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### Preparation and investigation on properties of lysozyme chemically bonded to single-walled carbon nanotubes

Zahra Borzooeian<sup>a</sup>; Afsaneh Safavi<sup>b</sup>; Mohammad Hossain Sheikhi<sup>c</sup>; Mahmood Aminlari<sup>a</sup>; Mohammad Mahdi Doroodmand<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Department of Biochemistry, School of Veterinary Medicine, Shiraz University, Shiraz 71345, Iran <sup>b</sup>

Department of Chemistry, College of Science, Shiraz University, Shiraz 71454, Iran <sup>c</sup> Nanotechnology Research Institute, Shiraz University, Shiraz, Iran

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## Preparation and investigation on properties of lysozyme chemically bonded to single-walled carbon nanotubes

Zahra Borzooeian<sup>a\*</sup>, Afsaneh Safavi<sup>b</sup>, Mohammad Hossain Sheikhic,  
Mahmood Aminlari<sup>a</sup> and Mohammad Mahdi Doroodmand<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Department of Biochemistry, School of Veterinary Medicine, Shiraz University, Shiraz 71345, Iran; <sup>b</sup>Department of Chemistry, College of Science, Shiraz University, Shiraz 71454, Iran; <sup>c</sup>Nanotechnology Research Institute, Shiraz University, Shiraz, Iran

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The purpose of this research is the preparation of a lysozyme-single-walled carbon nanotube (SWCNT) conjugate and investigation of the effect of conjugation on the structure and function of lysozyme. At first, SWCNTs were functionalised by oxygen and lysozyme was coupled to the SWCNTs by carbodiimide method. The high chemical stability of conjugation was purposed for the SWCNTs conjugated enzyme as approved by Fourier transform infrared (FT-IR) spectroscopy, transmission electron microscopy (TEM) images, agarose gel electrophoresis and X-ray diffraction (XRD) patterns. The degree of conjugation was determined by thermogravimetric analysis (TGA) process. The results showed no significant differences between the XRD patterns of the native lysozyme and conjugated lysozyme–SWCNTs and these indicated excellent capacity of the SWCNTs to conjugated enzyme. The gel electrophoresis studies and TEM image confirmed the covalent attachment of the enzyme to the functionalised SWCNTs. These results revealed that the enzyme retain a high fraction of their native structure and activity upon attachment to SWCNTs. Therefore, this conjugated protein represents novel preparations that make it an attractive choice as a natural antimicrobial agent.

**Keywords:** lysozyme; single-walled carbon nanotubes; enzyme conjugation

### 1. Introduction

During recent decades, the bioapplications of carbon nanostructures have been predicted and explored ever since the discovery of one-dimensional carbon allotropes. Among carbon nanostructures, carbon nanotubes (CNTs) with unique properties have been considered as an interesting nanomaterial due to their potential use in a variety of biological and biomedical systems and nanoscale devices. Their fantastic properties have caused the CNTs to be applicable in different branches of science including their use as nanobiocatalysts, a vehicle for enzyme encapsulation [1], DNA transfection [2–4], drug delivery [5–7] and biosensors [8–10].

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\*Corresponding author. Email: zborzooeian50@gmail.com; borzooian@shirazu.ac.ir

Recently, rapid developments in the application of CNTs as biosensor and bioreactor systems have been activated. The performance of these nanoscale biosensors and bioreactor devices has been driven via immobilisation of biological materials such as proteins and enzymes either in the hollow cavity or on the surface of CNTs [11,12].

However, a lot of important bioapplications of enzymes conjugated with CNT bundles rely on the interfacing effects of enzymes with the CNT matrix, the stability of the native structure and also the biological activity of enzymes, immobilised on the nanoscale supports are considered as serious challenge for the supported proteins and enzymes [13–23]. To solve this problem, it is necessary to control the biological activity of enzymes and also, large amounts of enzyme molecules are needed to be strongly coupled to the CNT bundles.

Both physical and chemical absorption processes have been reported for binding the enzymes on the nanoscale supports. Both covalent [15,16,24,25] and noncovalent bonds [13,14,18–22] have been reported for the attachment of enzymes to the CNT matrix. Despite considerable progresses in the preparation of CNT–protein conjugates, few studies have yielded detailed information on the structure and function of enzymes attached to CNTs [18,19].

Among different forms of enzymes, lysozyme (EC 3.2.1.17, mucopeptide, *N*-acetyl muramic hydrolase) is considered a natural antimicrobial protein that is of widespread distribution in avian eggs, mammalian milk, tears and other secretions, insects and fish [26]. The conjugate of SWCNTs with chicken egg white lysozyme was found to be soluble in aqueous solutions [27]). Silica nanotubes have been used as enzyme immobilisation carriers. The immobilisation profiles are described by the adsorption of lysozyme molecules from an aqueous solution onto the hydrophilic silica surface [28].

In this research, lysozyme is selected as a representative enzyme to study its chemical attachment to the SWCNTs. The structure and catalytic activities of the attached lysozyme are studied by FT-IR spectroscopy, TEM images, agarose gel electrophoresis, XRD patterns and TGA analysis to further evaluate the performance of SWCNTs as micro-reactors for enzyme immobilisation.

## 2. Experimental

### 2.1. Materials

Lyophilised chicken egg white lysozyme (EC 3.2.1.17) were purchased from Inovatech Inc., (Abbotsford, BC, Canada). *Micrococcus lysodeikticus* cells were provided by Sigma (St. Louis, MO, USA) as salt-free, dry powders and were used without further purification. Highly purified activated SWCNTs were synthesised by the chemical vapour deposition (CVD) process. Ferrocene was prepared by Merck, Darmstadt, Germany and MES [2-(*N*-morpholino)ethanesulfonic acid] buffer, *N*-ethyl-*N'*-(3-(dimethylamino)propyl) carbodiimide hydrochloride (EDC) and all other chemicals were purchased from Sigma and used as received.

### 2.2. Synthesis of SWCNTs

Highly purified (99%) aligned activated SWCNTs with a 50 nm internal diameter were synthesised by a CVD instrumentation system at a temperature of around 1300°C in argon

as an inert atmosphere using acetylene gas (Pars Balloon, Iran) as a source of carbon and ferrocene as a source of catalyst. The raw SWCNTs were then purified, end-opened and finally activated by oxygen. The activated SWCNT bundles were then used as an appropriate support for the modification with lysozyme.

### 2.3. Enzyme attachment onto SWCNTs

Conjugated lysozyme–SWCNTs solution was prepared by carbodiimide method [27] with modifications in some steps. To attach the enzyme onto the SWCNTs, about 1.0 mg of oxygen-treated SWCNTs were dispersed into 1.0 ml of 50 mM of MES [2-(*N*-morpholino) ethanesulfonic acid] buffer solution at a pH of 6.2. Equal volumes of *N*-hydroxy succinimide (NHS) in MES buffer (400 mM) was then added to the mixture. Afterwards, the mixture was sonicated (MSE Ultrasonic Disintegrators, 150 W, England) for around 30 min, along with the addition of 20 mM *N*-ethyl-*N'*-(3-(dimethyl amino)propyl) carbodiimide hydrochloride (EDC) to start the coupling of NHS to the carboxylic functional groups on the oxidised SWCNTs. After stirring at 200 rpm for 30 min, the resulting mixture was centrifuged at 7000 rpm for 15 min.

The suspension was then removed followed by the addition of MES buffer to the remaining precipitate. The centrifuge steps were repeated three times to remove excess EDC and NHS. The enzyme solution (10 mg/ml, 10 mM phosphate buffer, pH 8) was added to the rinsed nanotubes and sonicated for ca. 1 min to redisperse the SWCNTs. The mixture was then shaken at room temperature in an orbital shaker at 200 rpm during the conjugation of the enzyme with SWCNTs.

The SWCNT–enzyme suspension was then centrifuged and washed three times with triply distilled water and once with 1% (v/v) Tween-20 to completely remove all nonspecifically adsorbed enzyme. Control nanotube–enzyme conjugates were prepared using the same procedure in the absence of EDC and NHS.

### 2.4. Characterisations of nanotube–enzyme

The morphology of lysozyme supported on SWCNT bundles was compared with that of pure SWCNTs using TEM (Philips, CM10, 100 kV). For this purpose, the water suspension of 6% enzyme on SWCNTs was first sonicated for ca. 5 min to prepare a homogenous suspension. Then, one drop of the mixture was placed on a formvar-covered copper grid and the solvent was allowed to evaporate in air, at room temperature, using a 100 W tungsten lamp and was observed through the TEM. The patterned XRD was performed using XRD (D8, IIIV, Advance, Bruker, AXS) at  $\lambda = 0.1542$  nm. The amount of bound lysozyme was determined by measuring the unbound protein content in the supernatant after the binding process by using a spectrophotometer (ULTEROSPEC PLUS, Pharmacia LKB Biotechnology, Sweden) (scan demo, 200–500 nm). The chemical binding stability of lysozyme onto the SWCNTs was characterised using a FT-IR spectrometer (8300 Shimadzu). A lab-made TG analyser was also used to evaluate the binding efficiency.

### 2.5. Lysozyme activity

Lysozyme activity was assayed by the lysis of *M. lysodeikticus* cell walls consistent with the method of Imoto and Yagishita [29]. Nine milligrams of dried *M. lysodeikticus* cell walls

were dissolved in 25 ml of 0.1 M potassium phosphate buffer (pH 7.0) and diluted to a final volume of 30 ml with the same buffer. Lysozyme or conjugated lysozyme at a concentration of 1 mg of protein/ml was dissolved in cold distilled water. The cell wall suspension (2.9 ml) was poured into a cuvette and incubated at 25°C for 4–5 min to achieve temperature equilibration. The enzyme solution (0.1 ml) was added to the cuvette, and the change in absorbance at 450 nm was then recorded. One unit of activity of lysozyme is defined as the decrease in the absorbance at 450 nm of 0.001/min at pH 7.0 and 25°C using *M. lysodeikticus* cells as a substrate.

### 3. Results and discussion

#### 3.1. Binding efficiency

To have an enzyme with maximum activity, supporting the enzyme on nanomaterials seems to be effective. Maintaining the native structure and function of bound lysozyme is an important aspect of its immobilisation and it has a strong influence on the reproducibility of antimicrobial and industrial applications of lysozyme. In this research, to increase the chemical attachment of the enzyme to the SWCNTs, several parameters were optimised and conjugated processes were achieved with a 1 mg enzyme to 1 mg SWCNTs ratio and the remaining enzyme activity was about 87.5%. The spectroscopic results of the unbound protein assay in the supernatant after the binding process showed that almost all the enzyme was attached to SWCNTs (Figure 1(a) and (b)). As shown in Figure 1(b), after loading the enzyme to SWCNTs, no peak was observed at 280 nm, and this shows that all of the lysozyme was bound when added to the same amount of SWCNTs.

#### 3.2. Enzyme activity

The enzyme was attached onto the surface of oxygen-oxidised SWCNTs using carbodiimide activation of the nanotube-bound carboxylic acid groups. Standard kinetic assays suggested that lysozyme retained a high percentage of its native solution activity, 87% (Figure 2). The control sample (lysozyme exposed to oxidised SWCNTs in the absence of EDC and NHS) showed less than 3% of the activity of the covalently attached SWCNT–lysozyme conjugate, suggesting that the least nonspecific adsorption of lysozyme onto oxidised SWCNTs had occurred.

In addition, in this study, the conjugation process of lysozyme on 4% and 6% functionalised SWCNTs was studied. The complete binding of lysozyme with the activated SWCNTs was also approved by using thermograms shown in Figure 3. The TG analysis shows the percent of the conjugated lysozyme as well as the activation percent.

#### 3.3. Agarose gel electrophoresis, TEM and XRD studies

Before electrophoresis, samples were washed several times with a phosphate buffer (10 mM, pH 8) to remove any physically adsorbed enzyme. The results of agarose gel electrophoresis of native lysozyme and conjugated lysozyme–SWCNTs are shown in Figure 4. Significant brightness of the lane 5, conjugated lysozyme–SWCNTs, in comparison with that of the control is considered as good evidence for the covalent

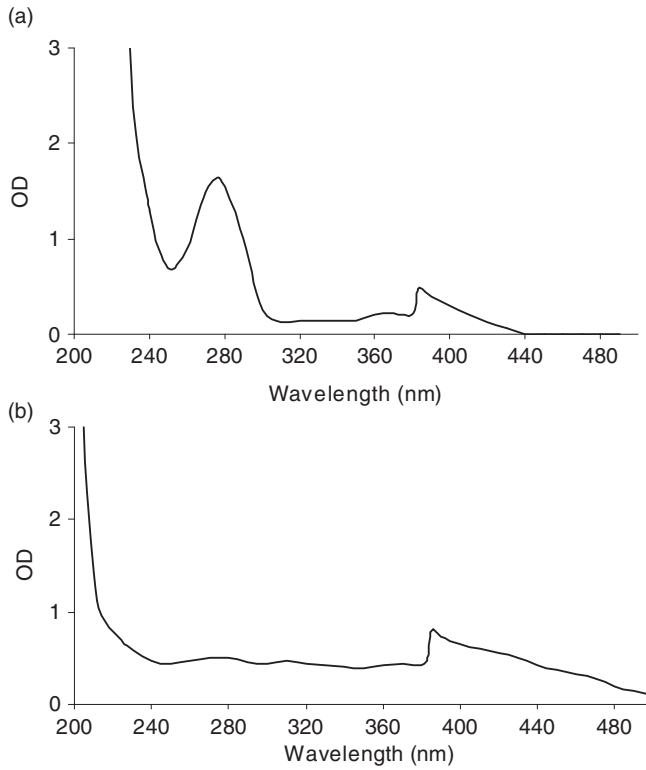


Figure 1. Scan demo spectra of (a) native enzyme solution and (b) supernatant of conjugated lysozyme-SWCNTs solution.

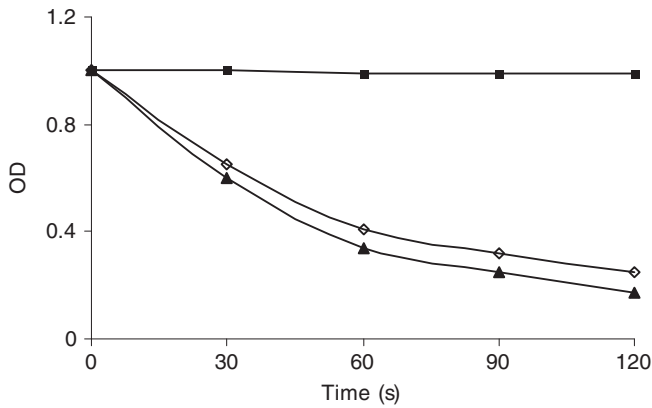


Figure 2. Comparison of native lysozyme (▲), conjugated lysozyme-SWCNTs (◇) and control solution activity (■).

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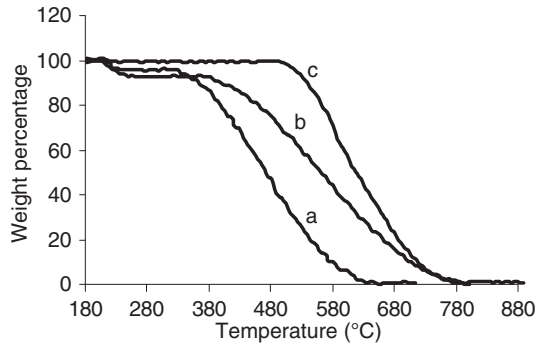


Figure 3. TGA measuring of (a) 4% functionalised SWCNTs, (b) 6% functionalised SWCNTs and (c) highly purified aligned SWCNTs.

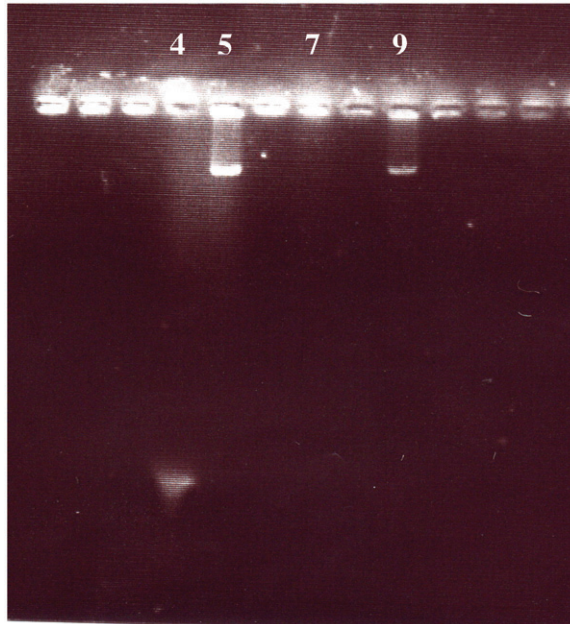


Figure 4. Agarose gel electrophoresis. Lane 4: native enzyme; lane 5: conjugated lysozyme-SWCNTs; lane 7: SWCNTs; lane 9: control.

bond between the lysozyme and SWCNTs. The weak brightness of control also indicates the slight adsorption of the enzyme to SWCNTs.

The covalent bond in conjugated lysozyme-SWCNTs was confirmed with XRD patterned and TEM images. According to the XRD patterns, the strong peaks of the purified SWCNTs and conjugated lysozyme correspond to the (002), (100) and (101) planes of carbon [30].



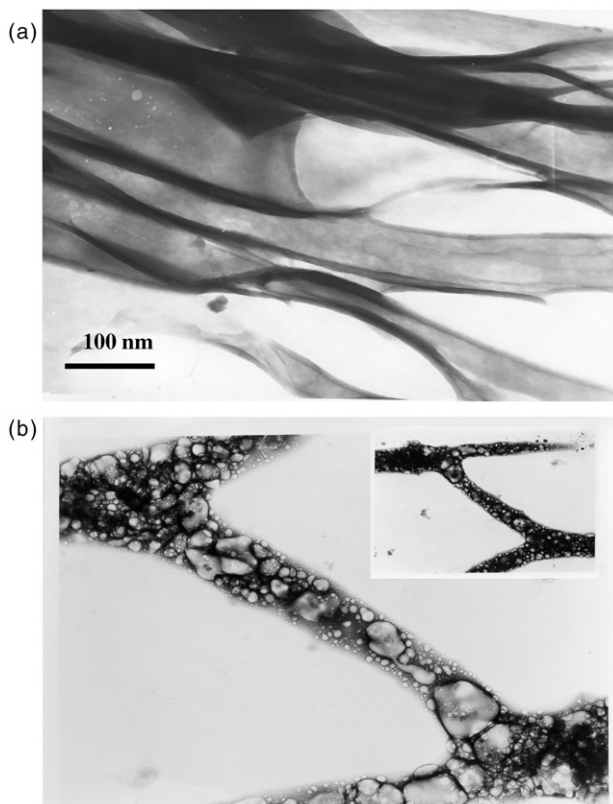


Figure 5. TEM images of carbon nanotubes (a) without and (b) with bound lysozyme. Lysozyme/SWCNTs = 1 mg/1 mg (w/w); magnification: 45,000.

The typical micrographs for SWCNTs with and without bound lysozyme are shown in TEM images (Figure 5). It is clear that the SWCNTs are essentially very smooth and Y shaped with a mean diameter of 50 nm. After binding the lysozyme, as shown in Figure 4(b), an agglomeration of enzyme is seen on the surface of SWCNTs and also in the holes of SWCNTs.

### 3.4. Mechanism of binding or FT-IR analyses

Figure 7 shows the FT-IR spectra recorded for native lysozyme (curve (a)), the SWCNTs (curve (b)) and lysozyme-immobilised on SWCNTs (curve (c)). The amide linkages between amino acid residues in polypeptides and protein provides the well known fingerprints from the FT-IR spectrum, exhibiting the character of those substances [31]. The positions of the amide type I and II bands in the FT-IR spectra of proteins are sensitive indicators of the conformational changes in the proteins secondary structure [32] and have been used in studies to investigate the immobilised enzyme molecules. The FT-IR spectra of the pure SWCNTs functionalised with carboxylic acid and also that of pure



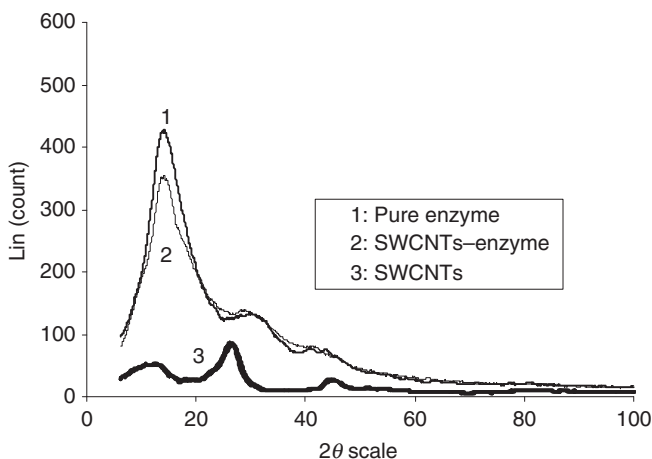


Figure 6. XRD patterns of (1) naked lysozyme, (2) conjugated lysozyme–SWCNTs and (3) SWCNTs without bound lysozyme.

lysozyme are shown in Figure 7(a) and (b). As shown in Figure 7(b), the peak at around  $1616\text{ cm}^{-1}$  is related to the carboxyl group in SWCNTs. The absence of this peak in the case of conjugated enzyme–SWCNT reveals the participation of a carboxyl group in lysozyme–SWCNT chemical bonding (Figure 7(c)).

A broad, strong  $\text{NH}_3$  stretching band in the  $3100\text{--}2600\text{ cm}^{-1}$  region is characteristic for amino acids. The absence of these extended and their peaks in Figure 7(c) reveals a decrease of amine groups in the conjugated enzyme and it confirms the incorporation of the amine groups in the formation of amide bond type II.

Multiple combination and overtone bands extend the absorption to about  $2000\text{ cm}^{-1}$ . This overtone region usually contains a prominent band near  $2222\text{--}2000\text{ cm}^{-1}$  assigned to a combination of asymmetrical  $\text{NH}_3^+$  bending vibrations and the torsional oscillation of the  $\text{NH}_3^+$  group [33]. The  $2000\text{ cm}^{-1}$  band is absent if the nitrogen atom of the amino acid is substituted. The significant decrease in the transmittance intensity in Figure 7(c) indicates the decrease of the amino group in the conjugated enzyme.

Also, weak asymmetric  $\text{NH}_3^+$  bending bands are near  $1660\text{--}1610\text{ cm}^{-1}$  and fairly strong symmetric bending bands are near  $1550\text{--}1485\text{ cm}^{-1}$  [33].

The decrease of intensity of peak 2200 and 1661 in Figure 7(c) indicates the absence of amine groups in the conjugated enzyme.

On the other hand, primary amides and secondary amides display a band in the region of  $1650\text{--}1515\text{ cm}^{-1}$  primarily due to  $\text{NH}_2$  or  $\text{NH}$  bending: the amide type II band. This adsorption involves coupling between N–H bending and other fundamental vibrations and requires a trans configuration [33].

Out-of-plane NH wagging in amides is responsible for a broadband of medium intensity in the  $800\text{--}666\text{ cm}^{-1}$  region. Surprisingly, an increase of these peaks related to only the type II amide was displayed in accordance with the FT-IR spectrum of the lysozyme-functionalised SWCNTs, as shown in Figure 7(a) and (c).

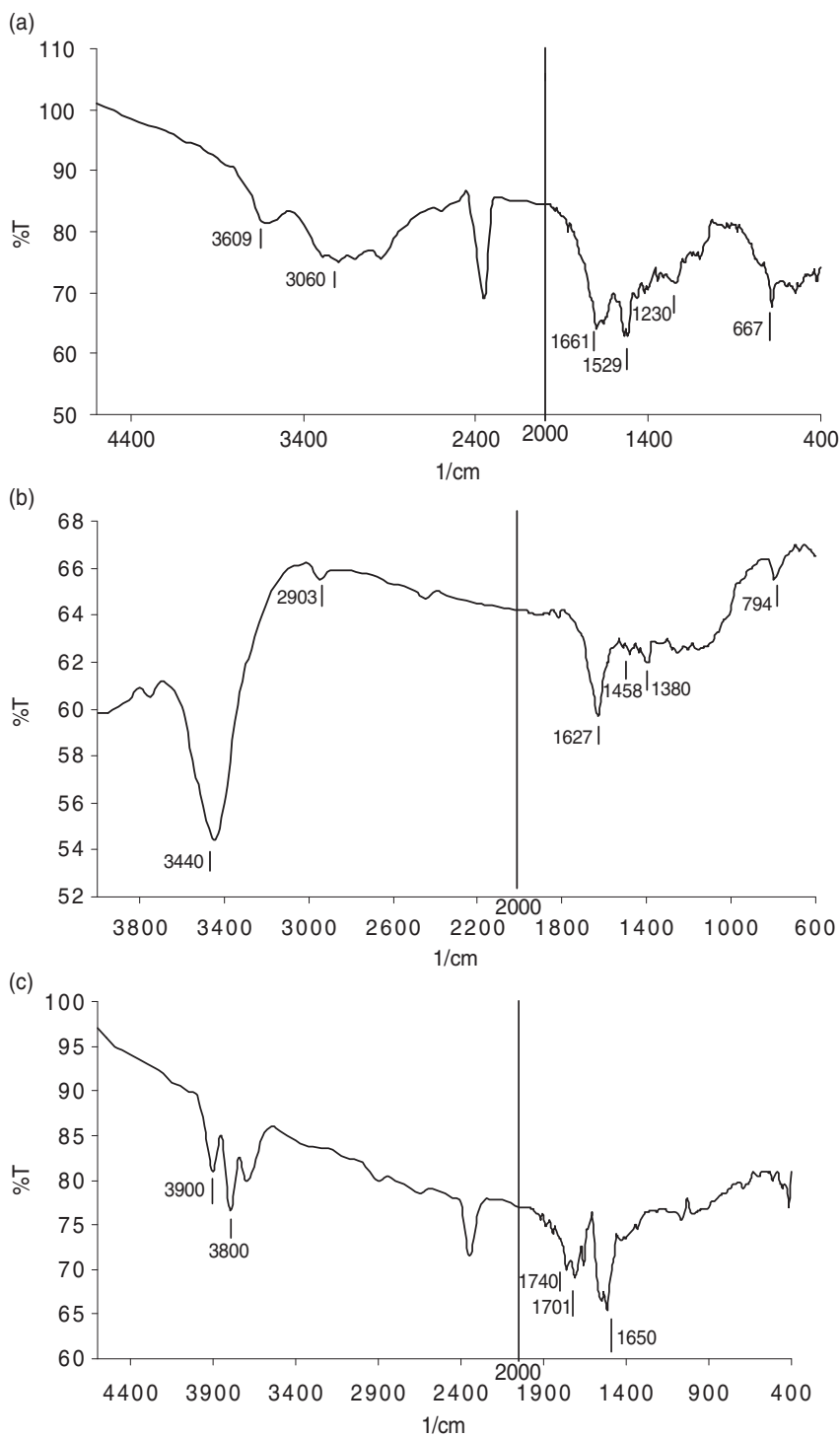


Figure 7. FT-IR spectra of (a) native enzyme, (b) SWCNTs and (c) attached lysozyme-SWCNTs.

#### 4. Conclusions

Activated SWCNTs characterise exciting materials for the preparation of enzyme conjugates with high active-enzyme loadings per unit weight of the material. They exhibit unique behaviours that distinguish them from traditional immobilisation systems. High active loading of lysozyme onto the SWCNTs enabled characterisation using spectrophotometric, electrophoretic, XRD and FT-IR studies. This confirmed that a variety of lysozyme retained a high fraction of their native activity and structure when attached to SWCNTs.

Indeed, to our knowledge, this is the first XRD, electrophoresis, FT-IR and TGA analysis of protein structure and function by covalent attachment onto SWCNTs. The availability of these nanomodified enzyme constructs opens up an entire exciting research direction in the field of nanoenzymology, finally, aiming to target and to alter the enzyme behaviour at the molecular level.

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