

## Measurement of Atom Resolvability in CryoEM Maps with Q-scores

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### Abstract

CryoEM density maps are now at the point where resolvability of individual atoms can be achieved. However, resolvability is not necessarily uniform throughout the map. We introduce a quantitative parameter to characterize the resolvability of individual atoms in cryoEM maps, the map Q-score. Q-scores can be calculated for atoms in proteins, nucleic acids, water, ligands, and other solvent atoms, using models fitted to or derived from cryoEM maps. Q-scores can also be averaged to represent larger features such as entire residues and nucleotides. Averaged over entire models, Q-scores correlate very well with the estimated resolution of cryoEM maps for both protein and RNA. Assuming the models they are calculated from are well-fitted to the map, Q-scores can thus be used as another measure to indicate resolvability of features in cryoEM maps at various scales, from entire complexes down to individual atoms. Q-score analysis of multiple cryoEM maps of the same proteins derived from different labs confirms reproducibility of structural features down to water and ion atoms.

### Introduction

CryoEM single particle methods strive to create accurate, high-resolution 3D maps of macromolecular complexes. Depending on many factors including imaging apparatus, detector, reconstruction method, structure flexibility, sample heterogeneity, and differential radiation damage, resulting maps have varying degrees of resolvability, or the level at which molecular features can be seen. Accurate quantification of resolvability in cryoEM maps has been a challenge in the field<sup>1</sup>. This task is very important as it can affect the interpretability and insights derived from such maps.

41  
42 For every cryoEM map, a resolution is commonly reported or estimated, calculated from a  
43 Fourier shell correlation (FSC) plot between two independent reconstructions of the same  
44 complex<sup>2</sup>. It is well recognized that cryoEM maps usually do not have isotropic resolution  
45 throughout, hence a single number may not accurately represent the entire map. Local resolution  
46 can be estimated by most of image processing software (e.g. ResMap<sup>3</sup>), however such  
47 information is not as easy to comprehend in terms of specific residues as in the case with an  
48 atomic model.

49  
50 Atomic models can be either fitted or built directly into cryoEM maps<sup>4,5</sup>. Map-model scores are  
51 then calculated from the model and map to assess how well the model fits the map<sup>6</sup>. Refinement<sup>7</sup>  
52 or flexible fitting<sup>8,9</sup> can then be applied, while making sure not to distort or overfit to noise<sup>10,11</sup>.  
53 The latter is accomplished by applying various stereochemical constraints, e.g. proper bond  
54 lengths, angles, dihedrals, preferred rotamers and van-der Waals distances; additional secondary-  
55 structure constraints (e.g. in the form of hydrogen bonds) can also be applied<sup>7,9,12,13</sup>.

56  
57 Once an atomic model has been fitted to or derived from a cryoEM map, it can then be used to  
58 measure the resolvability of the features in the map. This can be done in several ways, including  
59 a map-model FSC curve, which requires that the model first be converted to a cryoEM-like map  
60 at the same resolution as the map. Occupancies and atomic displacement parameters of residues  
61 or atoms can also be used in this process to make the model-map better match the cryoEM  
62 map<sup>14</sup>. However, the FSC plot reflects the entire map volume. Proper masking may evaluate the  
63 resolvability of smaller features such as individual protein chains<sup>10</sup>, however it is impractical to  
64 quantify the resolvability of even smaller features such as a single side chain using this approach.

65  
66 Two other methods that measure resolvability of such smaller features in a cryoEM map using a  
67 fitted model are EMRinger<sup>15</sup> and Z-scores<sup>16</sup>. EMRinger considers map values near carbon- $\beta$   
68 atoms, while Z-scores can be applied to secondary structures or entire side chains. These scores  
69 were shown to correlate with the reported resolution when averaged over an entire map and  
70 model, meaning they can also be used to support the estimated resolution of the map. Moreover,  
71 they can also pinpoint smaller features in the model (e.g. secondary structures or side chains)  
72 which are not well-resolved in the map or not fitted properly to the map.

73  
74 CryoEM maps have reached resolutions nearer to atomic-scale, for example apoferritin at 1.54Å  
75 (EMD:9865), 1.62Å (EMD:0144)<sup>17</sup>, 1.65Å (EMD:9599), and 1.75Å (EMD: 20026). A new  
76 question now arises as to how resolvability of individual atoms may be assessed. In  
77 crystallography, this is often reflected in the B-factor calculated for each atom<sup>18</sup>. Several  
78 formulations and interpretations of the B-factors are possible<sup>19</sup>, and their use in cryoEM has been  
79 suggested in the form of atomic displacement parameters (ADPs)<sup>14</sup>. So far, such formulations  
80 have not been fully characterized in terms of resolvability and resolution of map.

81

82 In this paper, we introduce a new score which is calculated from map values around an atom's  
83 position, the Q-score. It aims to be a direct measure of the resolvability of atoms in cryoEM  
84 maps of complexes containing proteins, nucleic acids, and solvent molecules.

85

86

## 87 **Atomic Map Profiles**

88

89 The basis of the Q-score is the atomic map profile. Atomic map profiles are calculated by  
90 averaging map values at increasing radial distances from the atom's position. The radial  
91 distances range from 0Å to 2.0Å, and only points that are closer to the atom in question than to  
92 any other atoms in the model are considered. Figure 1A shows example atomic profiles in our  
93 two new maps of Apoferritin with resolutions of 1.75Å and 2.32Å, now deposited as  
94 EMD:20026, and EMD:20027. The model is the X-ray model of Apoferritin, (PDB:3ajo), which  
95 was first rigidly fitted to the cryoEM map, and then further refined using the Phenix real-space  
96 refinement procedure<sup>7</sup>. In the examples, atomic profiles have Gaussian-like contours. We  
97 consider a Gaussian equation of the form:

98

$$99 \quad y = A e^{-\frac{1}{2}\left(\frac{x-\mu}{\sigma}\right)^2} + B \quad (1)$$

100

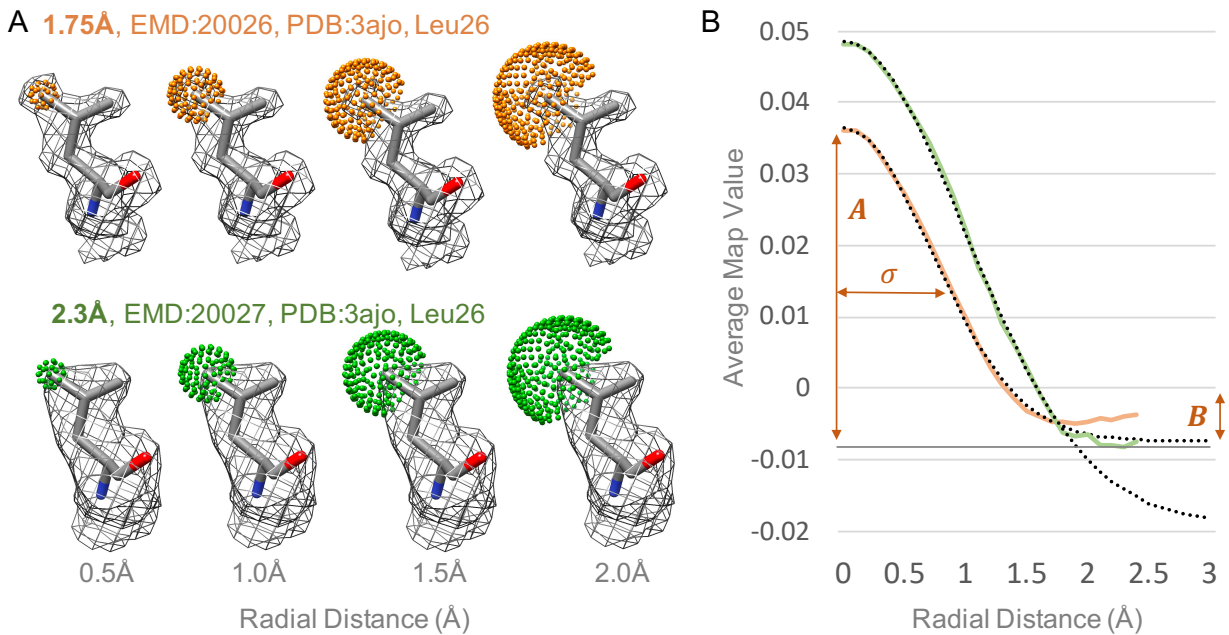
101 Gaussian functions of the form in Eqn.1, where  $x$  is the radial distance and  $y$  the average map  
102 value, fit extremely well to the atomic profiles shown in Figure 1, up to a distance of 2Å (mean  
103 error of ~0.01Å). Past this distance, observations in various maps indicate that atomic map  
104 profiles become noisy and start to increase. This is likely due to effects from other nearby atoms  
105 and/or solvent.

106

107 When the model is well-fitted to the map, the relative height,  $A-B$ , and width,  $\sigma$ , of the Gaussian  
108 function (Eqn.1) fitted to the profile may be considered to be proportional to several factors  
109 including the resolution of the map, and the overall mobility of the atom. It may be impossible to  
110 fully separate such factors based on the observed cryoEM map alone. Regardless of the cause,  
111 the overall Gaussian profile seen in the map represents to what degree the respective atom is  
112 resolved in the map - the more resolved an atom is in the map, the higher (relative to other peaks  
113 in the same map) and narrower (up to a certain point, i.e. the radius of the atom itself) the  
114 Gaussian profile around it would be.

115

116



117

118 Figure 1. Atomic map profiles in cryoEM maps of Apoferritin at 1.75Å and 2.3Å resolution. (A) The  
 119 residue Leu26 in the fitted model (PDB:3ajo) is shown, along with contour surface of the cryoEM map  
 120 around this residue. Spherical shells of points centered on the CD2 atom are shown at increasing radial  
 121 distances; only points that are closer to the CD2 atom than to any other atom in the model are used. (B)  
 122 Average map values at these points are plotted vs. radial distance; these are the atomic map profiles. The  
 123 dotted lines represent Gaussian functions with parameters *A*, *B* and  $\sigma$  which are fitted to each profile.

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### 127 Q-score

128

129 The idea behind the Q-score is to measure how closely the map profile of an atom matches that  
 130 of the Gaussian-like function we would see if an atom is well-resolved. Thus, to calculate the Q-  
 131 score, the atomic map profile is compared to a ‘reference Gaussian’ as given by Eqn. 1, with the  
 132 following parameters:

133

$$134 \mu = 0 \quad (2)$$

$$135 A = avg_M + 10\sigma_M \quad (3)$$

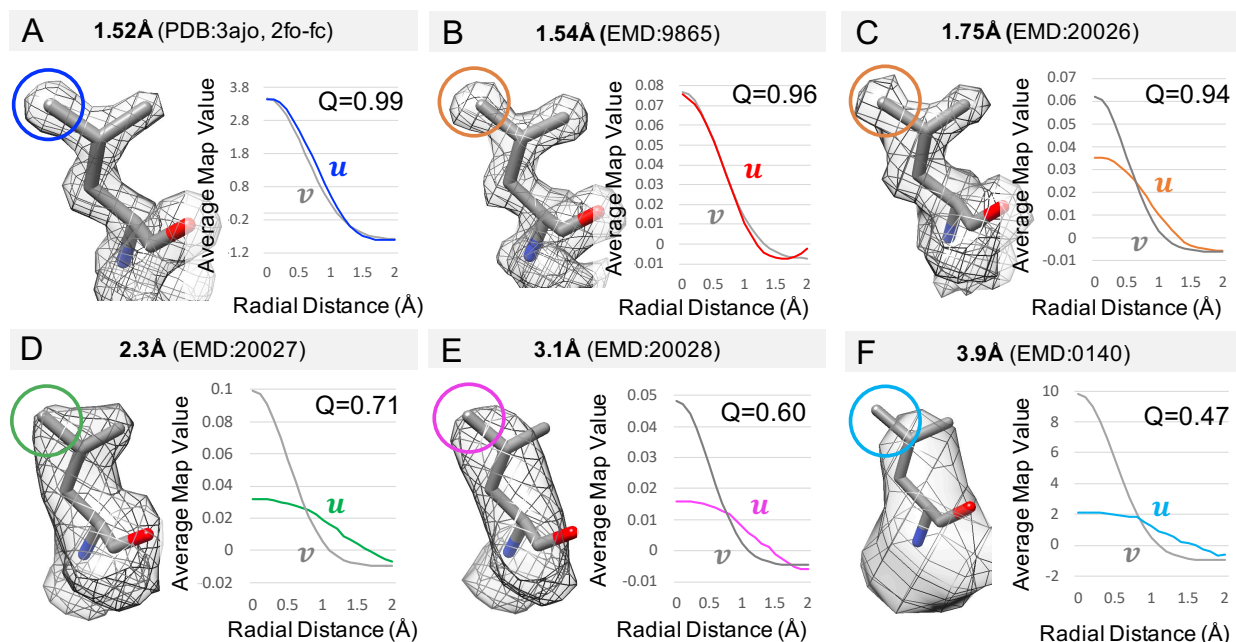
$$136 B = avg_M - 1\sigma_M \quad (4)$$

$$137 \sigma = 0.6\text{Å} \quad (5)$$

138

139 In the above, the mean,  $\mu$ , is set to 0, as the Gaussian is expected to be centered around the  
 140 atom’s position. The parameters *A* and *B* are obtained using the mean/average across all values  
 141 in the entire map,  $avg_M$ , and the standard deviation of all values around this mean,  $\sigma_M$ . A well

142 resolved atom would be centered on a peak that has a relatively high value in the map, and fall  
 143 off to a value below the mean, but not necessarily as low as the background noise. The width of  
 144 the reference gaussian is set as  $\sigma=0.6$ . These parameters in Eqns. 2-5 are chosen to make the  
 145 reference Gaussian roughly match the atomic profile of a well-resolved atom in the 1.54Å  
 146 cryoEM map as shown in Figure 2B. The height of the reference Gaussian is different in each  
 147 map, accounting for differences in the range of map values often seen in different maps; for  
 148 example, in Figure 1B, the values in in 2.3Å map are higher than those in the 1.75Å map.  
 149  
 150



151  
 152 Figure 2. Calculation of Q-scores for an atom in 6 maps at different resolutions, including an X-ray map.  
 153 The atom is CD2 from Leu 26 in PDB:3ajo. The atomic profile in each map is marked with the letter *u*,  
 154 while the reference Gaussian is marked with *v*.

155  
 156 The Q-score is then calculated as a correlation between values in the atomic profile obtained  
 157 from the map, *u*, and values obtained from the reference Gaussian, *v*, defined in Eqn. 1 and with  
 158 parameters in Eqns. 2-5. The following normalized, about the mean, cross-correlation formula is  
 159 used:

$$161 \quad Q(atom) = \frac{\langle u - u_{mean} \rangle \langle v - v_{mean} \rangle}{|u - u_{mean}| |v - v_{mean}|} \quad (6)$$

162  
 163 Several atomic profiles and reference Gaussians are illustrated in Figure 2, for an X-ray map and  
 164 5 cryoEM maps at various resolution. At high resolutions, the atomic profiles are more similar to  
 165 the reference Gaussian, and hence Q-scores are higher. At lower resolutions, the atomic profile  
 166 of the same atom is wider than the reference Gaussian, hence Q-scores are lower. Q-scores

167 would also be low for atomic profiles that are mostly noise (e.g. random values or a sharp peak).  
168 In some cases when the atom is not well-placed in the map, the Q-score can be negative if the  
169 atomic profile has a shape that increases away from the atom's position.

170

171 Calculating Q-scores is similar to calculating a cross-correlation between the model and a  
172 cryoEM map, using a simulated map of the model blurred using a Gaussian function with the  
173 parameters in Eqns. 2-5. The main difference is that with Q-scores, the cross-correlation is  
174 performed atom-by-atom, separating out parts of the density that are closest to each atom. The  
175 cross-correlation about the mean is used so that the Q-scores decrease as resolution also  
176 decreases. When not subtracting the mean, this effect would not be ensured<sup>16</sup>.

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### 180 **Q-scores of Atoms in Proteins**

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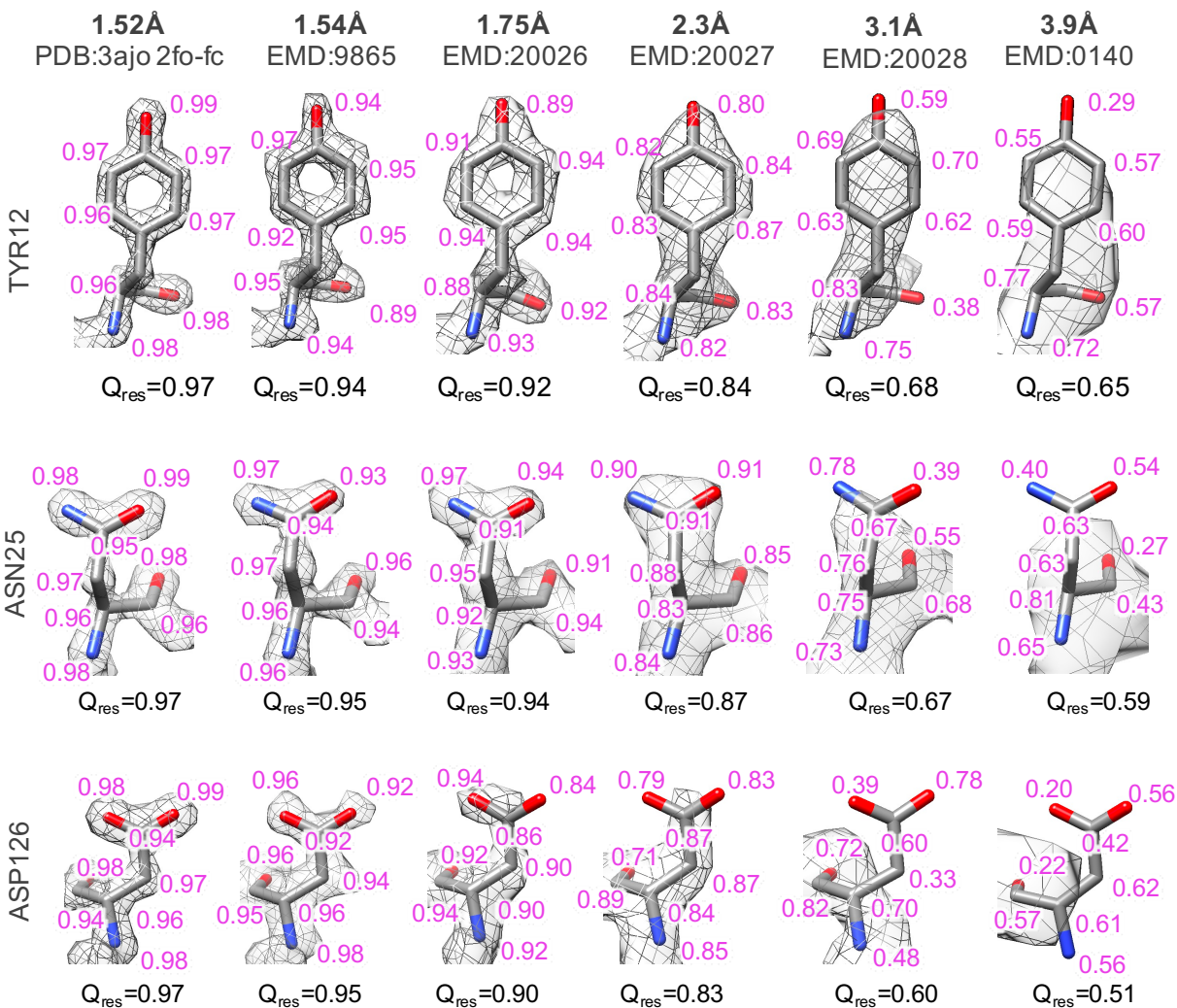
182 Figure 3 shows Q-scores for atoms taken from maps of Apoferritin at various resolutions. One of  
183 the maps is an X-ray map at 1.52Å resolution (2fo-fc, PDB:3ajo) as a reference; another is a  
184 recent high-resolution map at 1.54Å (EMD:9599). The other three are new maps we  
185 reconstructed to 1.75Å (EMD:20026), 2.3Å (EMD:20027), and 3.1Å (EMD:20028) with  
186 different numbers of particle images, from the same data set. For the cryoEM maps, the X-ray  
187 model PDB:3ajo was fitted to the density and also refined using Phenix real-space refinement<sup>7</sup>.  
188 Q-scores for each atom correlate well with visual resolvability, i.e. the more resolvable an atom,  
189 the higher the Q-score. They also increase as the estimated resolution of the map increases.

190

191 Resolvability and Q-scores can decrease for some residues faster than others as a function of  
192 resolution. For example, in Figure 3, the Q-score for ASP126 drops more than for ASN25 from  
193 1.52Å to 3.9Å. This effect may be due to several reasons. First, some residue types may be more  
194 susceptible to radiation damage (as previously shown using EMRinger<sup>15</sup>). Also, certain residue  
195 types may be more conformationally dynamic, or occur in environments that are more dynamic  
196 (e.g. solvent accessible), and hence may not resolve as well with a fewer number of particles.  
197 Finally, the interaction of the electron beam with charged side chains may have a weakening  
198 effect on map values around them<sup>14</sup>.

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200  
 201 Figure 3. Atom Q-scores for three types of residues, taken from Apoferritin maps at various resolutions.  
 202 Atom Q-scores are shown in purple close to each atom.

203  
 204

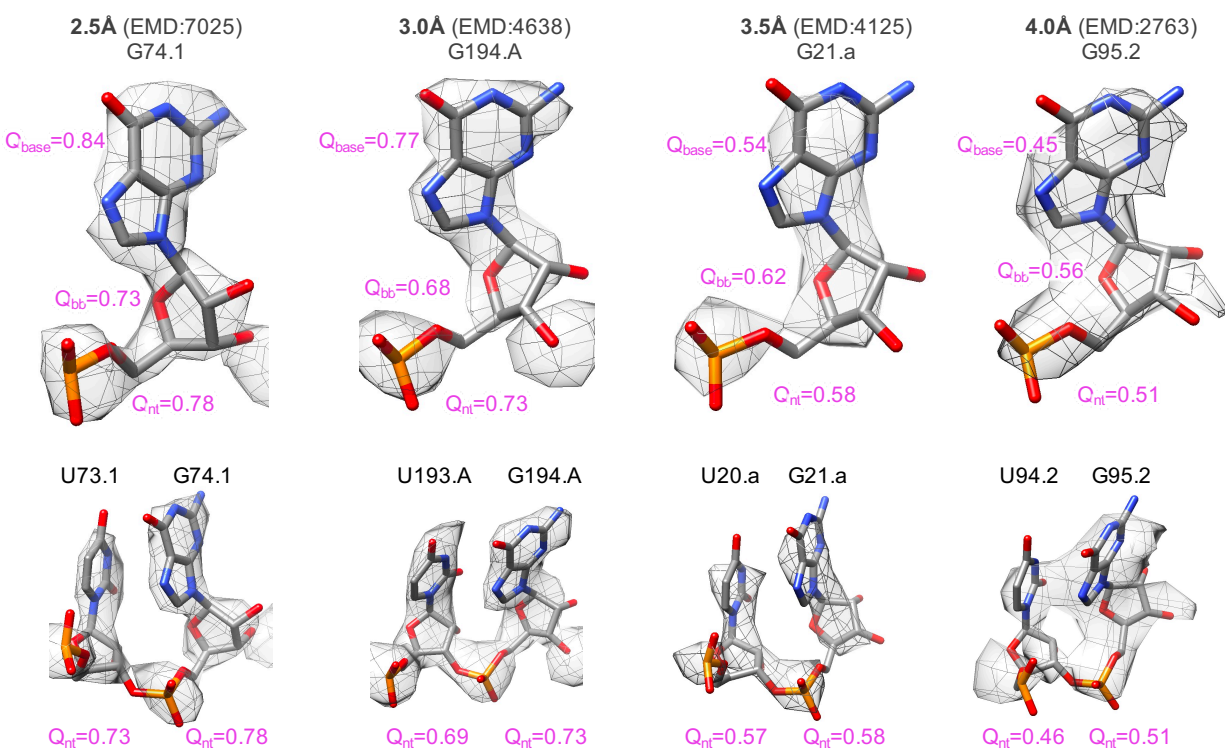
### 205 Q-scores for Atoms in Nucleic Acids

206  
 207 Q-scores can also be calculated for atoms in models of nucleic acids. In figure 4, we used several  
 208 maps and models containing RNA from the EMDB at resolutions ranging from 2.5Å to 4.0Å. Q-  
 209 scores were averaged over atoms in bases, phosphate-sugar backbones, and entire nucleotides.  
 210 As with proteins, Q-scores decrease with resolvability and estimated map resolution.

211  
 212 Figure 4 also illustrates a general trend that at ~4Å and lower resolutions, stacked bases from  
 213 adjacent nucleotides are typically not separable in cryoEM maps, whereas at higher than 4Å  
 214 resolutions, they usually do become separate at appropriate contour levels.

215

216 It is also interesting to note that for the examples in Figure 4, at high resolutions ( $\sim 2.5\text{\AA}$ ), the  
217 difference in Q-score or resolvability of individual bases is higher than that of the backbone  
218 (0.84 for base vs. 0.73 for backbone). Going towards lower resolutions in this example, bases  
219 become less resolvable (0.45 for bases vs 0.56 for backbone). This may be counter-intuitive as  
220 bases can have higher values in the map (i.e. appear first at a high contour level). However, these  
221 contours may have overall less detail as adjacent stacked bases are not fully separable and merge  
222 together.  
223  
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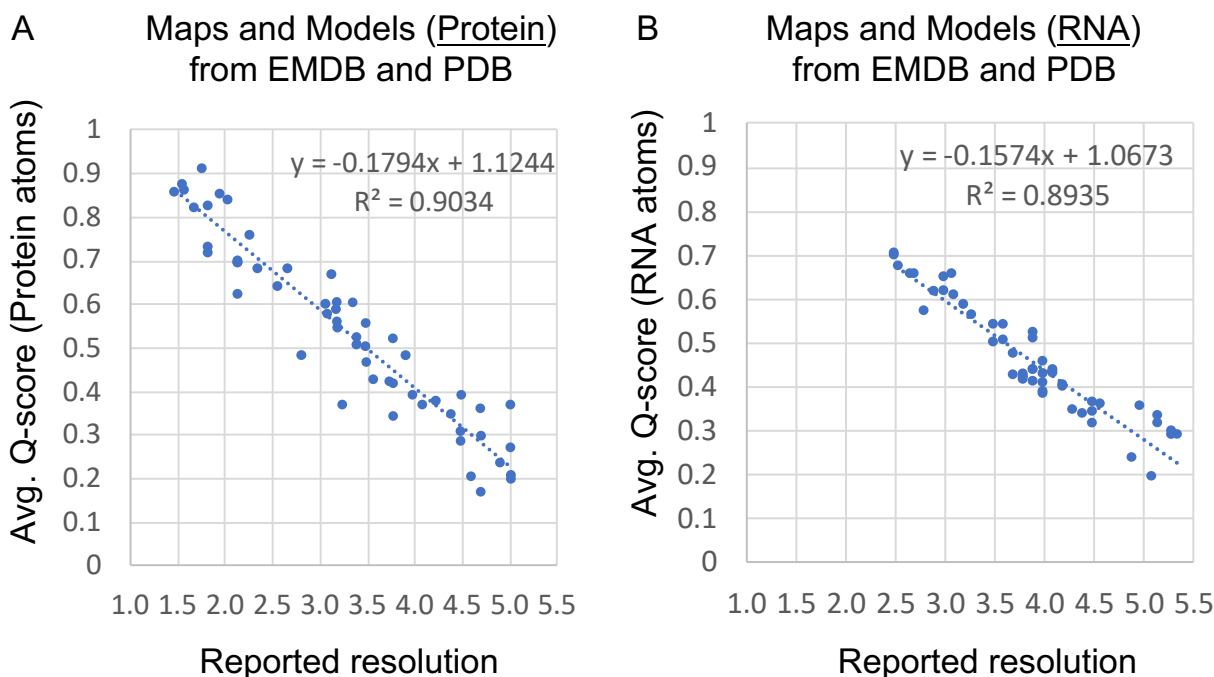
225  
226 Figure 4. Q-scores averaged over entire nucleotides ( $Q_{\text{nt}}$ ) in RNA maps and models from the EMDB at  
227 four different resolutions. Q-scores are also averaged for the base ( $Q_{\text{base}}$ ) and phosphate-sugar backbone  
228 ( $Q_{\text{bb}}$ ) groups in the nucleotides shown on the top row.  
229  
230

### 231 Q-score vs. Resolution

232  
233 Q-scores can also be averaged across an entire model to represent an average resolvability  
234 measure for the entire map. Such average Q-scores were plotted as a function of reported  
235 resolution for a number of maps and models obtained from the EMDB. Figure 5 shows these  
236 plots for two sets of maps and models, one set using only protein models, and the other set only  
237 nucleic acids (RNA). The protein set includes the maps used in the EMRinger analysis<sup>15</sup>, and  
238 further adding 24 maps of Apoferritin and  $\beta$ -galactosidase at resolutions up to  $1.54\text{\AA}$ . In the  
239 RNA set, a total of 52 maps and models were used at a range of resolutions ranging from  $2.5\text{\AA}$



240 (the highest resolution of an RNA-containing map to date) to 5.4Å. The full sets are listed in  
241 Tables 1 and 2. In both cases, the average Q-score correlates very strongly to reported resolution,  
242 with  $R^2$  of 0.90 for proteins and 0.89 for RNA. The  $R^2$  quantifies the error in fitting the linear  
243 function to the observed data; it is 1 for perfect correlation and 0 for no correlation. The high  
244 values of  $R^2$  in Figure 5 show that Q-scores closely capture the resolvability of atomic features in  
245 cryoEM maps. Thus, average Q-scores from a properly fitted model may be useful as a measure  
246 of resolvability in the map in addition to the reported resolution.  
247  
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249  
250 Figure 5. Model Q-scores compared to reported resolution for maps and models obtained from EMDB.  
251 (A) Average Q-scores for atoms in proteins. (B) Average Q-scores for atoms in RNA.

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### 254 Q-scores of Solvent Atoms

255  
256 The X-ray Apoferritin model (PDB:3ajo) contains one protein chain, 229 oxygen (O) atoms  
257 (from water) and 12 Mg atoms. A closeup on the map and model with two Mg and three O atoms  
258 is shown in Figure 6. Q-scores calculated for each of these atoms correlate well with the contours  
259 seen in the map. Of the four maps shown, three of them are cryoEM maps at near-atomic  
260 resolutions (1.54Å, 1.65Å, and 1.75Å). The model used all cases comes from the X-ray map. It is  
261 reassuring to see that some of the solvent atoms placed in the X-ray map can also be observed in  
262 the cryoEM maps (e.g. Mg183, O280, O236). However, some of the solvent atoms (e.g. Mg184),  
263 is not seen equally well in all three maps; for example, in the 1.54Å and 1.65Å maps, Mg184 has

264 low Q-score (0.12 and 0.03 respectively), and are not seen at the same map contour level where  
265 the other solvent atoms are seen.

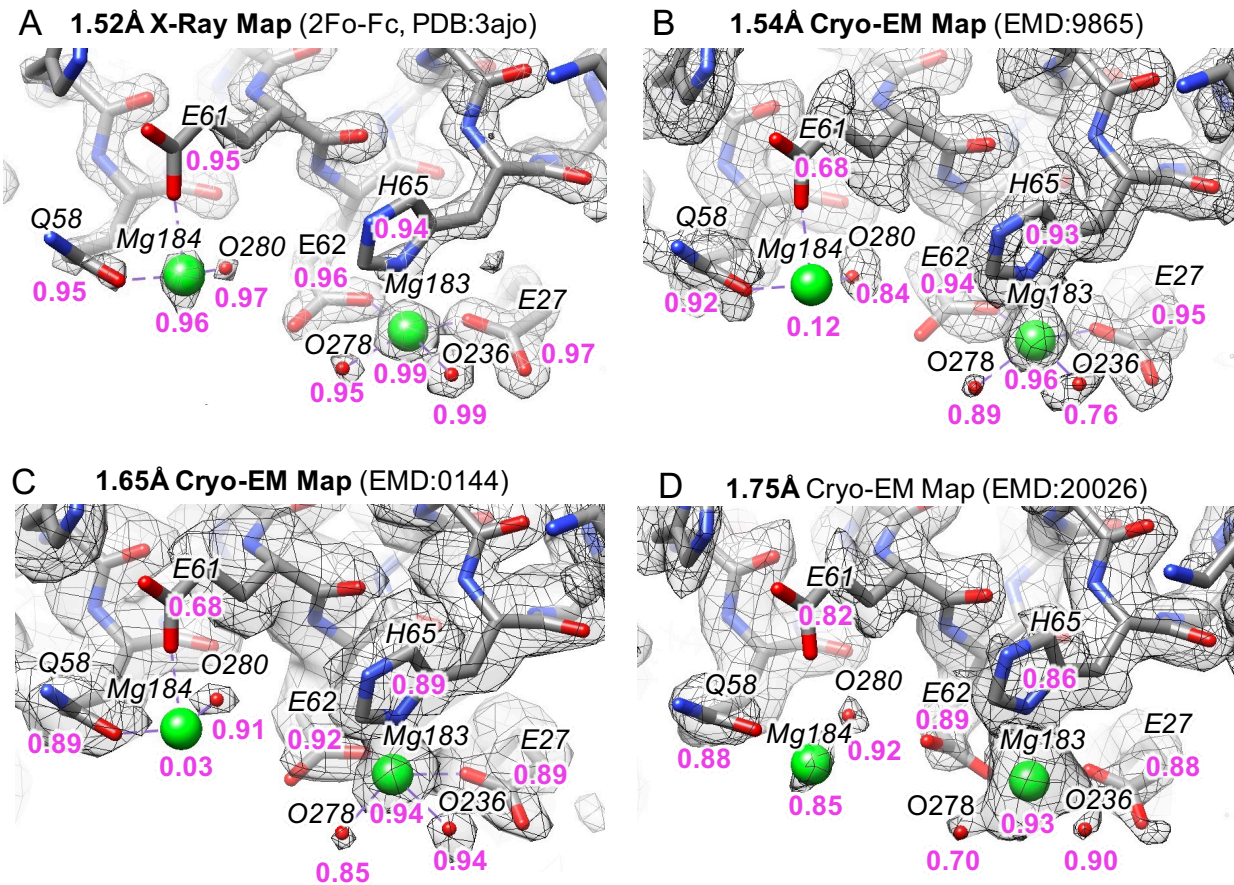
266

267 In this region of the map, the three water molecules shown in Figure 6 have high Q scores and  
268 observable map contours. Along with Mg183, these provide evidence that cryoEM structures can  
269 be used to identify locations of solvent molecules, much like with X-ray crystallography.

270 However, since Mg184 is only visible and has good Q-scores in only 2 of the 4 maps considered  
271 here, differences between the cryoEM and X-ray maps can also be seen. Such differences may be  
272 due to different affinities at some sites and/or different biochemical conditions across the  
273 different data sets.

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275



276

277 Figure 6. A close up in Apoferritin models showing solvent atoms (Mg and O from water), along with  
278 calculated Q-scores in purple under each atom and nearby residue. The model comes from the X-ray map  
279 (PDB:3ajo) shown in A. It was further refined into each of the three cryoEM maps, B-D.

280

281

282

283 Figure 7A shows distributions of Q-scores for solvent atoms in the X-ray map (PDB:3ajo). Most  
284 solvent atoms have very high Q-scores of 0.9 and higher. Visual inspection confirmed that all  
285 these solvent atoms can be seen in the X-ray map (2fo-*fc*), e.g. as shown in Figure 6A. Figure  
286 7B,C shows distribution plots for the same model fitted to the cryoEM maps at 1.54Å and 1.75Å  
287 resolution, using the rigidly fitted model and also after refinement (including solvent atoms) of  
288 the rigidly fitted model using Phenix real-space refine<sup>7</sup>.

289

290 For the rigidly fitted model, Q-scores of the solvent atoms are considerably lower than in the X-  
291 ray map (Figure 7B). For example, in the 1.75Å cryoEM map, only 12 O atoms from water have  
292 Q-scores of 0.9 and higher, and 32 have Q-scores of 0.8 to 0.9. In the 1.54Å map, 34 atoms have  
293 Q-scores of 0.9 and higher, and another 34 have Q-scores of 0.8 to 0.9. Thus, water atoms are  
294 less resolved in the cryoEM maps than in X-ray. It is possible that some of the solvent atoms  
295 seen in the X-ray model may not be resolvable in the cryoEM maps or may be in different  
296 positions.

297

298 To explore whether solvent atoms may have different positions in the cryoEM maps, Q-scores of  
299 the solvent atoms were also calculated in the X-ray model after real-space refinement with  
300 Phenix<sup>7</sup>. This refinement method moves solvent atoms towards higher map values, while keeping  
301 them within reasonable distance of other atoms. The distributions in the Q-scores for solvent  
302 atoms after this procedure are plotted in Figure 7B, C for the two cryoEM maps. Q-scores are  
303 now higher; 142 water atoms in the 1.54Å map and 145 atoms in the 1.75Å map have Q-scores  
304 of 0.8 and higher, compared to 225 water atoms in the X-ray map with Q-scores of 0.8 and  
305 higher.

306

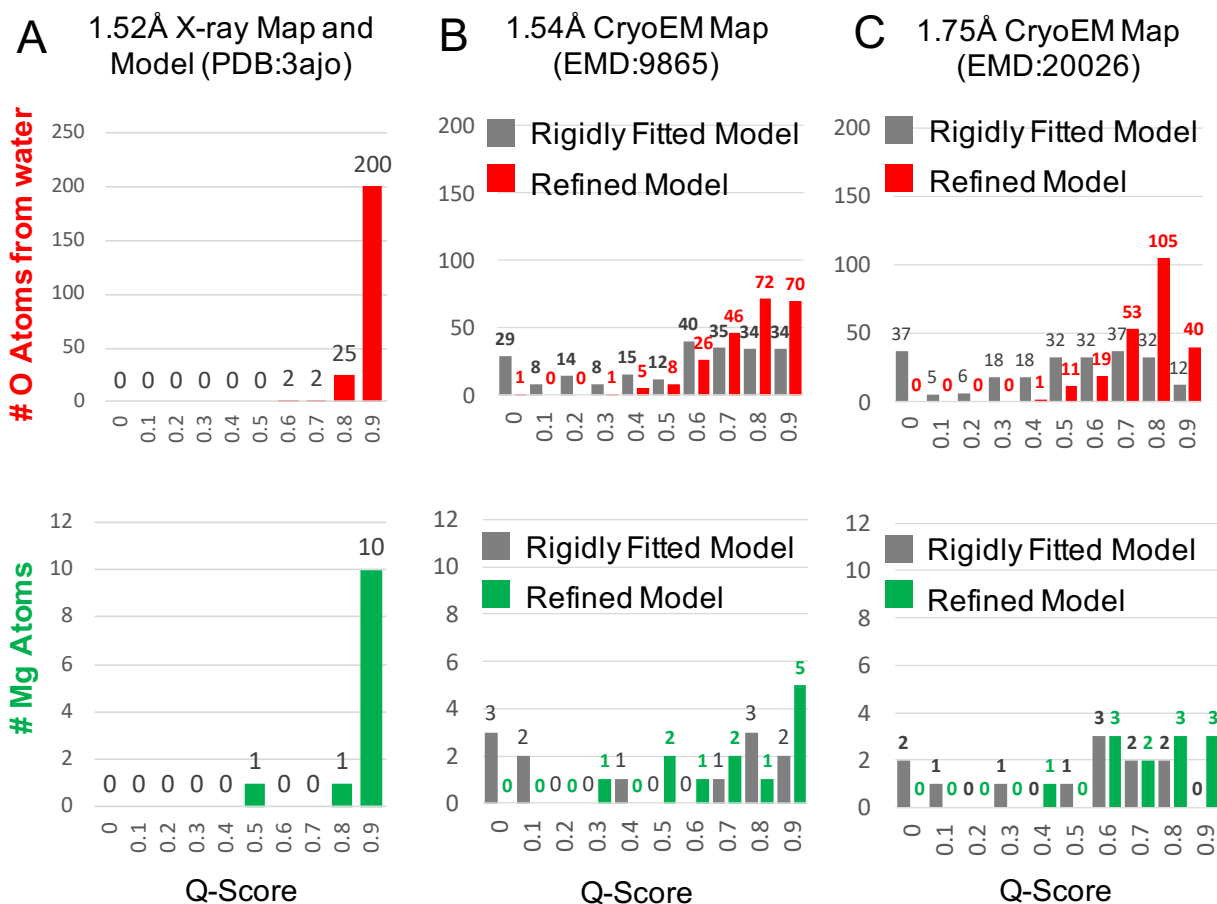
307 In the 1.54Å map, after refinement, water atoms with Q-scores 0.8 and higher moved between  
308 0.1Å and 2.2Å, on average 0.54Å. In the 1.75Å map, the water atoms with Q-scores of 0.8 and  
309 higher moved between 0.1Å and 1.6Å, on average 0.67Å. Although it is difficult to assess the  
310 exact cause of the movements in these maps, it is reasonable to conclude that the water found in  
311 cryoEM maps are real and potentially within experimental errors of their atom positions in both  
312 X-ray and cryoEM structures.

313

314 In the above analysis, the water molecules were based on those originally observed in the X-ray  
315 map. If one studies a *de novo* map, the identification of water molecules would require a protocol  
316 used in modeling software, e.g. Phenix and Coot. In addition to such a protocol, Q-scores may be  
317 used as an additional validation parameter to assist in the finding of water and ions.

318

319



320  
321 Figure 7. Distribution of Q-scores for solvent atoms (water and Mg) in X-ray map (PDB:3ajo), and in two  
322 cryoEM maps before and after refinement.  
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### 325 Radial Plots for Solvent Atoms

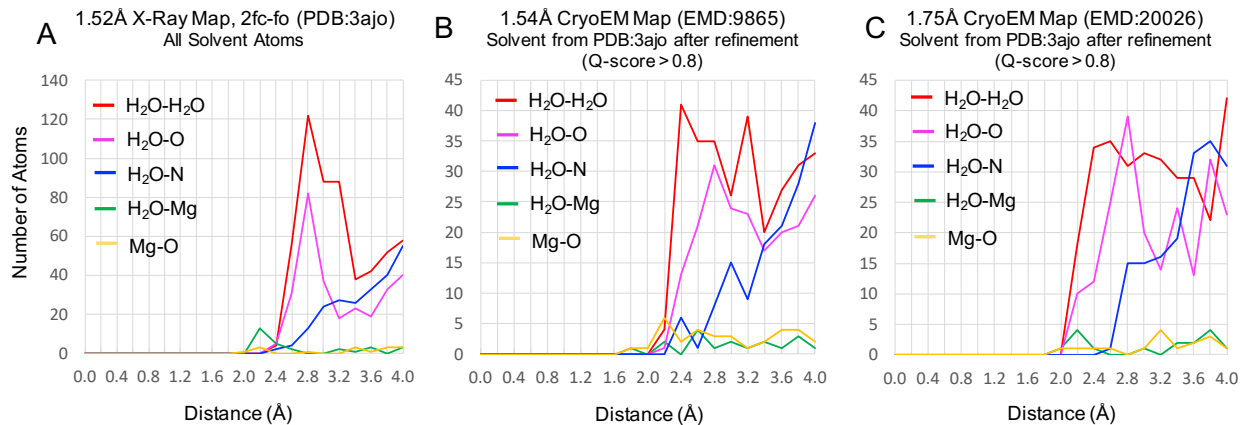
326

327 Radial plots in Figure 8 further characterize distances between solvent atoms (H<sub>2</sub>O and Mg) and  
328 other atoms including other water molecules (H<sub>2</sub>O-H<sub>2</sub>O), and also O and N atoms in protein,  
329 H<sub>2</sub>O-O and H<sub>2</sub>O-N respectively. The radial plot for the X-ray model of Apoferritin (PDB:3ajo) is  
330 shown in Figure 8A. This plot shows that H<sub>2</sub>O-H<sub>2</sub>O distances have a sharp peak at 2.8Å. A  
331 similar peak is seen for distances between O atoms in water and O atoms in protein (H<sub>2</sub>O-O).  
332 Distances from Mg atoms to H<sub>2</sub>O and to O have smaller peaks (since there are much fewer Mg  
333 atoms in the model) at a distance of 2.2Å.  
334

335

336 Radial plots for the X-ray model fitted to the 1.54Å and 1.75Å cryoEM maps are shown in  
337 Figure 8B, C, considering only solvent atoms with Q-scores of 0.8 and higher after refinement. A  
wider range H<sub>2</sub>O-H<sub>2</sub>O can be seen in both cases; instead of a sharp peak at 2.8Å, a broader peak

338 from  $\sim 2.4\text{\AA}$  up to  $\sim 3.2\text{\AA}$  can be seen. This seems to indicate that water-water distances in Cryo-  
339 EM may vary. On the other hand,  $\text{H}_2\text{O}-\text{O}$  still have a main peak at  $2.8\text{\AA}$  after refinement in both  
340 cryoEM maps, matching the peak seen in the X-ray map. Thus,  $\text{H}_2\text{O}-\text{O}$  distances are very similar  
341 in X-ray and cryoEM maps in these examples, however the differences in  $\text{H}_2\text{O}-\text{H}_2\text{O}$  distances  
342 suggests that there may be a difference in water organization around protein in cryoEM vs X-ray  
343 maps.  
344  
345  
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347  
348 Figure 8. Radial plots of distances from solvent atoms to other types of atoms. Oxygen atoms in water are  
349 labeled  $\text{H}_2\text{O}$ , whereas oxygen/nitrogen atoms in protein are labeled O/N respectively.  
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### 352 Q-scores of Solvent Atoms at different resolutions

353

354 Finally, we looked at the resolvability and Q-scores of solvent atoms in cryoEM maps of  
355 Apoferritin at different resolutions, as shown in Figure 9. The locations of the solvent atoms are  
356 again taken from the X-ray model (PDB:3ajo). As Figure 9 shows, Mg183 appears resolved at  
357 both  $1.75\text{\AA}$  and  $2.3\text{\AA}$ , with separable contours in both maps and high Q-scores (0.93 and 0.80).  
358 However, the contours no longer have a symmetric spherical shape, indicating possibly more  
359 variation in its position. In the  $3.1\text{\AA}$  map, the contour is no longer separable from that of the  
360 nearby His65 residue, and the Q-score is also considerably lower (0.60). The water atoms are  
361 similarly resolved in the  $1.75\text{\AA}$  and  $2.3\text{\AA}$  maps and contours around them can be seen, however  
362 at  $3.1\text{\AA}$  and  $3.9\text{\AA}$  they can no longer be seen and Q-scores become very low (-0.44 to 0.38).  
363

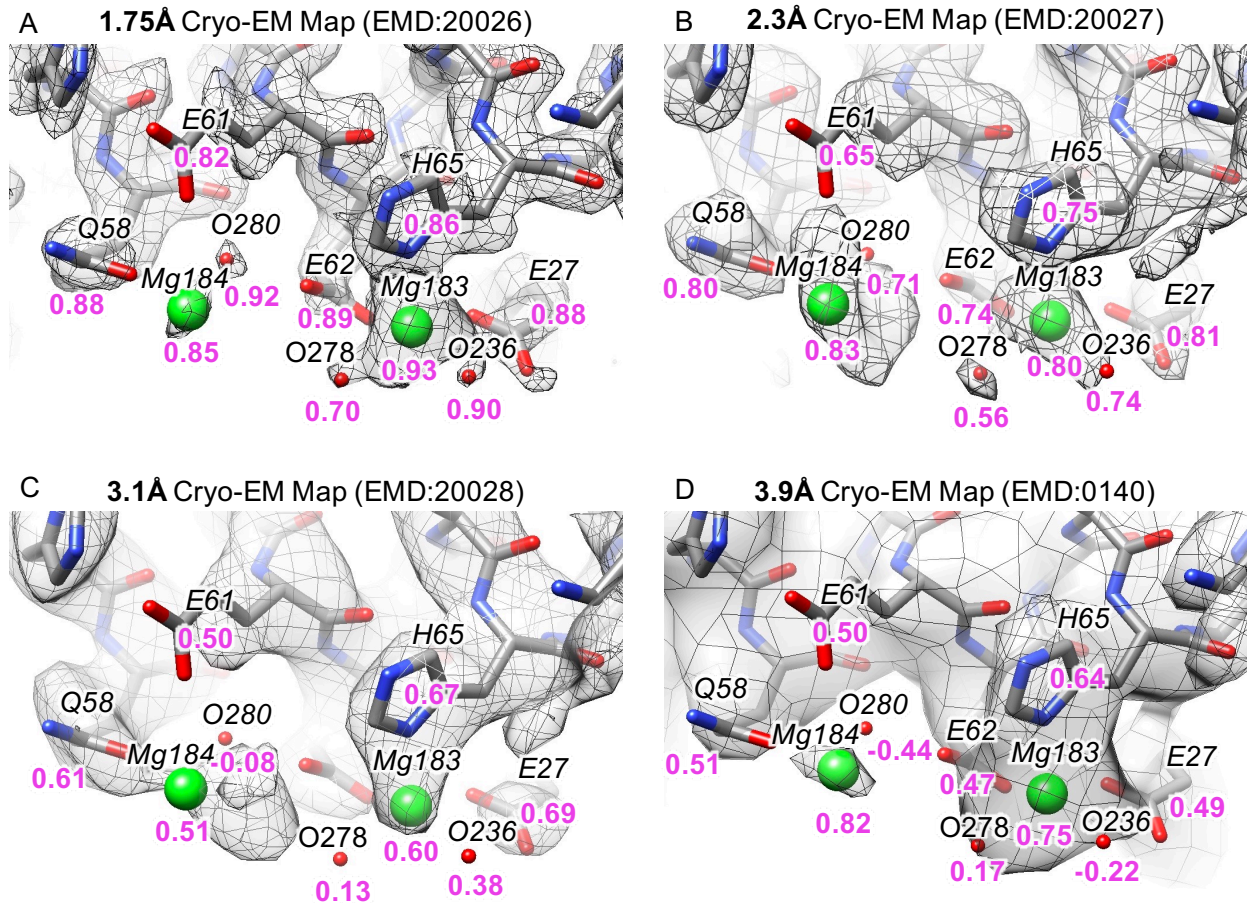
364

365 At  $3.9\text{\AA}$  resolution, both Mg atoms still have high Q-scores and thus high map values around  
366 them, and they can be seen at a lower threshold. However, the map contours at these thresholds  
367 do not necessarily separate them fully from the nearby residues (as again for Mg183).

368 Nevertheless, even at such lower resolutions ( $3\text{\AA}-4\text{\AA}$ ), it appears that the larger solvent atoms  
369 can still significantly influence the cryoEM map values, producing strong though more diffuse



369 peaks in the map. This may have some implications when creating or refining models in such  
370 maps. Perhaps placement of solvent atoms should be considered for the model to be accurately  
371 created and/or refined.  
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375 Figure 9. Solvent atoms from X-ray model (PDB:3ajo) in cryoEM maps at resolutions of 1.75Å to 3.9Å.  
376 Q-scores are shown in purple below each atom. Nearby residues with Q-scores are also labeled (Q58,  
377 E61, E62, H65, E27).

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380 **Conclusions**

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382 Q-scores can measure the resolvability of individual atoms in cryoEM maps, using atomic  
383 positions and nearby map values. As was noted, this metric is closely related to the map-model  
384 cross-correlation score, which is already widely used in the field to assess the fit of a model to a  
385 map. However, the Q-score improves in two ways on the cross-correlation score: 1) it is  
386 formulated so that it correlates to the resolution of the map and 2) it makes it applicable to small  
387 features (individual atoms) while avoiding explicit masking. Aside from this, it is important to

388 note that nothing is assumed about the model itself, e.g. whether it has good stereochemistry; this  
389 could be deduced with other scores such as the Molprobity score<sup>20</sup>.

390

391 Q-scores averaged over entire models were shown to correlate very well with the reported  
392 resolution of cryoEM maps containing both proteins and nucleic acids. Various visualizations  
393 also showed that Q-scores indeed correlate well with the resolvability of individual atoms, and  
394 also groups of atoms such as side chains. However, it still requires a model to first be fitted to or  
395 built based on the cryoEM map. The score can be very useful to analyze the map and its  
396 resolvability in different regions, and also test whether the model accurately interprets the map. It  
397 could thus be useful as a map-model validation metric.

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399 In this paper, several quantifiable observations were made with the help of Q-scores. For  
400 example, when applied to atoms in protein side chains, the Q-score showed that resolvability of  
401 certain types of side chains (Asp) drop faster than others (Asn) as a function of resolution. In the  
402 case of nucleic acids, per-nucleotide Q-scores could be used to indicate whether stacked bases  
403 are separable. Finally, Q-scores were also applied to water and other solvent atoms, helping to  
404 confirm that water and other solvent atoms can indeed be resolved and placed in cryoEM maps  
405 much as they are in X-ray crystallography.

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## 408 **Experimental Methods**

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410 Data: all the data for the analysis were drawn from EMDB and PDB. The EMDB 20026, 20027,  
411 20028 maps were collected in Titan Krios electron microscope (Thermo Fisher) at 300 keV  
412 equipped with BioQuantum energy filter and K2 director detector (Gatan). Images were recorded  
413 in movie mode and corrected prior to image processing with Relion software<sup>17</sup>. The map  
414 resolution was estimated from two independent maps with a total of 70,000 particle images  
415 recorded less than 10 hours.

416

417 Q-score calculation is implemented as a plugin to UCSF chimera, and is available from the  
418 following website: <https://cryoem.slac.stanford.edu/ncmi/resources/software>.

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422

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### Author contributions

G.P. conceived Q-scores, implemented the software and performed all the testing. W.C. came up with the term “Q-score”. K.Z. collected the images and reconstructed the maps (EMDB: 20026, 20027, 20028). Z.S. and S.L. provided additional data (not shown) for testing the Q-score. M.F.S. and W.C. contributed the discussion during the development. G.P. wrote the manuscript with inputs from other authors.

### Tables

Table 1. Maps from EMDB for which Q-scores of protein components are calculated for the plot in Figure 5A. The table on the left shows the original maps used in the original EMRinger analysis<sup>15</sup>. The table on the right contains a new set of maps of Apoferritin and  $\beta$ -galactosidase.

	EMD ID	Resolution	Q-score	EMRinger
1	2273	4.5	0.317	0.13
2	2278	3.5	0.429	3.26
3	2364	4.4	0.315	-0.47
4	2513	3.36	0.559	1.29
5	2677	4.5	0.260	-0.41
6	2762	3.4	0.485	2.09
7	2763	4	0.348	0.54
8	2764	3.75	0.384	0.9
9	2773	3.8	0.287	0.36
10	2787	3.4	0.469	1.85
11	2788	4.7	0.327	1.27
12	5160	3.2	0.515	2.18
13	5256	3.1	0.531	1.54
14	5391	4.9	0.216	0.2
15	5600	4.1	0.339	0.18
16	5623	3.2	0.558	3.05
17	5645	4.6	0.188	-0.05
18	5646	4.7	0.154	0.55
19	5678	4.5	0.357	0.49
20	5764	3.5	0.510	1.95
21	5778	3.27	0.335	0.56

	EMD ID	Resolution	Q-score	EMRinger
1	9865	1.54	0.850	8.22
2	9599	1.62	0.866	8.19
2	0144	1.65	0.854	8.14
3	20026	1.75	0.811	7.09
4	10101	1.84	2.814	8.44
5	0153	1.89	0.723	5.55
6	7770	1.9	0.713	5.41
7	9890	1.9	0.819	7.53
8	9914	2.01	0.843	7.21
9	4905	2.1	0.830	4.18
10	2984	2.2	0.620	3.58
11	4116	2.2	0.691	5.00
12	4415	2.2	0.691	4.38
13	8908	2.2	0.693	5.02
14	20027	2.32	0.750	5.53
15	4414	2.4	0.677	4.16
16	6480	2.6	0.638	3.99
17	4701	2.7	0.674	3.53
18	20227	2.85	0.484	1.55
19	20028	3.08	0.598	3.67
20	3854	3.15	0.661	4.61

22	5830	3.8	0.383	1.05
23	5886	5	0.340	0.8
24	5895	4.7	0.269	0.09
25	5896	5	0.246	0.06
26	5925	3.6	0.390	1.23
27	5995	3.2	0.540	2.04
28	6000	3.8	0.479	2.08
29	6035	3.5	0.461	0.96
30	6187	5	0.189	-0.71
31	6188	5	0.179	-0.16

21	5995	3.2	0.544	3.60
22	0140	3.9	0.482	3.44
23	2824	4.2	0.382	1.30

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447 Table 2. Maps from EMDB containing RNA for which Q-scores vs. resolution are plotted in

448 Figure 5B.

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	<b>EMD ID</b>	<b>PDB File</b>	<b>Resolution</b>	<b>Q-score</b>
1	7025	6az3-pdb-bundle2	2.5	0.699649
2	7025	6az3-pdb-bundle1	2.5	0.703164
3	8361	5t5h-pdb-bundle1	2.54	0.675016
4	0243	6hma	2.65	0.656016
5	7024	6az1	2.7	0.656345
6	6583	3jcs-pdb-bundle1	2.8	0.573334
7	20173	6ore-pdb-bundle1	2.9	0.615376
8	4638	6qul	3	0.649598
9	0600	6ole-pdb-bundle3	3	0.618584
10	0233	6hiz-pdb-bundle1	3.08	0.655904
11	4560	6qik-pdb-bundle1	3.1	0.606439
1	10068	6rzz-pdb-bundle1	3.2	0.584933
2	0101	6gzq-pdb-bundle1	3.28	0.564434
3	4125	5lze-pdb-bundle1	3.5	0.497689
4	4125	5lze-pdb-bundle2	3.5	0.538745
5	2938	4ug0-pdb-bundle1	3.6	0.54117
6	2938	4ug0-pdb-bundle2	3.6	0.503634
7	6559	3jcj-pdb-bundle1	3.7	0.471255
8	6559	3jcj-pdb-bundle2	3.7	0.421646
9	8620	5uyq-pdb-bundle1	3.8	0.42095
10	8620	5uyq-pdb-bundle2	3.8	0.426834
11	0076	6gwt-pdb-bundle2	3.8	0.417034
12	0076	6gwt-pdb-bundle1	3.8	0.411493

13	0192	6hcf-pdb-bundle2	3.9	0.524457
14	0192	6hcf-pdb-bundle1	3.9	0.506735
15	0192	6hcf-pdb-bundle3	3.9	0.408919
16	8279	5kps-pdb-bundle2	3.9	0.43481
17	8279	5kps-pdb-bundle1	3.9	0.437756
18	8618	5uyn-pdb-bundle2	4	0.383391
19	8618	5uyn-pdb-bundle1	4	0.385951
20	4080	5lmu	4	0.428174
21	2763	3j81_real_space_refined	4	0.453
22	2763	3j81	4	0.402465
23	4350	6g51	4.1	0.426988
24	8280	5kpv-pdb-bundle1	4.1	0.435967
25	8280	5kpv-pdb-bundle2	4.1	0.43031
26	643	6o7k	4.2	0.395112
27	20188	6ost-pdb-bundle1	4.2	0.3981
28	4382	6gc7	4.3	0.339055
29	0083	6gxp-pdb-bundle1	4.4	0.331033
30	4349	6g4w	4.5	0.311581
31	3133	5ady	4.5	0.361631
32	4351	6g53	4.5	0.338915
33	0104	6gzx-pdb-bundle1	4.57	0.356781
34	4083	5lmv	4.9	0.228577
35	3553	5mrf-pdb-bundle1	4.97	0.349647
36	8473	5tzs	5.1	0.183097
37	3661	5no2	5.16	0.326795
38	3662	5no3	5.16	0.310096
39	4122	5lzb-pdb-bundle1	5.3	0.28398
40	4427	6i7o-pdb-bundle1	5.3	0.292207
41	4075	5lmp	5.35	0.282151

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