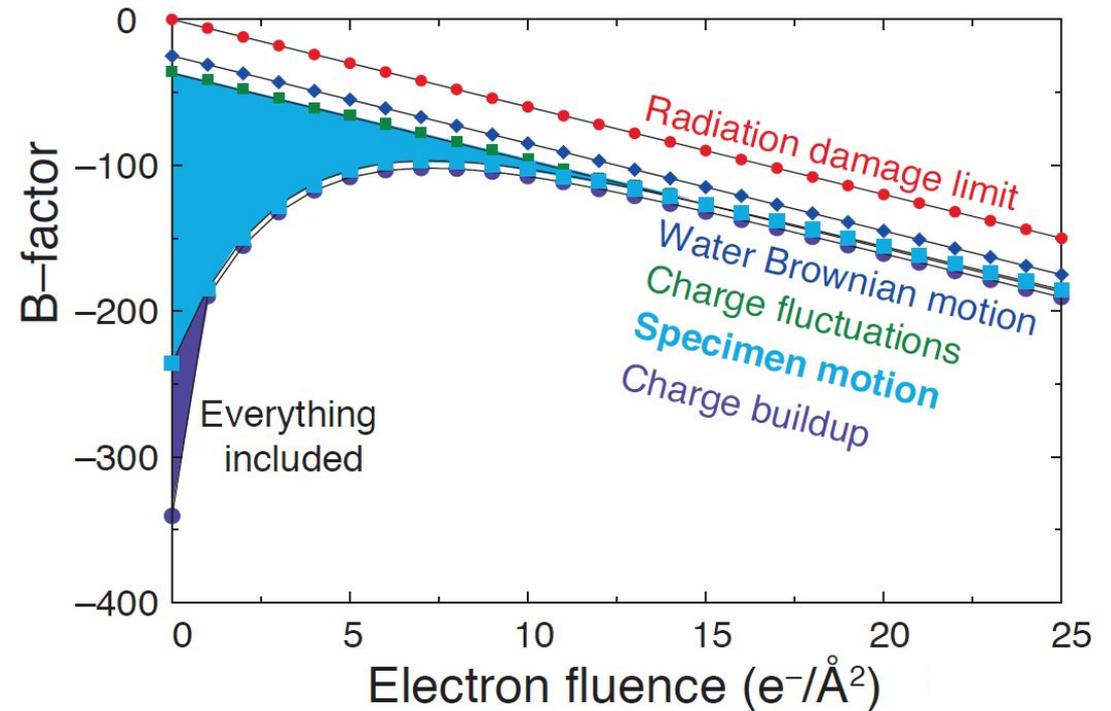
MotionCor2 (Zheng...Agard, 2017, *Nat Meth* 14, 331-2)



# Map improvement

## Sample distortions during imaging

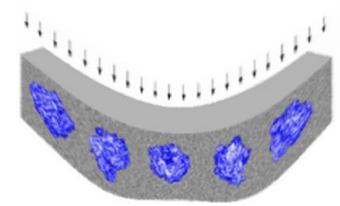
- the information in each frame is damped by different B-factor due to distinct effects during data collection
- compensation for local motion (per particle)  
+ per frame amplitude weighting with corresponding B-factor => particle polishing



# Map improvement

## Sample distortions during imaging

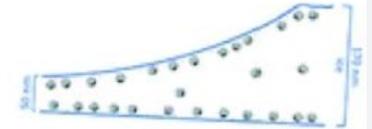
- distortion of sample surface due to illumination with electron beam
- particles located in different depth of the specimen layer
  - defocus variance for particles within single micrograph
- per particle defocus (astigmatism) estimation = ctf refinement



**38\*†**  
Apoferritin  
(0.5 mg/mL)



**39\*†**  
Apoferritin with  
0.5 mM TCEP



**40**  
Protein with  
Carbon Over  
Holes



**41**  
Protein and  
DNA Strands  
with Carbon  
Over Holes



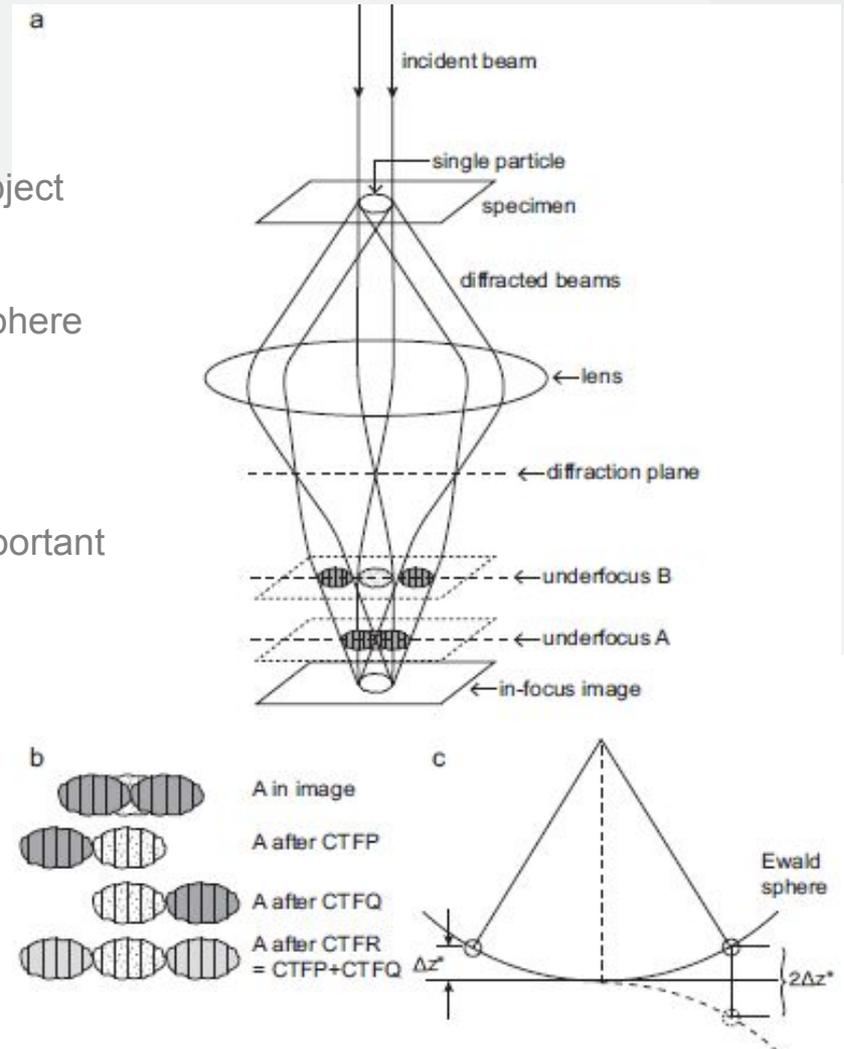
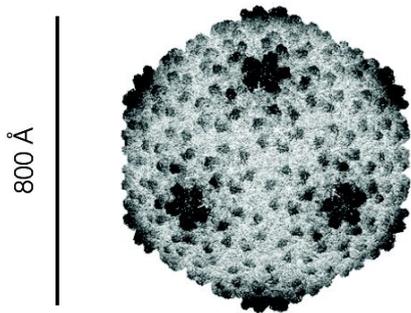
**42\*†**  
T20S  
Proteasome



# Map improvement

## Ewald sphere correction

- the assumption that the image is 2D projection of the 3D object does not hold for thick specimens
- wave-function at the image plane samples surface of the sphere in 3D FT of the object
- Friedel symmetry is lost
- depends on electron wavelength – stronger effect (more important to consider) for 100keV than for 300keV





800 Å

