

Synthesis and Self-Assembly of Functionalized Donor– σ –Acceptor Molecules

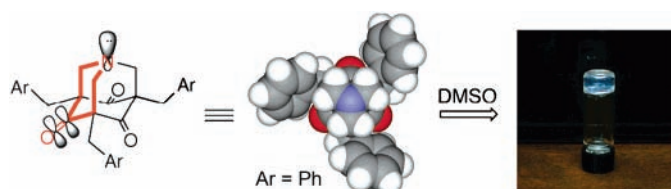
Hengfeng Li, Edwin A. Homan, Andrew J. Lampkins, Ion Ghiviriga, and Ronald K. Castellano*

Department of Chemistry, University of Florida, P.O. Box 117200,
Gainesville, Florida 32611-7200

castellano@chem.ufl.edu

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ABSTRACT



3,5,7-Tris(arylmethyl)-1-aza-adamantanetrione donor– σ –acceptor compounds have been synthesized in four steps. Computational and ^1H NMR analyses rationalize the solubility, gelation, and conformational properties of the C_3 -symmetric molecules toward employing σ -coupled donor–acceptor interactions in molecular self-assembly.

Donor– σ (spacer)–acceptor molecules¹ are unique alternatives to traditional π -conjugated chromophores in applications ranging from nonlinear optics^{2,3} to unimolecular electrical rectification;⁴ a high transparency in the visible region and significantly dipolar excited state⁵ underlie their function. While well-studied at the molecular level, only recently have these chromophores been considered as building blocks for advanced materials and polymers.^{6,7} A

common motif within the donor– σ –acceptor class features a nitrogen donor atom and carbonyl π -acceptor at opposite ends of a saturated three-carbon spacer;⁸ the resulting through-bond interactions^{1b} are apparent even in the ground state where they can influence the stereoselectivity of addition to the carbonyl group⁹ and bias conformation at nitrogen.¹⁰ We have initiated a research study that employs such donor– σ –acceptor chromophores in supramolecular

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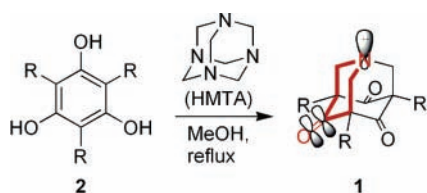
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Scheme 1. Synthesis of Donor- σ -Acceptor 1-Aza-adamantanetriones from Substituted Phloroglucinol Derivatives¹⁴

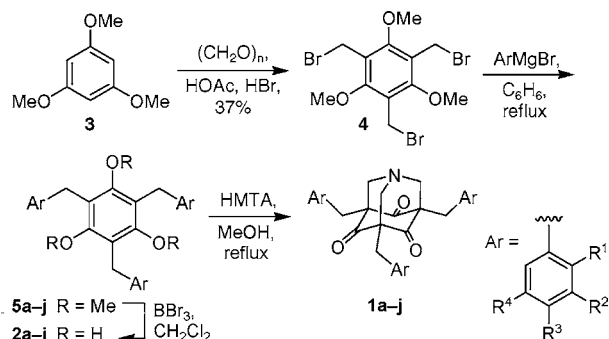


architectures; for example, reversible assemblies wherein the inherent dipole of the molecules should facilitate their one-dimensional organization in solution, an important morphology for gels,¹¹ liquid crystals,¹² and hydrogen-bonded assemblies¹³ that display polar order.

The shape, symmetry, and rapid entry into 1-aza-adamantanetriones **1** made them an attractive scaffold to initiate our studies. Elegant work by Nicholas Risch and co-workers demonstrated the single-step conversion of 2,4,6-trialkylphloroglucinol derivatives **2** (where R = Me, Et, and *i*-Pr) to 3,5,7-trisubstituted 1-aza-adamantanetriones **1** via a Mannich-type reaction effected by hexamethylenetetramine (HMTA, Scheme 1).¹⁴ Three carbonyl groups and three “R” groups converge on the concave underside of the adamantanoid platform; the constrained orientation of the bridgehead nitrogen lone pair with respect to the carbonyl π systems via an intervening three σ -bonds defines the donor- σ -acceptor framework. Enforced through-bond interactions are then evident in the ground state through greatly diminished nitrogen basicity¹⁵ and nucleophilicity.¹⁶ Reported here are the syntheses and solution-phase properties of the tris-(arylmethyl) derivatives of the 1-aza-adamantanetriones (**1a–j**, Table 1); once prepared and studied, we reasoned that a variety of structures could be derived from appropriate modifications to the aromatic periphery.

Upon designing the synthesis of **1a–j**, only *O*-protected tribenzyl precursor **5a** could be found in the literature,¹⁷ the product of a five-step sequence beginning from phloroglucinol. Our alternative two-step sequence to this compound

Table 1. Synthesis of Tris(arylmethyl)-1-aza-adamantanetriones^a



entry	R ¹	R ²	R ³	R ⁴	% yield of 5 ^b	% yield of 1 ^{b,c}
a	H	H	H	H	90	65
b	CH ₃	H	H	H	55	61
c	H	CH ₃	H	H	42	62
d	H	H	CH ₃	H	66	43
e	H	CH ₃	H	CH ₃	27	48
f	<i>i</i> -Pr	H	H	H	66	64
g	H	H	<i>t</i> -Bu	H	64	33
h	H	H	F	H	63	44
i	H	H	OR	H	63 (OMe)	58 (OH)
j	3-naphthalenyl				24	40

^a See the Supporting Information for synthetic details. ^b Isolated yield.

^c Yield for two steps where the conversion of **5** to **2** is quantitative (HMTA = hexamethylenetetramine; Ar = aryl).

and various analogues (Table 1) begins with the bromomethylation¹⁸ of commercially available 1,3,5-trimethoxybenzene **3** and subsequent 3-fold benzylic substitution with an appropriate, freshly prepared aryl Grignard reagent. The yields of **5a–j** are generally good, representing a minimum 80–90% average conversion at each of three benzylic sites. Some decrease in yield is observed as the size of the aryl group increases (e.g., **5e**, **5j**). Demethylation of **5a–j** is performed quantitatively by treatment with BBr₃ and condensation of the phloroglucinol products **2a–j** with HMTA in the manner described by Risch (methanol, reflux)¹⁴ produces the tricyclic targets **1a–j**. While the yields of the desired 1-aza-adamantanetriones are modest, the products precipitate from methanol in each case and only filtration and washing are required for their isolation. Moreover, a variety of substituents can be accommodated in this final reaction, including fluorinated (**1h**) and bicyclic aromatics (**1j**) and phenols (**1i**).

The 1-aza-adamantanetrione cores have the expected spectroscopic signatures.¹⁴ Using parent **1a** as an example, two intense carbonyl stretches (1735 and 1692 cm⁻¹) appear in the IR spectrum (Fermi resonance), and a weak UV transition is observed that is attributable to the σ -coupled transition (λ_{CT} = 284 nm ($n \rightarrow \pi^*$), ϵ_{CT} = 2200 M⁻¹ cm⁻¹, THF). The compounds show moderate solubility in haloge-

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(15) The pK_a values for the protonated 3,5,7-trimethyl-1-aza-adamantanetrione, -dione, and -one are 0.3 (3:1 water/dioxane), 3.5, and 7.14, respectively (ref 14f).

(16) For example, treatment of 3,5,7-tripropyl-1-aza-adamantanetrione **1l** (vide infra) with methyl iodide, hydrogen peroxide, or *m*-CPBA gives no reaction at the bridgehead nitrogen.

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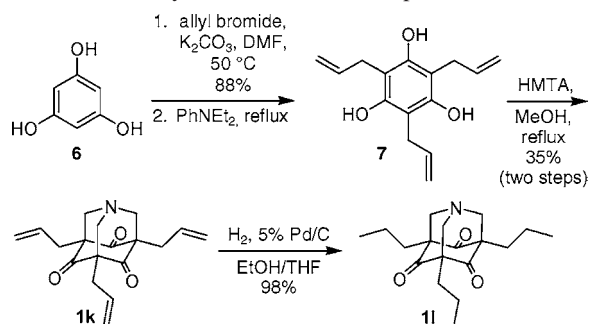
Table 2. Solvent-Dependent ^1H NMR Chemical Shifts^a of the N- α -CH₂ Protons for Substituted 1-Aza-adamantantriones (300 MHz, 25 °C)^b

compd	DMSO- <i>d</i> ₆	pyridine- <i>d</i> ₅	CDCl ₃	C ₆ D ₆
1a	3.15	3.37	3.11	2.63
1k	3.33	3.55	3.41	2.78
1l	3.47	3.62	3.38	2.74

^a Reported in ppm versus TMS. ^b The shifts were concentration independent over the range permitted by solubility (2.5–50 mM).

nated solvents and DMSO, with excellent solubility in pyridine. A corresponding dependence of the N- α -CH₂ ^1H NMR chemical shift on solvent polarity/polarizability¹⁹ is observed (Table 2) that roughly follows the expected dipolar properties of the core in solution. Namely, as the core dipole is stabilized (through-bond effects) in more polar solvents, the bridgehead nitrogen becomes more electron deficient; the consequence is a deshielding of the N- α -CH₂ protons.²⁰ That these effects are unique to the core and do not arise from chemical shift anisotropy (involving the aromatic substituents) is shown through model compounds. Three-fold *O*-allylation of phloroglucinol **6** followed by a Claisen rearrangement offers new triallyl derivative **7** (Scheme 2).

Scheme 2. Synthesis of Model Compounds **1k** and **1l**



This material, although challenging to purify, was reacted with HMTA directly to provide triallyl 1-aza-adamantantrione **1k** in 35% yield (isolated yield for two steps). Similar chemical shift trends are observed for this compound and saturated tris(propyl) **1l** (Table 2), demonstrating that ground-state electronic stabilization of the core is responsible for the downfield shifts in more polar solvents.

Unexpected given the modest solubility of **1a–j** in most organic solvents, two derivatives, **1a** and **1i**, display gelation behavior.²¹ Optically clear gels result from heating and cooling DMSO (Figure 1a) and CHCl₃ solutions of **1a** (~0.5

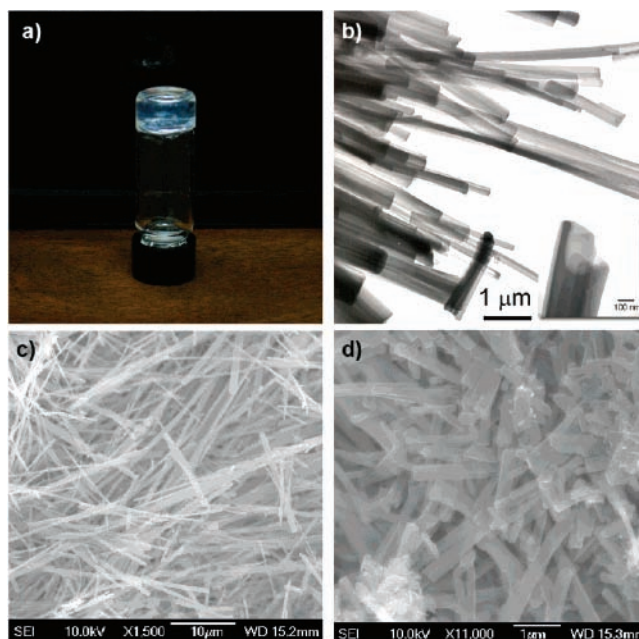


Figure 1. Organogels from tribenzyl-1-aza-adamantanetrione **1a**: (a) 0.5 wt % of **1a** in DMSO after heating and cooling; (b) TEM and (c) SEM images of a xerogel formed from critical point drying of an 0.5 wt % DMSO gel (inset: an ~0.5 μm fiber that appears as a tube); (d) SEM images of a xerogel formed from conventional freeze-drying of an 0.5 wt % DMSO gel.

wt %). The gels take nearly 1 h to form and then exhibit a sol–gel transition (T_{gel}) at ~45 °C (determined by the inverted vial technique);²¹ importantly, the process is reversible with no signs of decomposition or structural change to the monomer by ^1H NMR (DMSO-*d*₆).²² Similarly, addition of water to DMSO solutions of **1i** results in gelation at the solvent interface.

SEM and TEM techniques were used to explore the morphologies of xerogels formed from **1a** (Figure 1b–d). The solvent was removed from DMSO gels (e.g., Figure 1a) via both critical point drying and conventional freeze-drying.²³ TEM images reveal 0.5 μm fibers (Figure 1b) that do not show any discernible higher-ordered structure, although some do appear hollow (Figure 1b, inset). Extended fibrillar structures are also detected by SEM from each of the sample preparations; these show little entanglement, consistent with more crystalline gelators.^{24,25} In all cases, the

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(22) An important consideration as the tricyclic ring systems are not strain-free. The bond angle at the carbonyl is calculated as 114.5°, smaller than the optimum sp² bond angle of 120°.

(23) For a discussion of gel morphology dependence on drying technique see: Frey, M. W.; Cuculo, J. A.; Spontak, R. J. *J. Polym. Sci., Part B: Polym. Phys.* **1996**, *34*, 2049–2058.

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(25) DSC analysis of the monomer reveals a sharp endothermic transition upon first heating (297.1 °C) and sharp exotherm upon cooling (222.5 °C). Likewise, preliminary powder X-ray diffraction studies show a series of low angle diffraction peaks that are not readily indexed.

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(20) The same effect is found upon introducing carbonyl groups to the 1-aza-adamantane core. For 1,3,5-trimethyl-1-aza-adamantane, ^1H NMR (CDCl₃) δ N- α -CH₂ = 2.60 ppm; this value increases through the monoketone (2.88–3.03), diketone (2.75–3.45), and triketone (3.41) indicative of enhanced through-bond effects (data taken from ref 14).

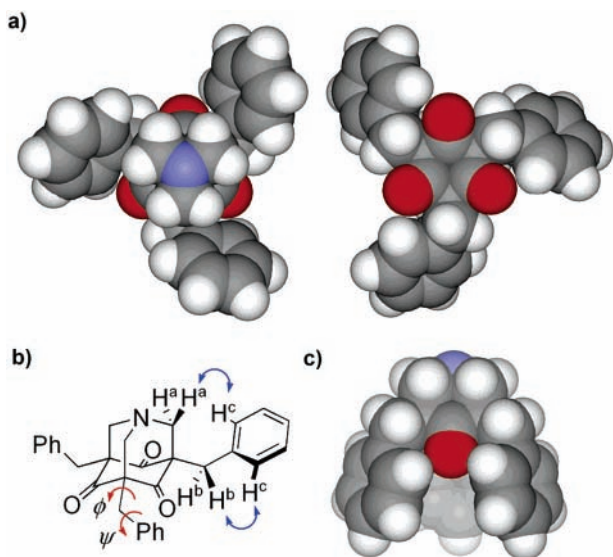


Figure 2. Low-energy conformations of **1a** identified from Monte Carlo conformational searching:²⁶ (a) energy-minimized lowest energy “all-arms-up” conformation (one enantiomer is shown); (b) NOE contacts identified by a NOESY experiment and labeling of critical dihedral angles, ϕ and ψ ; (c) energy-minimized lowest energy “all-arms-down” conformation, approximately 5.8 kcal mol^{−1} higher in energy.

manifestation of fibers is consistent with other gelators, the assembly of which is generally understood to be one-dimensional organization of the monomers.²¹

As ascertaining molecular ordering and conformation from the gel phase remains an interminable challenge,²¹ both solution-phase NMR experiments and computation were undertaken to preliminarily probe the conformational preferences of **1a**. Monte Carlo conformational searching²⁶ identifies the chiral (but racemic) C₃-symmetric “all-arms-up” arrangement as the lowest energy conformation (Figure 2a) with values of $\phi \sim 45^\circ$ and $\psi \sim 90^\circ$ (Figure 2b) for the two relevant dihedral angles.²⁷ Although appealing from a molecular recognition standpoint, the “all-arms-down” conformations (Figure 2c) are predicted to be significantly higher in energy. The lowest energy of these is shown ($\Delta\Delta E_{\text{rel}} = 5.75$ kcal mol^{−1}, HF/3-21G*)²⁶ and reveals eclipsed interactions between the N- α -CH₂ hydrogens (H^a) and benzylic hydrogens (H^b); additionally, the *o*-phenyl hydrogens are poorly aligned to participate in favorable C–H \cdots O interactions²⁸ with the core carbonyl oxygens, and in fact, these electrostatic interactions are likely repulsive.

(26) MacroModel v. 8.6 (Schrödinger, LLC), Amber* force field, CHCl₃ GB/SA solvation model. The structures were further minimized at the ab initio (HF/3-21G*) level using Gaussian 98 (Revision A.7, Gaussian, Inc.: Wallingford, CT, 2004). Details and references are provided in the Supporting Information.

(27) Close in energy are the C_s-symmetric “all-arms-up” conformers bearing one disparate arm with $\phi \sim -45^\circ$ and $\psi \sim -90^\circ$.

(28) Castellano, R. K. *Curr. Org. Chem.* **2004**, 8, 845–865.

Evidence for the lowest energy conformation in solution comes through a NOESY experiment where NOEs are observed between hydrogens H^c on the aromatic ring and H^a on the core (Figure 2b; $d = 2.7$ Å in the minimized structure of **1a**), a result only possible if the “all-arms-up” conformer is present in solution. In any case, compounds **1a–j** exist as equilibrium mixtures of conformers in solution,²⁹ as indicated by the relatively large temperature dependence of their chemical shifts. The temperature dependence coefficient is 0.2 ppb/K for H^a and 1.1 ppb/K for H^b in **1a**; these coefficients increase in **1b** to −2.6 and 2.3 ppb/K, respectively. The *o*-CH₃ protons of **1b** also display a large temperature dependence (0.6 ppb/K) as does the *o*-proton of the aromatic ring (4.1 ppb/K). The barriers to conformational exchange become even higher for **1e**; at −80 °C, H^a and H^b display a pattern of at least eight lines which coalesce into two at 20 °C.

A survey of the literature reveals that while low molecular weight organogelators of diverse structure have been identified,²¹ few possess the structural and functional attributes of **1a,i**. While our studies have offered a glimpse of the monomer structure and behavior of **1a** in solution, our current efforts seek to understand why this molecule is a gelator at all. Certainly an appreciable ground-state dipole moment for **1a** (~ 4 D) is predicted by computation, and the dipole-driven stacking of molecules is conceivable in solution¹² where other factors—complementary monomer shape, aryl substitution (i.e., π – π interactions), weak intermolecular contacts (e.g., dispersion and C–H \cdots O), and solvation—also play a role.³⁰ Further studies are now conceivable to show how through-bond interactions might both facilitate the organization of donor– σ –acceptor molecules such as **1a** in solution and impart their assemblies with unique electronic properties.

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Supporting Information Available: Experimental procedures and characterization data for compounds **1–7**, DSC data, computational details, and relevant NMR data. This material is available free of charge via the Internet at <http://pubs.acs.org>.

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(29) Solid-state ¹³C CPMAS NMR (10 kHz) of a powdered sample of **1a** reveals multiple resonances in the C=O, N- α -CH₂, and CH₂Ar regions.

(30) For comprehensive studies of dipolar aggregation phenomena in solution see: Yao, S.; Beginn, U.; Gress, T.; Lysetska, M.; Würthner, F. J. *Am. Chem. Soc.* **2004**, 126, 8336–8348 and references therein.