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# Experimental and theoretical investigation of hydrogen bonded complexes between glycolic acid and water



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ABSTRACT

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# HIGHLIGHTS

# G R A P H I C A L A B S T R A C T

- Experimental identification of glycolic acid–water 1:1 complexes for the first time.
- Identification of hydrogen bonded GA-H<sub>2</sub>O structures present in an argon matrix.
- Computational modelling of structures and spectroscopy of 1:1 complexes between GA and H<sub>2</sub>O.

#### ARTICLE INFO

Keywords: Glycolic acid Molecular complex Spectroscopy Computational chemistry Matrix isolation Hydrogen bond

# 1. Introduction

Glycolic acid (GA) is the smallest  $\alpha$ -hydroxycarboxylic acid having two functional OH groups in the same molecule, and it is therefore able to form intra- and intermolecular hydrogen bonds. Also, GA is a model species for understanding how competing OH-groups in a molecule affect the ability to form molecular complexes.

The molecular structure and especially probing the conformational space of GA have been the focus of many studies in the gas phase [1–6], solid state [7] and low temperature matrices [8–13]. The most stable SSC conformer of the acid (see Scheme 1) was found to be the predominant species in gas, solid and low-temperature matrix phases. In addition to conformational studies, the OH overtone and UV induced photochemical transformations in low temperature matrices were investigated as

Theoretical MP2 and B3LYPD3 calculations, as well as experimental matrix isolation infrared spectroscopy

studies, were used to investigate the 1:1 complexes formed between glycolic acid and water. Out of five

computationally predicted forms of GA···H2O complex the most stable one was detected experimentally in solid

argon. This structure is characterized by two intermolecular O-H…O hydrogen bonds depicting a six-member

ring in which water acts both as a proton acceptor and as a proton donor. Two other structures with the alco-

holic OH group acting as a proton donor are also tentatively suggested to be present in solid argon.

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Scheme 1. Structure of three most stable conformers of glycolic acid monomer.

well. Near-infrared excitation of the first and second OH stretching overtones of GA were found to initiate conformational photoisomerization reactions [9-11,14], allowing selective formation and identification of less stable conformers. By contrast, excitation using visible green light (532 nm), both forward and backward photoreactions subsequently to IR-photolysis occur between the GA conformers in the argon matrix. This results to a photoinduced equilibrium upon visible photolysis [12]. Recently, UV laser irradiation at 212 and 226 nm has been used to study the photoinduced structural transformations of GA in an argon matrix. It turned out that both photodissociation and photoisomerization occurred upon UV excitation. The main dissociation channel produced molecular complexes of formaldehyde and water with carbon monoxide [13]. The UV-induced processes of GA conformers have been investigated in more detail by Ahokas et al. [15] expanding the understanding of the overall photochemistry of the compound employing more extensive kinetic photochemistry measurements. The work employed also theoretical modelling of the kinetic data to reveal and explain the various photoinduced reaction paths taking place upon photolysis.

Much less has been done in the field of glycolic acid molecular complexes. Three recent studies deal with interaction of GA with dinitrogen using infrared and Raman spectroscopies [16–18]. Of the three theoretically predicted GA-N<sub>2</sub> structures involving the SSC conformer, only one hydrogen-bonded complex has been found experimentally. This SSC-N<sub>2</sub> complex exhibit the dinitrogen molecule bound to the carboxyl OH group of the acid. Moreover, this complex structure was found to reside in three different matrix sites, each of these local sites showing a site-selective response upon the  $\nu$ OH overtone excitation at slightly different wavelengths [17,18].

In turn, the interaction of GA with water has been studied

experimentally in the gas phase in the  $4\nu_1$  and  $4\nu_2$  OH stretching vibration region using a highly sensitive cavity ring-down spectroscopy [6]. Moreover, several research papers deal with theoretical studies of glycolic acid interacting with various number of water molecules [19–23]. Especially, the study by Gu *et al.* [22] deals with the strength of hydrogen bonding and other properties of the glycolic acid–water complex in comparison with its aromatic analog, 9-hydroxy-9 fluorene carboxylic acid, complexed with water. Such data allowed to predict the binding energy D<sub>0</sub> for the SSC-H<sub>2</sub>O global minimum to be 8.51 kcal mol<sup>-1</sup>. In addition, a valuable discussion on the cooperative and anticooperative balance in this complex was presented.

Here, we combine FTIR spectroscopy and a low-temperature matrix isolation technique to study the molecular complexes formed between glycolic acid and water. The main aim of the work is to be able to spectroscopically characterize the 1:1 GA-H<sub>2</sub>O complexes prevalent in low-temperature Ar matrices of premixed GA and water gas phase samples. Quantum chemical calculations were performed at the MP2 and B3LYPD3 levels to support the analysis of the experimental data to identify experimentally observed complex species.

# 2. Experimental

# 2.1. Matrix isolation FTIR studies

Glycolic acid was purchased from Janssen Chimica (99%) and argon from Messer (5.0). GA was pumped before use to get rid of volatile impurities. The matrix samples were prepared by passing H<sub>2</sub>O/Ar mixtures of the 1/500 or 1/1000 sample ratio through the glass U-tube with GA, situated outside the cryostat chamber. The GA/H<sub>2</sub>O/Ar gaseous mixtures were deposited onto a cold CsI window kept at 15 K in a closed cycle cryostat (ARS-2HW, APD-Cryogenics). The matrix deposition conditions were fixed to obtain samples containing mostly monomeric GA and its complexes of the 1:1 stoichiometry. Such experimental conditions do not allow for precise estimation of the GA/H<sub>2</sub>O ratio. The pressure of the gas mixtures and the deposition rates were controlled by piezo transducers (model 902B, MKS Instruments) installed in the deposition line. The low temperature was maintained by a Scientific Instruments 9700 temperature controller equipped with a silicon diode. The sample temperature was 10 K during spectral measurements. FTIR spectra between 4000 and 400  $\mbox{cm}^{-1}$  were collected in a transmission mode with a 0.5 cm<sup>-1</sup> resolution averaging over 128 scans on a Bruker IFS 66 Fourier Transform spectrometer equipped with a liquid  $N_2$  cooled



Fig. 1. The MP2 optimized structures of the 1:1 complexes of GA with water. Positions of the bond (3,-1) and ring (3,+1) critical points derived from AIM calculations are shown by small green and red dots, respectively.

Table 1

Computed interaction energies and relative energies compared to the global minimum C1 using MP2, B3LYPD3 and CCSD(T) methods with 6-311++G(2d,2p) basis set (in kJ mol<sup>-1</sup>).

Structure	Interaction energy E <sub>int</sub>				Relative Energy $\Delta E$			
	MP2	CCSD(T)/MP2 <sup>a</sup>	B3LYPD3	CCSD(T)/B3LYPD3 <sup>a</sup>	MP2	CCSD(T)/MP2 <sup>a</sup>	B3LYPD3	CCSD(T)/B3LYPD3 <sup>a</sup>
C1	-40.24	-40.19	-48.53	-40.78	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
C2a	-35.00	-34.96	-43.33	-35.42	11.08	10.77	10.47	10.88
C2b	-32.78	-32.78	-40.86	-33.20	13.61	13.24	13.13	13.41
C3	-21.98	-21.52	-25.67	-21.31	16.80	16.97	20.86	16.70
C4	-12.43	-12.35	-15.99	-12.43	26.37	26.07	30.54	25.95

<sup>a</sup> CCSD(T) calculations are single-point calculations at the MP2 or B3LYPD3 optimized geometries, respectively.

## Table 2

Electron density parameters of the intermolecular bond critical points BCP (au) and ring critical points RCP (au) of the  $GA-H_2O$  computed at the MP2/6-311++G(2d,2p) level.

AIM Parameters				
		ρ(r)	$\nabla^2 \rho(\mathbf{r})$	Elip.
BCP	H7…O10	0.0368	+0.1138	0.030
	H1105	0.0212	+0.0757	0.110
RCP	(6 at.)	0.0135	+0.0590	
BCP	H9010	0.0289	+0.0955	0.061
	H1105	0.0233	+0.0856	0.026
RCP	(7 at.)	0.0089	+0.0378	
BCP	H9010	0.0240	+0.0857	0.010
	H11…O5	0.0201	+0.0737	0.045
RCP	(7 at.)	0.0081	+0.0341	
BCP	H1108	0.0253	+0.0902	0.028
BCP	H1106	0.0158	+0.0632	0.108
	H2…O10	0.0059	+0.0261	4.756
	H3…O10	0.0059	+0.0261	4.757
RCP	(7 at.)	0.0046	+0.0260	
RCP	(4 at.)	0.0058	+0.0270	
	AIM Par BCP RCP BCP RCP BCP RCP BCP BCP BCP BCP	AIM Parameters           BCP         H7010 H1105           RCP         (6 at.)           BCP         H9010 H1105           RCP         (7 at.)           BCP         H1108           BCP         H1106 H2010           RCP         (7 at.)	$\begin{tabular}{ c c c c } \hline AIM Parameters & $$$$$$$$$$$$$$$$$$$$$$$$$$$$$$$$$$$$	$\begin{array}{c c c c c c c c c c c c c c c c c c c $

#### MCT detector.

# 2.2. Computational details

All calculations were carried out with the Gaussian 16 program package [24]. The structures of the GA complexes with H<sub>2</sub>O were optimized at the B3LYPD3 [25-29] and MP2 [30-33] levels of theory using the 6-311++G(2d,2p) [34,35] basis set. The chosen computational approaches are well known to be successful and cost-effective in determining energetic and spectroscopic properties of complex systems. Optimization of the complexes was done with the Boys-Bernardi full counterpoise method by Dannenberg et al. [36,37]. The interaction energies were estimated by subtracting the energies of the isolated monomers with the frozen geometry from the energy of the complexes. Energies of the optimized structures at B3LYPD3/6-311++G(2d,2p) and MP2/6-311++G(2d,2p) levels were further refined by single-point calculations using the CCSD(T) method. Wavenumbers and infrared intensities were computed at a harmonic approximation to follow the changes in vibrational spectra upon complex formation. The natural bond orbitals [38] calculations at the MP2 level were carried using the NBO 3.1 version [39] as implemented in Gaussian 16. The topological analysis of electron density (AIM) [40,41] was performed at the MP2/6-311++G(2d,2p) level using the AIM studio program (Version 19.10.12, Professional) [42].

#### Table 3

Geometric parameters of hydrogen bond bridges in the SSC complexes with water (1:1). The values are computed both at the MP2 and B3LYPD3 levels and denoted as MP2/B3LYPD3 in the Table.

C1 ROH <sub>A</sub> 0.965/0.966	ROH <sub>C</sub> 0.982/0.988	ROH <sub>A</sub> …O 2.083/2.132	αOH <sub>A</sub> …O 118.5/116.3	ROH <sub>C</sub> …OH <sub>2</sub> 1.818/1.780	ROH…O=C 2.136/2.074	αOH <sub>C</sub> …OH <sub>2</sub> 159.4/158.2	αOH…O==C 130.6/133.2
<b>C2a</b> ROH <sub>A</sub>	ROH <sub>C</sub>	$ROH_{A}$ $OH_{2}$	ROHO=C	αOH <sub>A</sub> …OH <sub>2</sub>	αOH…O=C		
С2Ь	0.907/ 0.900	1.940/ 1.009	2.023/ 1.943	103.0/ 102.0	143.0/ 143.0		
ROH <sub>A</sub> 0.967/0.973	ROH <sub>C</sub> 0.967/0.968	ROH <sub>A</sub> …OH <sub>2</sub> 1.935/1.880	ROH…O=C 2.028/1.946	αOH <sub>A</sub> …OH <sub>2</sub> 161.4/161.2	αOH…O=C 146.6/150.7		
<b>C3</b> ROH <sub>A</sub>	ROH <sub>C</sub>	ROH <sub>A</sub> …O	αOH <sub>A</sub> …O	ROH…OH <sub>A</sub>	αOH…OH <sub>A</sub>		
C4	0.907/0.900	2.070/2.120	110.//110./	1.557 1.550	131.2/ 132.3		
ROH <sub>A</sub> 0.964/0.966	ROH <sub>C</sub> 0.967/0.968	ROH <sub>A</sub> …O 2.116/2.167	αOH <sub>A</sub> …O 117.6/115.4	ROH…OH <sub>C</sub> 2.198/2.140	αΟΗ…ΟH <sub>C</sub> 142.6/144.4	RCH…OH <sub>2</sub> 2.830/2.736	αCH…OH <sub>2</sub> 102.5/102.6
<b>SSC monomer</b> ROH <sub>A</sub> 0.965/0.966	ROH <sub>C</sub> 0.967/0.968	ROH <sub>A</sub> …O 2.108/2.157	αOH <sub>A</sub> …O 118.0/115.8				

The parameters of the GA monomer are marked in gray.  $OH_A$  and  $OH_C$  denotes alcohol and carboxyl OH group, respectively. Parameters presented relate to distances (R; given in Angstroms) and bond angles ( $\alpha$ ; given in degrees).



**Fig. 2.** The vOH region of the infrared spectra of argon matrices of GA co-deposited with  $H_2O/Ar = 1/500$  (d) and 1/1000 (c) compared with  $H_2O/Ar = 1/500$  (a) and GA/Ar (b) spectra. The difference spectrum (e) obtained by subtracting spectra (a) and (b) from the spectrum (d) is presented in the upper part of the figure. Letters M, D, and T denote monomer, dimer, and trimer, respectively. W and GA subscripts denote water and glycolic acid.

#### 3. Results and discussion

# 3.1. Quantum chemical calculations

Among the six stable monomeric structures of GA, the SSC conformer stabilized by the O—H···O intramolecular hydrogen bond was found to be present in low-temperature matrices after deposition with an estimated population of ca. 95 % [10,14]. Thus, our study of the interaction of GA with the water molecule was limited to this most stable form of the acid. According to both B3LYPD3 and MP2 methods applied, there are five stable structures for the SSC-H<sub>2</sub>O interaction of the 1:1 stoichiometry. The computed local minima structures for the GA-H<sub>2</sub>O complexes are presented in Fig. 1 together with the adopted atom numbering and the relevant energetics shown in Table 1.

Cartesian coordinates of the optimized complexes are provided in Table S1 in the Supplementary material. The values of three topological AIM parameters: the electron density  $\rho(\mathbf{r})$ , its Laplacian  $\nabla^2 \rho(\mathbf{r})$  and ellipticity at the critical points obtained for the 1:1 stoichiometry are shown in Table 2.

The most stable structure C1, in accordance with the MP2/aug-ccpVTZ results [22], is characterized by two intermolecular O—H…O hydrogen bonds (see Fig. 1). A six-member ring is formed in which water acts simultaneously as a proton acceptor for the carboxyl OH group, and a proton donor for the carbonyl OH group. For this structure, the intramolecular hydrogen bonding in the GA molecule is preserved and its geometry is slightly deformed by hydrogen bonding to water. In the second and third most stable complexes C2a and C2b (marked in the text generally as C2) water is inserted into the internal hydrogen bond. These structures are also bound by two intermolecular hydrogen bonds. One of them connects the alcoholic OH<sub>A</sub> group with the oxygen of the water molecule. For the second hydrogen bond H<sub>2</sub>O acts as a proton donor to the carbonyl C—O group. The intramolecular hydrogen bond between OH<sub>A</sub> and O—C is no longer present in these structures for the GA subunit. This is due to the insertion of the H<sub>2</sub>O molecule and changes in geometry under the influence of interaction with water. These forms are similar as to the interaction energy but differ in the orientation of the water molecule relative to the SSC subunit. The alcoholic OH<sub>A</sub> group of SSC monomer appears in the same plane as the carbonyl group, but is tilted out of the plane by about 40° in both of the C2a and C2b complexes.

The two other higher energy structures (C3 and C4) contain a water molecule acting as a proton donor for the oxygen atom of the alcoholic OH<sub>A</sub> and carboxyl OH<sub>C</sub> groups, respectively. For both C3 and C4 forms intramolecular hydrogen bonding is retained in the SSC subunit, showing small deviations from the geometry found for the SSC monomer. Additionally, in the C4 complex, the AIM method predicts low values of electron density and high ellipticity for the bond paths connecting the oxygen atom of the water molecule with the hydrogen atoms of the CH<sub>2</sub> group of the acid (see Fig. 1 and Table 2). This data suggests that C-H…O connections would not exist. However, the presence of two lone electron pairs in the water molecule pointing towards the CH bonds could be related to weak interactions via the CH bonds.

Table 3 contains the calculated bond distances and angles of intermolecular and intramolecular hydrogen bond bridges for the five structures of the SSC-H<sub>2</sub>O complex. For comparison purposes, the parameters of the SSC monomer are shown in the lowest part of the table. The shortest intermolecular distance for H…O of 1.818/1.780 Å was found in the C1 structure for carboxyl OH<sub>C</sub> interacting with the water oxygen. In all other cases, the intermolecular distances are in the range of 1.9 to 2.2 Å. Analysis of the data in Table 3 and Table S2 also suggests that the intramolecular OH<sub>A</sub>…O hydrogen bond present in the SSC monomer is affected by the OH…O intermolecular hydrogen bond formed upon complexation with water. The smaller value of the ROH<sub>A</sub>…O distance as well as the increase in electron population of the antibonding orbital  $\sigma^*$  of the OH<sub>A</sub> bond in both C1 and C3 structures ( $\Delta\sigma^* = 0.5$  and 1.1 millielectrons at NBO/MP2, respectively) indicate



**Fig. 3.** Selected regions of the infrared spectra of argon matrices of GA co-deposited with  $H_2O/Ar = 1/500$  (d) and 1/1000 (c) compared with  $H_2O/Ar = 1/500$  (a) and GA/Ar (b) spectra. The difference spectrum (e) obtained by subtracting spectra (a) and (b) from the spectrum (d) is presented in the upper part of the figure. Letters M, D, and T denote monomer, dimer, and trimer, respectively. W and GA subscripts denote water and glycolic acid.

Table 4

Selected MP2/6-311++G(2d,2p) calculated wavenumber shifts  $\Delta \nu$  (cm<sup>-1</sup>) and intensities (km mol<sup>-1</sup>) of the 1:1 GA complexes with water compared to the corresponding experimental shifts.

MP2 <sup>a</sup>				Mode <sup>b</sup>	Ar matrix			Assignment	
C1	C2a	C2b	C3	C4		Monomer GA (SSC)/ H <sub>2</sub> O	GA(SSC)-H <sub>2</sub> O		
						ν	ν	$\Delta \nu$	
$^{-3}$	-83	-61	-33	+11	νOH <sub>A</sub>	3561.0	3446.5, 3455.0sh	-114.5, -106.0	C2
(75)	(295)	(245)	(206)	(72)			3554.0	-7.0	C1
-305	-2	-2	0	-5	νOH <sub>C</sub>	3561.0	3187.0	-374.0	C1
(687)	(58)	(79)	(95)	(104)			3554.0	-7.0	C2
-29	0	$^{-1}$	-2	+5	νC==O	1773.0	1735.0	-38.0	C1
(224)	(271)	(295)	(255)	(258)			1773.0	0.0	C2
+13	+23	+23	$^{-1}$	+3	$\omega CH_2 + \delta OH_A {+} \delta OH_C$	1265.0	1276.0	+11.0	C1
(136)	(37)	(36)	(32)	(22)					
+84	-5	-6	+4	-4	$\delta OH_C + \nu C - O_C + \omega CH_2$	1143.5	1222.5, 1224.0sh	+79.0, +80.5	C1
(162)	(88)	(79)	(156)	(132)					
+4	+17	+18	-11	-5	$\nu CO_A + \nu CO_C$	1090.0	1095.0	+5.0	C1
(166)	(276)	(275)	(222)	(290)			1104.5	+14.5	C2
+22	-2	-2	+5	$^{-3}$	$\nu CC + \nu C - O_C + \nu CO_A$	854.0	877.5	+23.5	C1
(27)	(13)	(16)	(31)	(20)					
+222	0	-2	+2	$^{-10}$	τOH <sub>C</sub>	495.5	817.0	+202.5	C1
(123)	(98)	(111)	(122)	(115)					
-39	-38	-31	-30	-14	$\nu_{as}H_2O$	3736.0	3702.0	-34.0	C1/C2
(128)	(138)	(128)	(118)	(131)					
-90	-85	-82	-91	-20	$\nu_{s}H_{2}O$	3638.5	3543.5, 3536.5	-95.5, -102.0	C1/C2
(144)	(289)	(300)	(115)	(37)					
-5	0	+4	+16	+3	$\delta H_2O$	1590.0	1589.5	-0.5	C1
(139)	(118)	(65)	(68)	(82)					

<sup>a</sup>Corresponding positions of GA(SSC) and  $H_2O$  monomers are: 3785, 3786, 1794, 1313, 1175, 1111, 874, 646 cm<sup>-1</sup> and 3982, 3862, 1661 cm<sup>-1</sup> (MP2/6-311++G (2d,2p).

<sup>b</sup>Subscripts A and C denote alcoholic and carboxyl modes, respectively.

that the strength of the intramolecular hydrogen bond increases compared to the SSC monomer. The opposite effect is observed for the C4 structure where a decrease of the electron population of the  $\sigma^*$  orbital of 0.45 millielectrons was found. These data are consistent with those discussed by Gu *et al.* for different GA hydrogen bonded complexes [22].

# 3.2. Infrared spectra of matrix isolated 1:1 SSC-H<sub>2</sub>O complexes

Under the diluted experimental conditions used, the most likely formation of the  $GA\cdots H_2O$  complexes involve mainly the 1:1 stoichiometric ratio. Larger aggregates appearing in the annealing experiment are used here only to exclude other complexes formed than the 1:1 being the focus of this report. A more detailed computational and experimental work on higher  $GA\cdots H_2O$  aggregates will be reported separately later.

Figs. 2 and 3 show representative fragments of the infrared spectra measured for argon matrices obtained after co-deposition of GA with two different H<sub>2</sub>O/Ar mixtures. The upper parts of the Figures depict the difference spectra, which are obtained by subtracting the spectra (a) and (b) from the spectrum (d). When GA was co-deposited with H<sub>2</sub>O/Ar mixtures, notable amounts of new bands appeared, which were not present in the spectra recorded for both monomeric subunits. Selected vibrational band shifts observed after complexation between GA and H<sub>2</sub>O are summarized in Table 4. They are compared with the corresponding shifts calculated at the MP2/6-311++G(2d,2p) level. This data obtained at the MP2-level shows generally a better agreement of most vibrational modes compared with the experimental spectra than those computed at the B3LYPD3 level (see Table S3).

As shown in Fig. 2, a set of new bands appeared in the  $\nu$ OH spectral region due to the complexed water and GA molecules. The most intense band is situated at 3702 cm<sup>-1</sup>. This is due to the asymmetric stretching mode of the complexed  $H_2O$  molecule. It is redshifted by 34 cm<sup>-1</sup> from the monomeric  $v_{as}$  of water [43]. Unfortunately, the vibrational band observed for the complex species coincides with theoretical predictions for four different forms of the GA····H<sub>2</sub>O complex (see Table 4). The same is true for the symmetric stretching vibration of water. Therefore, it was not equivocally possible to decide on the GA…H2O structure based on the shifts observed for these vibrational modes of water solemnly. The vibrational mode changes observed for glycolic acid turned out to be more informative for determining the structure of the studied complex. The results suggest the presence of one prevalent structural form (C1), and minor spectral signals due to two less prevalent forms of GA···H<sub>2</sub>O, (C2a and C2b) in argon matrices. These assignments are discussed in the following.

The spectral signature of the C1 structure in the  $\nu$ OH region of GA is characterized by a relatively broad absorption with a large shift of -374 cm<sup>-1</sup> (theoretical value -305 cm<sup>-1</sup>) originating from the perturbed carboxyl OH<sub>C</sub> group. In turn, the C2 structures give rise to a doublet situated around 3450 cm<sup>-1</sup> due to the alcoholic  $\nu$ OH<sub>A</sub> mode depicting a redshift of *ca*. 110 cm<sup>-1</sup>. A weak band situated at 3554.0 cm<sup>-1</sup> with a small shift of -7 cm<sup>-1</sup> can be assigned either to C1 or C2 forms based on calculations.

As shown in Fig. 3 and Table 4, new features in the vicinity of GA monomer bands were also observed in other spectral regions, and in some cases vibrational bands connected to C1 and C2 forms of the  $GA \cdots H_2O$  complex could be distinguished.

The observed perturbation of the carboxyl group of C1 structure manifests itself by a strong band in the region of the carbonyl group stretching mode at 1735.0 cm<sup>-1</sup>. This vibrational band shows a red shift of  $-38 \text{ cm}^{-1}$  compared with the theoretical value  $-29 \text{ cm}^{-1}$ . Both inplane and out-of-plane (torsion) modes of the OH<sub>C</sub> group are also strongly shifted to higher wavenumbers by *ca*. 80 cm<sup>-1</sup> and 202 cm<sup>-1</sup>, respectively. These values are in good agreement with those predicted theoretically by MP2 of 84 cm<sup>-1</sup> ( $\delta$ OH<sub>C</sub>) and 222 cm<sup>-1</sup> ( $\tau$ OH<sub>C</sub>). In addition to the vibrational bands observed in the  $\nu$ OH region one additional feature was found due to C2 structures at 1104.5 cm<sup>-1</sup>. This

band can be assigned as the  $\nu CO_A + \nu CO_C$  vibrational mode. Table 4 shows that wavenumber shifts predicted for the C2a form and the slightly less stable C2b structure are similar. Therefore, one cannot exclude the presence of both complexes in the studied matrices as they are indistinguishable in the obtained spectra due to the structural and spectroscopical similarities.

# 4. Conclusions

Both MP2 and B3LYPD3 calculations combined with 6-311++G (2d,2p) basis set reveal five local stable structures for glycolic acid complexed with water. Each of the 1:1 complexes contain at least one intermolecular O-H---O hydrogen bond. GA acts as a proton donor for all the complex structures found. Moreover, in the case of cyclic intermolecular H-bonded complexes, water acts as both a proton donor and acceptor depending on the structure in question. Analysis of the experimental infrared spectra of the GA/H2O/Ar matrices turned out to be quite a difficult task due to the spectral similarity of the theoretically predicted wavenumber shifts for the perturbed water vibrational modes. However, the presence of the most stable C1 complex in argon matrices can be well identified and documented based on its differences from the seven-member ring structures C2a and C2b. The C1 structure is characterized by a six-member ring formed by two intermolecular O-H--O hydrogen bonds formed between the GA carboxyl group and the water molecule. The presence of two other forms of the complex with the GA alcoholic group acting as a proton donor is tentatively suggested based on weak spectral signals separable from the most stable C1 structure. This is also supported by the computational results. The observed C1 form of GA…H<sub>2</sub>O complex here clearly corresponds to the structure observed for the glycine-water complex observed in a supersonic jet using microwave spectroscopy [44]. This suggests that for small organic molecules with intramolecular hydrogen bond involving a carboxylic group there is a plausible interaction pattern resolved here. This could be an important piece of knowledge when starting to look for its implications in atmospheric, astrochemical and biological aquaenvironments.

# Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

# Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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# Appendix A. Supplementary material

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#### J. Krupa et al.

#### Spectrochimica Acta Part A: Molecular and Biomolecular Spectroscopy 325 (2025) 125081

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