

1 **A combined crystallographic and theoretical study of weak intermolecular interactions in**
2 **crystalline squaric acid esters and amides**

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28 **ABSTRACT:**

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30 We report the synthesis and X-ray solid state structures of five squaric acid derivatives, i.e. a
31 zwitterionic compound namely 3-Hydroxy-4-(2-pyridin-2-yl-ethylamino)-cyclobut-3-ene-1,2-dione (1);
32 a squaramide monoester, 3-Ethoxy-4-(2- pyridin-2-yl-ethylamino)-cyclobut-3-ene-1,2-dione (2); two
33 differently solvated (EtOH and DMSO/water) disquaramides 3,4-bis((4-
34 hydroxyphenethyl)amino)cyclobut-3-ene-1,2-dione (3 and 4, respectively); and a mixed hydrogen
35 squarate and disquarate 2-(2-Amino-ethyl)-pyridinium salt (5). All compounds form interesting
36 supramolecular assemblies in the solid state that have been analyzed using high level DFT calculations
37 and the Bader's theory of "atoms-in-molecules". An intricate combination of ion-pair and H-bonding
38 interactions along with π - π stacking and anion- π contacts of the cyclobutenedione rings are crucial for
39 the formation of the supramolecular assemblies in the solid state

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41 1. INTRODUCTION

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43 Squaric acid (3,4-dihydroxy-cyclobut-3-en-1,2-dione) derivatives are highly functionalized four-
44 membered ring systems with a strong ability to form H-bonds both as donors and acceptors.

45 Remarkably, their enhanced ability for establishing hydrogen bonding compared to urea has been
46 rationalized taking into consideration the increase in the aromaticity of the four-membered ring upon the
47 formation of H-bonds.¹ Squaric acid amides, semiesters and esters are easy to synthesize and have
48 multiple applications in several fields such as catalysis,² supramolecular chemistry³ and transmembrane
49 transport.⁴ Similarly to urea and thiourea, they are convenient supramolecular synthons for generating
50 interesting assemblies in the solid state.⁵ In fact, the use of squarate and hydrogen squarate salts is
51 frequent in crystal engineering⁶ and organic material research.⁷ Moreover, they have been used by some
52 of us to analyze the electrostatic compression phenomenon^{8a} that provides an explanation to the face-to-
53 face π -stacked assemblies observed in a series of zwitterionic squaric acid/squaramide compounds.^{8b}
54 We have applied this phenomenon in the crystal engineering field combining the π -stacking of tertiary
55 N-alkylsquaramides with hydrophobic interactions to construct supramolecular assemblies resembling
56 lipid bilayers.⁹

57 In this manuscript, we have synthesized several squaric acid derivatives with different degree of
58 substitution (see Fig. 1a). That is, zwitterionic monosquaramide (1), squaramide monoester (2),
59 disquaramides (3 and 4) and finally a mixed hydrogen squarate and squarate salt (5) (2-(2-
60 ammonioethyl)pyridin-1-ium as counter-cation) have been Xray characterized with the additional
61 objective of extending the knowledge regarding the forces that govern their supramolecular assemblies
62 in the solid state. To achieve this goal, we combine crystal structure and computational analyses of these
63 five model compounds. In particular, we focus our attention on analysis of the charge assisted H-
64 bonding and π - stacking interactions involving the four membered ring.

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66 2. EXPERIMENTAL AND THEORETICAL METHODS

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68 2.1. Materials and measurements.

69 All chemicals used were of reagent grade and used as received from Sigma-Aldrich

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71 2.2. Synthesis.

72 Synthesis of 1-5 were carried out following reported methodology.¹² Suitable crystals of 1 and 5 for
73 SXRD analysis were obtained in water, while crystals of 2 were obtained in diethyl ether, crystals of 3
74 in ethanol and crystals of 4 in DMSO/water.

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76 2.3. X-ray crystallographic analysis.

77 Single crystal X-ray diffraction intensity data of solid forms 2 and 3 were collected using a MAR345
78 diffractometer with an image plate detector, equipped with graphite monochromated MoK α radiation (λ
79 = 0.71073 Å), and for forms 1, 4 and 5 data were collected using a D8 Venture system equipped with a
80 multilayer monochromator and a Mo microfocus source (λ = 0.71073 Å). Frames were integrated with
81 the Bruker SAINT software package using a SAINT algorithm. Data were corrected for absorption
82 effects using the multi-scan method (SADABS).¹³ The structure was solved and refined using the
83 Bruker SHELXTL Software Package, a computer program for automatic solution of crystal structures,
84 and refined by the full-matrix least-squares method with ShelXle Version 4.8.0, a Qt graphical user
85 interface for the SHELXL computer program.¹⁴ A summary of crystal data and relevant refinement
86 parameters is given in Table 1.

87

88 2.4. Theoretical methods.

89 The geometries of the complexes included in this study were computed at the M06-2X/def2-TZVP level
90 of theory using the crystallographic coordinates within the TURBOMOLE program.¹⁸ This level of
91 theory is adequate for studying noncovalent interactions dominated by dispersion effects like π -stacking.
92 The basis set superposition error for the calculation of interaction energies has been corrected using the
93 counterpoise method.¹⁹ The interaction energy (ΔE) has been computed by subtracting the energy of the
94 monomers (isolated molecules) to the energy of the complex, $\Delta E = E_{AB} - E_A - E_B$). The “atoms-in-
95 molecules” (AIM)²⁰ analysis of the electron density has been performed at the same level of theory
96 using the AIMAll program.²¹ The supramolecular cluster approach is an appropriate strategy to
97 estimate interaction energies in the solid state.²² In this approach, the supramolecular cluster of a crystal
98 is formed by a given central molecule (M1) that is in contact with other Mn molecules and forms the
99 first coordination sphere. In this manner, the molecular coordination number (MCN) is determined. This
100 methodology has been successfully used to predict/rationalize crystal growth in a given compound.²²
101 However, in this manuscript we have used a simpler approach to estimate the strength of the
102 noncovalent interactions that play important roles in the crystal packing of compounds 1-5. That is, we

103 have selected several dimers from the solid state crystal structures and evaluated the binding energies as
104 a difference between the energy of the supermolecule and the sum of the monomers.

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108 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

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110 3.1. Description of squaric acid derivatives 1–5.

111 X-ray crystallographic characterization revealed that compound 1 crystallizes in the monoclinic system
112 with space group P21/c and one molecule of 1 in the asymmetric unit. This zwitterionic squaramide in
113 anti-conformation forms selfcomplementary dimers through NH \cdots O hydrogen bonds stabilized by
114 electrostatic pyridinium \cdots carbonyl interactions in a zig-zag fashion. Interestingly, the phenomenon of
115 the electrostatic compression observed by some of us in similar zwitterionic compounds^{8a} is not
116 observed in 1, squaramide and pyridinium rings are stacked instead.

117 Compound 2 crystallizes in the monoclinic system with space group P21/n and one molecule of 2 in the
118 asymmetric unit. A syn configuration of the amide moiety allows the formation of self-complementary
119 dimers through NH \cdots Npyr hydrogen bonds between the best donor and the best acceptor. Each dimer is
120 surrounded in the crystal by six equivalent dimers interacting via weak van der Waals interactions.

121 Structures 3 and 4 are two different solvates of the same disquaramide compound. Solvate 3 crystallizes
122 in the monoclinic system with space group Cc and one molecule of the bis-squaramide and one of
123 ethanol in the asymmetric unit. Squaramide groups interact with the expected head-to-tail R₂ 2(10)
124 supramolecular synthon usually found in the disquaramides. Layers of hydrogen bonded squaramides
125 form channels occupied by ethanol molecules interacting with the phenol groups. It is remarkable that
126 all ethanol molecules interact with the phenol moiety of the same layer of squaramides forming an
127 efficient hydrogen bond network while in the other side of the channel phenol groups are only weakly
128 supported by aliphatic \cdots phenol interactions.

129 On the other hand, DMSO solvate 4 crystallizes in the monoclinic system with space group P21/c with
130 five molecules of the bis-squaramide, four of dimethylsulfoxide and two of water in the asymmetric
131 unit. An important difference with respect to the ethanol solvate is that DMSO molecules fill the same
132 channels formed by head-to-tail hydrogen bonded disquaramides in a alternate configuration so half of
133 the DMSO molecules interact as acceptors with one side of the channels and the other half with the
134 other side. In addition, water molecules complete the intricate network of interactions

135 Finally, squarate salt 5 crystallizes in the monoclinic system with space group P21/c and one molecule
136 of 2- aminoethylpyridinium cation, one molecule of monosquarate anion, half molecule of the squarate
137 dianion and two water molecules in the asymmetric unit. In the structure, trimers formed by two charge
138 assisted hydrogen bonded squarate monoanions and one dianion are surrounded by aminoethyl
139 pyridinium cations.

140 The theoretical study is devoted to the analysis of the noncovalent forces that govern the crystal packing
141 in compounds 1–5. In Fig. 7a we represent a fragment of the Xray solid state structure of compound 1
142 (zwitterion) where the three different assemblies that control the crystal packing are present and we have
143 analyzed the noncovalent forces responsible to their formation. First, we have studied a charge assisted
144 H-bonded dimer that is shown in Fig. 7b. The protonated pyridine is close (1.79 Å) to the O-atom of the

145 anionic squaramate ring explaining the large interaction energy ($\Delta E1 = -57.0$ kcal/mol). The second
146 assembly is a π -stacking interaction between the pyridinium moiety and the four-membered squaramate
147 ring. The interaction energy ($\Delta E2 = -10.3$ kcal/mol) is stronger than conventional π -stacking interaction
148 due to the fact that the rings are charged. Finally, self-assembled H-bonded dimers are also found in the
149 X-ray structure (see Fig. 7d) that are energetically very favored ($\Delta E3 = -28.0$ kcal/mol).

150 Disquaramides 3 and 4 only differ in the crystallization solvent molecules. Both compounds form
151 infinite 1D supramolecular H-bonded chains typical of secondary disquaramides (see Fig. 1b). The final
152 3D architecture is generated by the antiparallel stacking of these polymeric chains (see Fig. 9a,b). In
153 both compounds, the stacked chains are connected by the solvent molecules by means of H-bonding
154 interactions with the phenolic groups. The main difference is that in compound 3 two adjacent stacked
155 chains are disposed parallel and, conversely, in compound 4 they are perpendicularly arranged. This is
156 likely due to the role of the solvent (EtOH in 3 and DMSO and water in 4) connecting the phenolic OH
157 groups. We have computed the interaction energy of a H-bonded dimer retrieved from the infinite 1D
158 chain of compound 3 (see Fig. 9c), which is $\Delta E6 = -20.9$ kcal/mol (~ 10.5 kcal/mol per H-bond). Such
159 large interaction energy is due to the increase in the aromaticity of the four membered ring upon the
160 formation of the dimer, as previously demonstrated by some of us.^{1,26} We have also evaluated the
161 antiparallel π -stacking interaction in both compounds (see models in Fig. 9d,e). The π -stacking of both
162 four-membered rings is complemented with two Tshaped (or C–H $\cdots\pi$) aromatic interactions involving
163 the phenolic rings in both compounds, thus explaining the large interaction energies. The π -stacked
164 dimer is 4.2 kcal/mol less favorable in 4 than in 3 (shorter π - π stacking but longer C–H $\cdots\pi$
165 interactions). Since the dimers are also connected via the OH groups by the solvent molecules, this
166 difference in energy is likely compensated by the stronger ability of DMSO and water with respect to
167 EtOH to participate in H-bonding interactions.

168 Compound 5 is a mixed salt composed by the diprotonated 2- (2-Amino-ethyl)-pyridine salt and both
169 hydrogen squarate and squarate as counter-ions. In Fig. 10a we have represented a fragment of the X-ray
170 structure and it can be observed the existence of ladders of di-squarate anions surrounded by two
171 symmetric ladders of the dication that also interact with ladders of mono-squarate anions. Since the
172 three main compounds are charged, the main force is the electrostatic attraction between the counterions
173 that is a priori a nondirectional interaction. However, weaker H-bonds and π - interactions are able to
174 finely tune their final assembly in the crystal packing. We have analyzed the self-assembled fragment
175 highlighted in Fig. 10a. It can be observed the formation of a dimer by stabilized by strong N⁺–H \cdots O–
176 C and C–H \cdots O H-bonds (1.76 Å and 2.31 Å, respectively) between the protonated pyridine moiety and
177 the squarate dianion.

178 Remarkably, this dimeric moiety forms a parallel displaced π -stacking interaction with another dimer. A
179 close examination of this assembly (see Fig. 10b) reveals the existence of two symmetrically related
180 anion– π interactions²⁷ between the anionic O atom of the squarate and the protonated pyridine ring.
181 This anion– π interaction is remarkably short (3.1 Å from O to the ring centroid) due to the cationic

182 nature of the π -system. The binding energy of this assembly (considering the H-bonded dimers
183 previously formed) is very large and negative ($\Delta E_9 = -75.5$ kcal/mol) due to the electrostatic (ion-pair)
184 nature of the interaction.

185 Finally, we have used the Bader's theory of atoms in molecules²⁰ to characterize the interactions
186 described in Figs. 7 to 10. In Fig. 11 we represent the distribution of critical points (CPs) and bond paths
187 for the assemblies governed by π -interactions. Those governed by H-bonding interactions are given in
188 the ESI (see Fig. S1). The existence of a bond CP and bond path connecting two atoms is clear evidence
189 of interaction, since it indicates that electron density is accumulated between the nuclei that are linked
190 by the associated atomic interaction line.²⁸ The distribution of CPs in the π -stacking assembly of
191 compound 1 shows the existence of four bond CPs (red spheres) and bond paths connecting three carbon
192 atoms and the exocyclic N atom of the squaramate to the pyridinium ring, thus confirming the π - π
193 interaction. The distribution also shows several ring CPs (yellow spheres) and a cage CP (green sphere)
194 that further characterize the π - π interaction. In compound 2 the π -stacking interaction is characterized
195 by a bond CP and bond path inter-connecting the four and six membered rings. Moreover, the $\text{CH}\cdots\text{N}$
196 interaction is also confirmed since a bond CP and bond path connect the CH bond to the nitrogen atom
197 of pyridine. In compound 3 it is interesting to highlight both T-shape stacking interactions (or $\text{CH}\cdots\pi$
198 interactions). One is characterized by a single bond CP and bond path connecting one aromatic H atom
199 of one molecule to the aromatic carbon atom of the other molecule. The other one is characterized by
200 two bond CPs and bond paths interconnecting two aromatic H atoms to two aromatic carbon atoms (see
201 Fig. 10c). Due to the formation of a supramolecular ring, a ring critical point also appears upon
202 complexation. Finally, in complex 5 the anion- π interaction is characterized by the presence of a bond
203 CP that connects the O atom of the di-squarate moiety to the pyridine ring. This O atom also participates
204 in a hydrogen bonding interaction that further contributes to the formation of the assembly

205

206 **CONCLUSIONS**

207

208 Five new squaric acid derivatives have been synthesized and characterized by single crystal X-ray
209 diffraction. The small ring is highly functionalized with strong H-bond donor and acceptors groups, thus
210 forming interesting assemblies in their solid state architecture. The noncovalent interactions that govern
211 the crystal packing have been analyzed by means of DFT (M06-2X) calculations and the AIM theory.
212 The π -system of the squaric acid derivatives is able to establish a series of π -interactions, including
213 stacking and anion- π in addition to the expected H-bonding interactions. They have been evaluated
214 energetically and characterized using the distribution of critical points and bond paths.

215

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305 **Legends to figures**

306

307 **Figure. 1** (a) Squaric acid derivatives 1 to 5 studied in this work. (b) H-bonding patterns typical for
308 squaramide monoesters and secondary disquaramides.

309

310 **Figure. 2** Crystal structure of 1 showing the most relevant interactions

311

312 **Figure. 3** Crystal structure of 2 showing self-complementary dimers

313

314 **Figure. 4** Crystal structure of 3 showing ethanol channels

315

316 **Figure 5.** Crystal structure of 4 showing DMSO channels

317

318 **Figure 6** Crystal structure of 5 showing charge assisted hydrogen bonds

319

320 **Figure 7** a) X-ray fragment of compound 1. H-atoms omitted for clarity (b-d) Theoretical models used
321 to evaluate the noncovalent interactions. Distances in Å.

322

323 **Figure 8** (a) X-ray fragment of compound 2. H-atoms omitted for clarity (b,c) Theoretical models used
324 to evaluate the noncovalent interactions. Distances in Å.

325

326 **Figure 9** (a,b) X-ray fragments of compound 3 and 4. (c-e) Theoretical models used to evaluate the
327 noncovalent interactions. Distances in Å.

328

329 **Figure 10** (a) X-ray fragment of compound 5. (b,c) Theoretical models used to evaluate the noncovalent
330 interactions. Distances in Å.

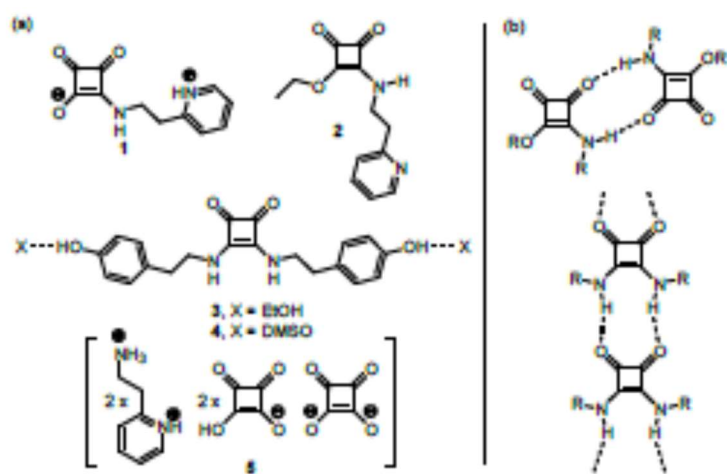
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332 **Figure 11** Distribution of bond, ring and cage critical points (red, yellow and green spheres,
333 respectively) and bond paths for several assemblies of compounds 1 (a), 2 (b), 3 (c) and 5 (d).

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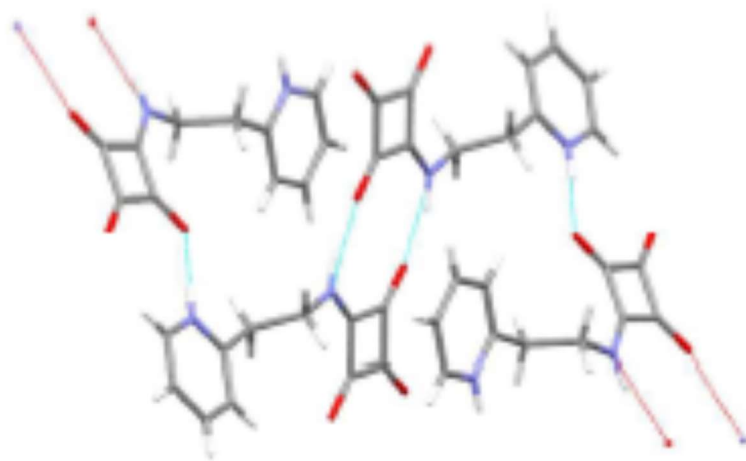
FIGURE 1



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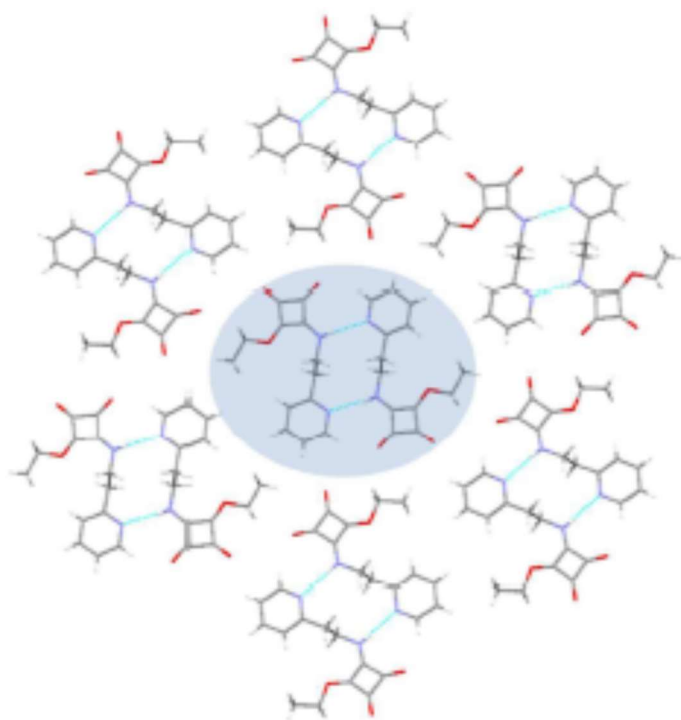
FIGURE 2



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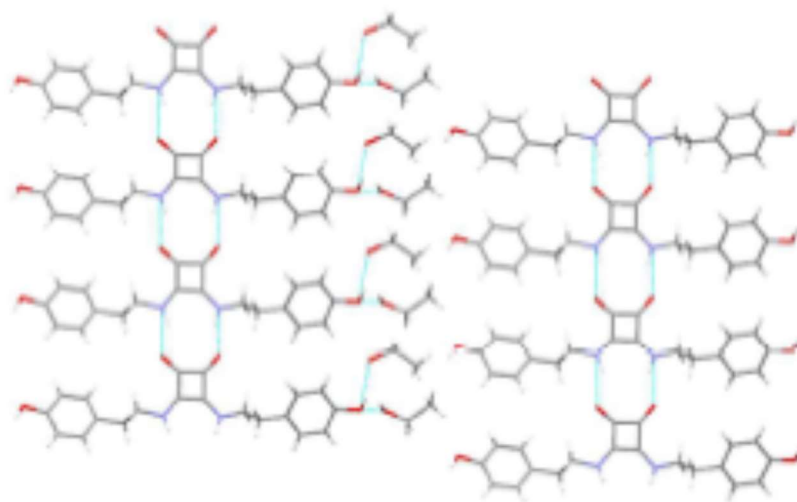
FIGURE 3



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FIGURE 4



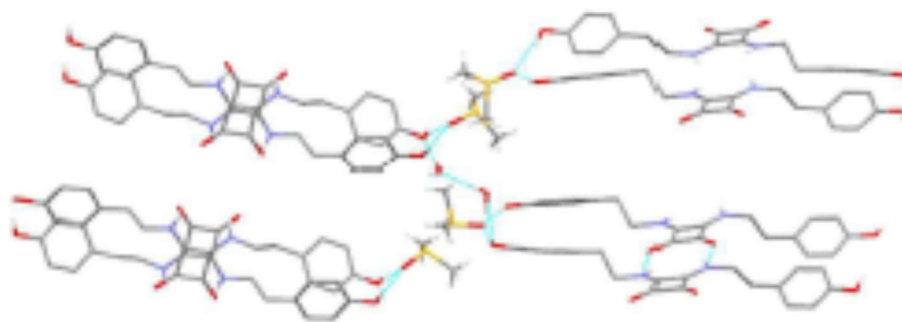
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FIGURE 5

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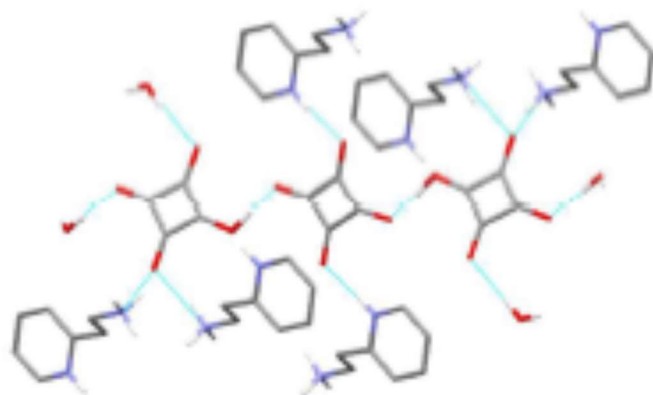
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FIGURE 6

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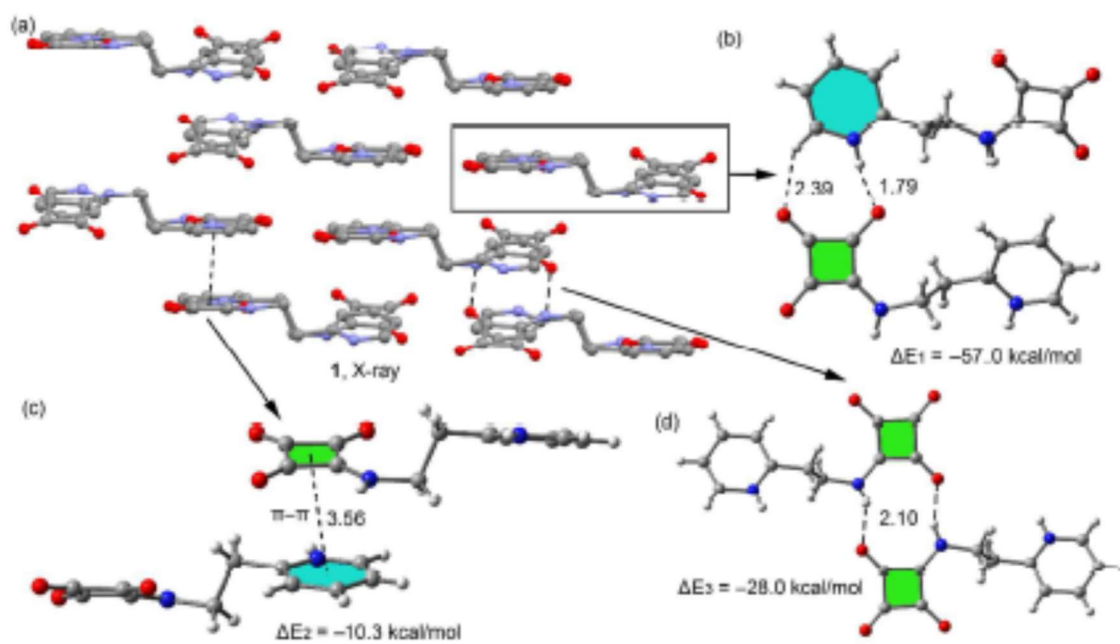
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FIGURE 7

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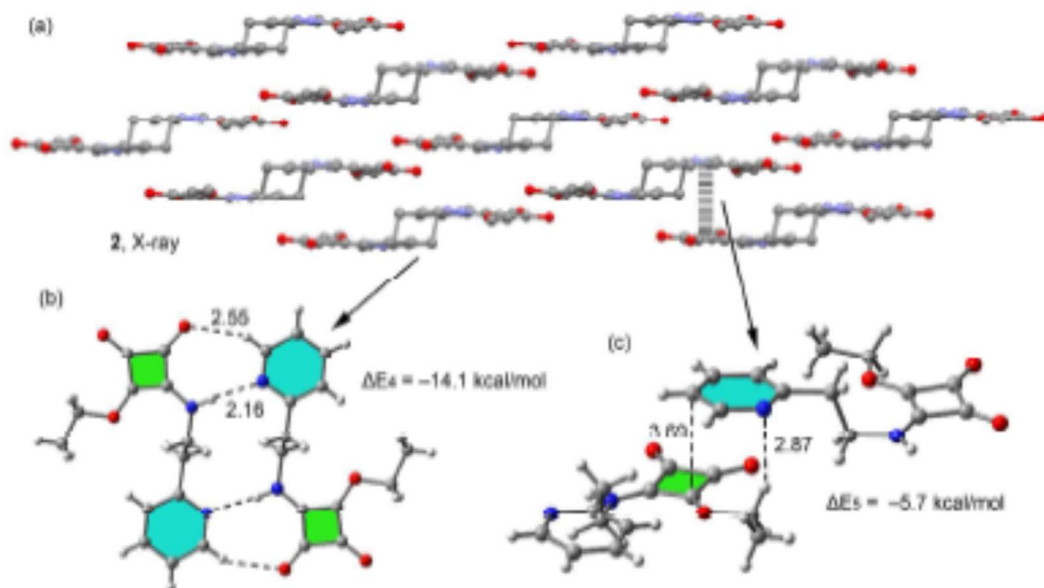
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FIGURE 8

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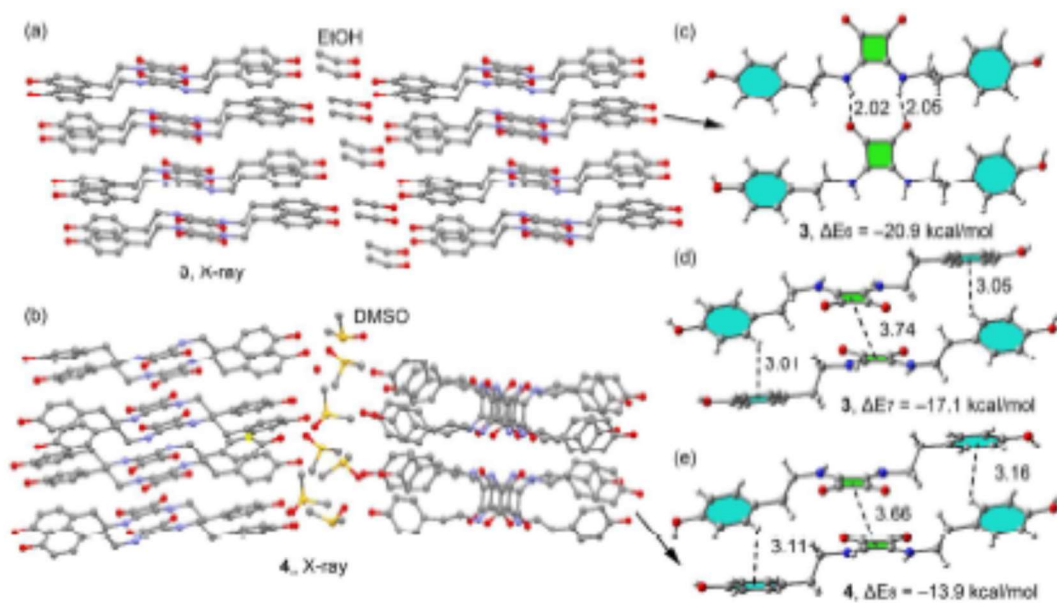
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FIGURE 9

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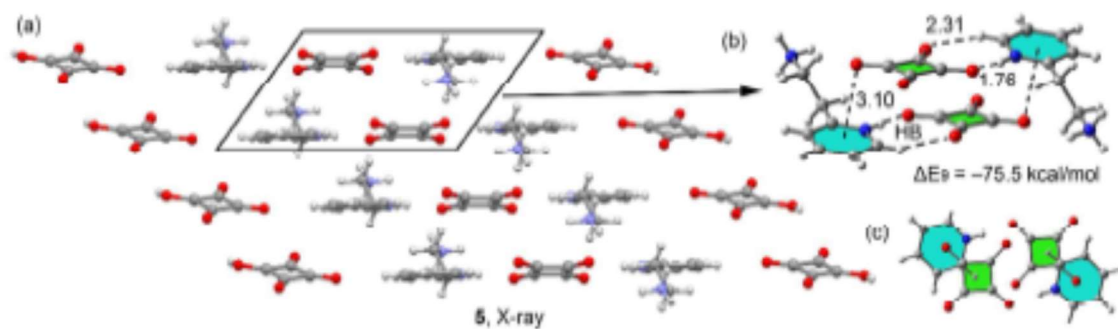
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FIGURE 10

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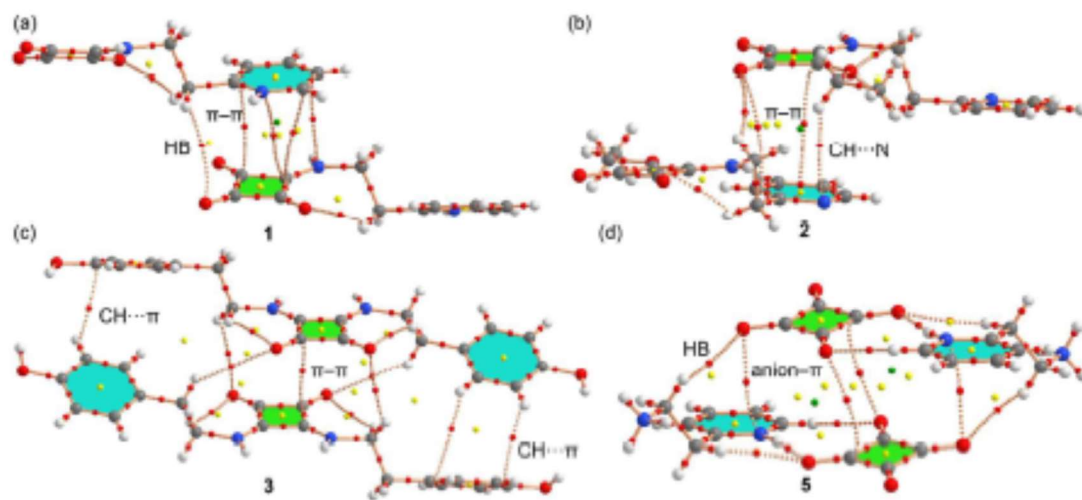
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FIGURE 11

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395 **Table 1** Crystallographic data and refinement details of compounds 1–5
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Structure	1	2	3	4	5
Empirical formula	C ₁₁ H ₁₀ N ₂ O ₄	C ₁₄ H ₁₄ N ₂ O ₄	C ₁₆ H ₁₀ N ₄ O ₁₀	C ₁₈ H ₁₈ N ₁₀ O ₁₆ S ₄	C ₁₄ H ₁₇ N ₂ O ₄
Formula Weight	218.21	246.26	796.89	2110.44	329.28
Temperature (K)	303(2)	293(2)	293(2)	303(2)	100(2)
Wavelength (Å)	0.71073	0.71073	0.71073	0.71073	0.71073
Crystal system	Monoclinic	Monoclinic	Monoclinic	Monoclinic	Monoclinic
Space group	P2 ₁ /c	P2 ₁ /n	Cc	P2 ₁ /c	P2 ₁ /c
a, b, c (Å)	7.1055(13) 10.956 (2) 14.797(3)	7.435(5) 14.028(7) 12.008(6)	46.92(5) 6.086(4) 7.467(8)	23.485(10) 9.632(4) 47.030(19)	4.7188(6) 15.4660(14) 20.0360(18)
α, β, γ (°)	90 118.699(7) 90	90 92.07(3) 90	90 92.72(6) 90	90 96.764(10) 90	90 99.372(4) 90
Volume (Å ³)	1010.4(3)	1251.6(12)	2130(4)	10564(8)	1442.7(3)
Z	4	4	2	4	4
ρ (calc.) (Mg/m ³)	1.434	1.307	1.243	1.327	1.516
Absorption coefficient (mm ⁻¹)	0.107	0.094	0.088	0.170	0.127
F(000)	456	520	848	4472	692
θ range for data collection (°)	2.43 to 25.00	2.90 to 30.33	1.74 to 32.32	2.16 to 25	2.06 to 23.28
Reflections collected / unique	4251/988	11149 / 3058	6362/3820	173437/18613	12685/2071
Data/restraints/parameters	988/0/145	3058/3/164	3820/13/241	18613/13/1393	2071/0/208
Goodness-of-fit on F ²	1.096	1.160	0.973	0.630	1.024
Final R indices [I > 2σ(I)]	R1 = 0.0673, wR2 = 0.1707	R1 = 0.0475, wR2 = 0.1278	R1=0.0758, wR2=0.2012	R1=0.0364, wR2=0.0514	R1=0.0337, wR2=0.0840
R indices [all data]	R1=0.0729, wR2=0.1735	R1=0.0536, wR2=0.1312	R1=0.1222, wR2=0.2424	R1=0.1991, wR2=0.0626	R1=0.0471, wR2=0.0916
Largest diff. peak and hole (e. Å ⁻³)	0.172, -0.281	0.200, -0.305	0.479, -0.452	0.262, -0.159	0.171, -0.284
CCDC	1539382	1539383	1015653	1017965	1539385

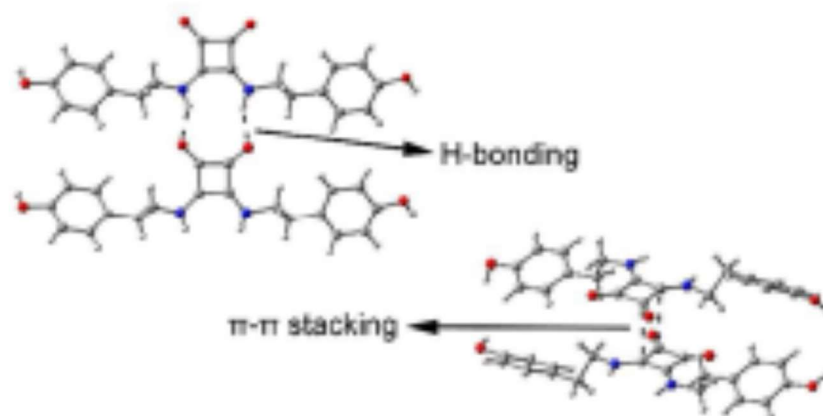
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400 We report the synthesis and X-ray solid state structures of five squaric acid derivatives. All compounds
401 form interesting supramolecular assemblies in the solid state that have been analyzed using high level
402 DFT calculations.

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