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The structure of phenol- Ar n ( n = 1 , 2 ) clusters in their S 0 and S 1 states

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Electronic spectroscopy and dynamics of the monomer and Ar n clusters of 9-phenylfluorene
The structure of phenol-Ar$_n$ ($n=1,2$) clusters in their $S_0$ and $S_1$ states

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The structures of the van der Waals bonded complexes of phenol with one and two argon atoms have
been determined using rotationally resolved electronic spectroscopy of the $S_1 ← S_0$ transition. The
experimentally determined structural parameters were compared to the results of quantum chemical
calculations that are capable of properly describing dispersive interactions in the clusters. It was
found that both complexes have $\pi$-bound configurations, with the phenol-Ar$_2$ complex adopting a
symmetric (1\,1\,1) structure. The distances of the argon atoms to the aromatic plane in the electronic
ground state of the $n=1$ and $n=2$ clusters are 353 and 355 pm, respectively. Resonance-enhanced
multiphoton ionization spectroscopy was used to measure intermolecular vibrational frequencies in
the $S_1$ state and Franck–Condon simulations were performed to confirm the structure of the
phenol-Ar$_2$ cluster. These were found to be in excellent agreement with the (1\,1\,1) configuration.

I. INTRODUCTION

Intermolecular interactions of aromatic molecules are vital for chemical and biological recognition.$^1$ A detailed
understanding of these interactions at the molecular level requires accurate knowledge of the intermolecular potential
energy surface. Essential parameters of such a surface include the interaction energy and the geometry of the global
minimum, as well as the occurrence of less stable local minima. The fruitful interplay of high-resolution spectroscopy
of isolated clusters in molecular beams and high-level quantum chemical calculations provides the most direct
access to these potential parameters.$^{2-5}$ Clusters of phenol with neutral ligands, denoted phenol-$L_n$, are attractive model
systems to investigate the competition of two different fundamental types of intermolecular forces, namely hydrogen
bonding to the acidic OH group (H-bond) and van der Waals (vdW) bonding (stacking) to the highly polarizable $\pi$
electron system of the aromatic ring ($\pi$-bond, vdW bond). It turns out that the relative interaction strengths of both binding
motifs strongly depend on the type of ligand ($L$), the degree of solvation ($n$), and the degree of electronic excitation
or ionization. Hence, a plethora of spectroscopic and theoretical studies have been carried out on phenol-bearing
clusters in order to determine the preference for stacking or hydrogen bonding interactions.

The present work reports high-resolution electronic spectra of phenol-Ar$_n$ clusters with $n=1$ and 2 in a molecular
beam expansion, along with quantum chemical calculations. An analysis of vibrational frequencies from new resonance-
enhanced multiphoton ionization (REMPI) spectra of the phenol-Ar$_n$ ($n=1-2$) clusters will corroborate the results.
The analysis of the $S_1 ← S_0$ spectra obtained at the level of rotational resolution provides for the first time clear-cut
information about the geometry and preferential binding motif of these prototype clusters, which are model systems for an
acidic polar molecule interacting with a nonpolar solvent. Despite numerous spectroscopic studies on phenol-Ar$_n$
clusters reported in the past, the structural binding motif of this simple system has not been identified unambiguously for the
neutral electronic states.

In the following, the present knowledge about phenol-Ar$_n$ will be briefly reviewed. In 1985, initial spectroscopic
data about phenol-Ar$_n$ ($n=0-2$) came from one-color REMPI spectra of the $S_1 ← S_0$ transition and two-color
photoionization efficiency (PIE) spectra of the cation ground state ($D_0$) recorded via the $S_1$ state origins by Goñi et al.$^{10}$
On the basis of nearly additive shifts in the $S_1 ← S_0$ transition energies ($-33$ and $-68$ cm$^{-1}$) and ionization potentials
($-152$ and $-297$ cm$^{-1}$) upon complexation with one and two argon atoms, the authors concluded that both argon
ligands are $\pi$-bonded to phenol on opposite sides of the aromatic ring, denoted (1\,0\,0) and (1\,1\,1) structure, respectively.$^{10}$
The intermolecular vibrational structures observed in the $S_1 ← S_0$ electronic spectra of phenol-Ar$_1$ (Refs. 11 and 12) and
phenol-Ar₂ (Ref. 13) have subsequently been assigned assuming π-bonded (1|0) and (1|1) structures, respectively.

Almost negligible complexation-induced frequency shifts of the O–H stretch (ν_{OH}) and other skeletal vibrations in the S₀ state of phenol-Ar₁ observed via stimulated Raman spectroscopy and IR dip spectroscopy have been indicative for a π-bonded (1|0) geometry for the n=1 complex. In addition, high-level quantum chemical calculations of the potential energy surface in the S₀ state yield a π-bonded global minimum, and it is unclear at present whether the H-bonded structure is a shallow local minimum or a transition state. Comparison of rotational constants derived from a rotational band contour fit of the S₁ origin spectrum with ab initio rotational constants obtained at the MP2/6-31G(d,p) level also support a π-bonded (1|0) geometry for n=1. Meerts et al. presented the fully rotationally resolved electronic spectrum of the 7D-phenol-Ar₁ cluster, without a detailed structural analysis. The rotational constants of the S₀ state are close to those of the S₁ state, implying similar π-bonded geometries in both electronic states. Mass-analyzed threshold ionization (MATI) and zero-kinetic-energy (ZEKE) photoelectron spectroscopy have been employed to derive the binding energies of π-bonded phenol-Ar₁ in the D₀, S₁, and S₀ states as 535±3, 397±13 and 364±13 cm⁻¹, respectively, and to measure and assign the intermolecular vibrational modes in the D₀ cation state. The intermolecular frequencies are consistent with the π-bonded phenol-Ar₁ geometry. Similarly, the ν_{OH} frequency of phenol⁻⁻Ar₁ derived from IR photodissociation of the cation dimer generated by REMPI is compatible only with a π-bonded isomer.

Until recently, all spectroscopic studies indicated that phenol⁺⁻Ar₁ has a π-bonded equilibrium structure in the S₀, S₁, and D₀ states and no signature of a H-bonded phenol⁺⁻Ar₁ isomer had been detected. In 2000, however, the IR photodissociation spectrum of phenol⁺⁻Ar₁ generated in an electron impact (EI) ion source clearly demonstrated that the H-bonded isomer is the global minimum on the potential energy surface of the cation cluster, with a characteristic ν_{OH} frequency strongly redshifted from isolated phenol⁺ by H-bonding. This result was confirmed by quantum chemical calculations, which predict the H-bonded isomer as global minimum in the D₀ state, whereas the π-bonded structure is only a local minimum. The reason why the most stable H-bonded isomer of phenol⁺⁻Ar₁ had completely escaped previous spectroscopic detection (MATI, PIE, ZEKE, REMPI-IR) arises from the fact that the phenol⁺⁻Ar cation in the D₀ state had been prepared by REMPI of the neutral π-bonded precursor, which is governed by the restrictions of minimal geometry changes imposed by the Franck–Condon (FC) principle. In contrast, the EI cluster ion source predominantly produces the most stable isomer of a given phenol⁺⁻Arₙ cation cluster because the reaction sequence begins with EI ionization of the phenol monomer, which is followed by three body cluster aggregation reactions. As the H-bond in phenol⁺⁻Ar₁ is more stable than the π-bond, the energetically most favorable isomers of larger phenol⁺⁻Arₙ clusters (n>1) have one H-bonded ligand and (n-1) π-bonded ones. The ionization-induced π→H switch in the preferred phenol···Ar binding motif has recently been probed by time-resolved IR spectroscopy of the phenol⁺⁻Ar₂ complex prepared by REMPI. These studies revealed that after ionization of π-bonded phenol-Ar₁, one Ar ligand isomerizes from the π-bonded site toward the H-bonded site on a time scale of several picoseconds. However, it was noted that for a full understanding of this dynamic process, one must know whether the neutral phenol-Ar₂ precursor complex has a symmetric (1|1) structure with one Ar above and the other symmetrically below the aromatic plane or a (2|0) structure with both Ar atoms at the same side of the aromatic ring. Unfortunately, no reliable calculations are available for the potential energy surface of phenol⁺⁻Ar₂. Moreover, spectroscopic evidence for the geometric structure of neutral phenol-Ar₂ is scarce and not unambiguous as it relies on vibrationally resolved spectra only. Recent hole-burning spectra of phenol-Arₙ with n=1 and 2 demonstrated that all spectral features observed in the S₁←S₀ REMPI spectra indeed arise from single isomers in the molecular beam expansion, which have been assigned to π-bonded structures for both n=1 and n=2. The refined analysis of the intermolecular vibrational structure observed for phenol-Ar₂ was, however, compatible with both a (1|1) and a (2|0) structure. The main purpose of the present work is to provide the definitive answer to the question of the geometry of the phenol-Ar₂ trimer.

II. METHODS

A. Experimental procedures

The experimental setup for rotationally resolved laser induced fluorescence spectroscopy is described in detail elsewhere. Briefly, it consists of a ring dye laser (Coherent 899-21) operated with Rhodamine 110, pumped with 7 W of the frequency-doubled output of a diode pumped Yb:YAG (yttrium aluminum garnet) disk laser (ELS Versadisk). About 600–700 mW of the fundamental dye laser output is coupled into an external folded ring cavity (Spectra Physics) for second harmonic generation. The typical output power is 20 mW and is constant during each experiment. The molecular beam is formed by expanding phenol, heated to 365 K, and seeded in 600 mbar of argon, through a 230 μm hole into the vacuum. The molecular beam machine consists of three differentially pumped vacuum chambers that are connected by two skimmers (1 and 3 mm diameter, separated approximately 200 mm) in order to reduce the Doppler width to 25 MHz. The molecular beam is crossed at right angles with the laser beam in the third chamber, 360 mm downstream of the nozzle. The resulting fluorescence is collected perpendicular to the plane defined by the laser and the molecular beam by an imaging optics setup consisting of a concave mirror and two planoconvex lenses. The fluorescence is detected by a UV enhanced photomultiplier tube whose output is recorded by a PC based photon counter card. The relative frequency is determined with a quasi-confocal Fabry–Pérot interferometer. The absolute frequency is determined by recording the iodine absorption spectrum and comparison of the transitions with tabulated lines.
The experimental apparatus for REMPI spectroscopy has been described in detail previously. Phenol-Ar\_n clusters were produced in a skimmed supersonic expansion by passing argon gas over a heated phenol sample (330–350 K) in an internal sample holder located directly behind the valve. The pressure of argon gas can be varied up to 8 bars in order to optimize the production of phenol-Ar\_n clusters. The rotational temperature of the molecules is approximately 4 K after the expansion.\textsuperscript{21} The molecular beam interacts with the counterpropagating, frequency-doubled output of two Nd:YAG pumped dye lasers (Radiant Dyes, Narrow Scan) using Coumarin 153 for excitation, while a mixture of sulforhodamine B and 4-dicyanomethylene-2-methyl-6-p-dimethylaminostyryl-4H-pyran (DCM) was used for the ionization laser to achieve a wide tuning range. The lasers were calibrated (±0.02 cm\(^{-1}\)) with reference to simultaneously recorded iodine absorption spectra, corrected from air to vacuum.

Phenol was purchased from Riedel–de Haën and was used without further purification. 7D-phenol was produced by refluxing phenol with an excess of D\(_2\)O and subsequent removal of solvent.

**B. Computational methods**

1. Quantum chemical calculations

Quantum chemical calculations were performed with the TURBOMOLE (Ref. 39) and ORCA (Ref. 40) program packages. The Gaussian atomic orbital basis sets were taken from the TURBOMOLE library.\textsuperscript{41,42} The economic triple-zeta Ahlrichs-type sets with different numbers of polarization functions (TZVP or TZVPP) as well as the triple and quadruple-zeta sets of Dunning\textsuperscript{43} including diffuse basis functions (aug-cc-pVTZ and aug-cc-pVQZ) have been employed. Using these sets a detailed basis set dependence study has been performed for the structure of phenol-Ar\_2. The equilibrium geometries of the electronic ground and the lowest excited singlet states were optimized at the level of the approximate coupled cluster singles and doubles model (CC2) employing the resolution-of-the-identity approximation.\textsuperscript{44,45} The CC2 method represents the simplest reliable \textit{ab initio} treatment of electron correlation consistent for both ground and excited states, which is necessary to describe noncovalently bound complexes. In addition, we also considered the currently most accurate density functional theory (DFT) approach for noncovalent interactions, namely, a double-hybrid functional including empirical dispersion corrections (B2PLYP-D).\textsuperscript{46,47} This method explicitly includes nonlocal correlation effects and yields very accurate results close to those of CCSD(T) for the widely used S22 benchmark set of vdW complexes. Full geometry optimizations using analytical B2PLYP-D gradients\textsuperscript{48} were performed for this method and only ground states were considered.

2. Franck–Condon simulations

The change in a molecular geometry on electronic excitation can be determined from the intensities of absorption or emission bands using the FC principle. According to the FC principle the relative intensity of a vibronic band depends on the overlap integral of the vibrational wave functions in both electronic states, which is determined by the relative shift of the two potential energy curves connected by the vibronic transition along the normal coordinates \(Q\) of both states and the vibrations involved,

\[
FC = \left| \int [\Psi'(Q')]^\dagger \Psi''(Q') dQ' \right|^2 = \langle v', ..., v'_M | v''_N, ..., v''_N \rangle^2, \quad (1)
\]

where the \(\Psi(Q)\) are the \(N\)-dimensional vibrational wave functions. The normal coordinates \(Q'\) of the excited state and \(Q''\) of the ground state are related by the linear orthogonal transformation given by Duschinsky.\textsuperscript{39}

The program FCFIT (Ref. 50) determines the structural changes on electronic excitation from the experimentally determined intensity pattern. Simultaneously, the changes in the rotational constants are used in the fit to assess the ge-

**FIG. 1.** Two-color (1+1)'\(\rightarrow\)S\(_0\) REMPI excitation spectra of phenol-Ar\_n (\(n=1\text{--}2\)). The spectra were recorded with the probe laser set to 32 210 cm\(^{-1}\). Assignments of intermolecular modes are included for the \(n=1\) complex. Frequencies are relative to the electronic origin of the \(n=1\) cluster at 36 315.05 and of the \(n=2\) cluster at 36 280.94 cm\(^{-1}\).

**FIG. 2.** Rotationally resolved spectrum of the electronic origin of the phenol-Ar\_1 cluster at 36 315.05 cm\(^{-1}\) and simulation of the spectrum using the FC principle. According to the FC description can be determined from the intensities of absorption or emission bands using the FC principle. According to the FC principle the relative intensity of a vibronic band depends on the normal coordinates are used in the fit to assess the geometrical changes.

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3. Evolutionary strategies

The rotationally resolved electronic spectra were fit to an asymmetric rigid rotor Hamiltonian with the help of evolutionary strategies (ESs). Contrary to most previous applications of genetic algorithm techniques, in the evaluation of molecular parameters from rotationally resolved electronic spectra, a different ES with mutative step size control was used in the present work. Mutative step size control adapts the speed at which the parameter space is explored with each optimization step. It tends to work well for the adaptation of a global step size but tends to fail when it comes to the step size of each individual parameter due to several disruptive effects. The derandomized algorithm DR2 used here is aiming at the accumulation of information about the correlation or anticorrelation of past mutation vectors that connect trial solutions in order to tackle this problem. The high effectiveness of this approach for spectral analysis has been demonstrated recently.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. REMPI spectra of phenol-Ar₁–₂

REMPI spectra of the phenol-Ar₁ (n=1–2) clusters are shown in Fig. 1. Spectroscopic results are in agreement with previous studies but show considerable improvement in signal-to-noise ratio.

In the REMPI spectra of the phenol-Ar₁ cluster [Fig. 1(a)], the most intense feature, the S₁ band origin, appears at 36 316.4 ± 0.5 cm⁻¹, in very good agreement with the previous value of 36 316 ± 0.5 cm⁻¹. The position of the origin transition represents a redshift of 33 cm⁻¹ with respect to the S₁ origin of the phenol monomer at 36 348.7 cm⁻¹. The spectrum also exhibits a number of vDW vibrational modes at 23, 42, and 53 cm⁻¹ above the band origin. They have been previously assigned as the bending mode β₁, its overtone, 2β₁, and the intermolecular stretch σ₁.

The most prominent spectral feature in the phenol-Ar₂ spectrum [Fig. 1(b)] at 36 282.1 ± 0.5 cm⁻¹ is assigned to the S₁ ← S₀ origin. Relative to the phenol-Ar₁ band origin, this peak is redshifted by 34 cm⁻¹, suggesting that the argon atom solvates the phenol molecule at a similar binding site to that in phenol-Ar₁. In a previous study several smaller visible features in the spectrum were assigned to a progression in an intermolecular bending vibration (β₁, 2β₁, and 3β₁) at 14, 27, and 39 cm⁻¹ and excitation of the intermolecular stretch (σ₁ at 36 cm⁻¹). It was argued that this vibronic assignment is not unique and an asymmetric (2|0) structure cannot be excluded for the phenol-Ar₂ cluster.

B. Rotationally resolved electronic spectrum of phenol-Ar₁

The rotationally resolved electronic spectrum of the electronic origin of the phenol-Ar₁ cluster at 36 315.05 cm⁻¹ is shown in Fig. 2. It is a nearly pure c-type spectrum which is dominated by a strong central Q-branch, shown in an expanded view in the lower trace of Fig. 2. Since no a- or b-type transitions could be incorporated unambiguously into the fit, the final fit was made to a pure c-type asymmetric rotor Hamiltonian. The same is true for the other high-resolution spectra discussed below.

Close agreement between the experimental spectrum and the simulation is obtained. The parameters deduced from this fit, listed in Table I, are the rotational constants in the S₀ state (A', B', C'), the change in rotational constants on electronic excitation (Δ(A, B, C)), the frequency of the S₁ ← S₀ origin transition, and the direction of the transition dipole moment with respect to the system’s main inertial a-axis (expressed in the angle φ).

The rotational temperature of the molecules in the molecular beam was described using a two temperature model with T₁=2.1 K, T₂=6.5 K, and a relative weight factor of 0.01 for T₂. The Lorentzian width cannot be transformed into an excited state lifetime in this case, since the spectrum contains an unresolved torsional splitting due to the OH torsion and serves only to obtain

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameter</th>
<th>Expt. (MHz)</th>
<th>CC2 (MHz)</th>
<th>B2PLYP-D (MHz)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A'</td>
<td>1818.7(5)</td>
<td>1804.00</td>
<td>1827.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B'</td>
<td>1124.9(5)</td>
<td>1210.25</td>
<td>1200.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C'</td>
<td>917.5(14)</td>
<td>973.25</td>
<td>971.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>φ</td>
<td>0°</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΔA/MHz</td>
<td>-34.94(6)</td>
<td>-37.12</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Δβ/MHz</td>
<td>24.40(3)</td>
<td>31.66</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΔC/MHz</td>
<td>23.35(2)</td>
<td>32.16</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

^<sup>1</sup> With the TZVP basis set.
^<sup>2</sup> With the aug-cc-pVTZ basis set.
^<sup>3</sup> Fixed to zero in the fit.

This table provides a comparison of the molecular parameters from the fit to the rotationally resolved electronic spectrum of phenol-Ar₁ and 7D-phenol-Ar₂, to the results of ab initio calculations. For the definition of the parameters, see text.
good agreement between simulation and experiment.\textsuperscript{62} The rotational constants of the ground state of phenol-Ar\textsubscript{1} determined from the high-resolution spectrum show significant deviations from those obtained from a contour fit to a low-resolution spectrum (with deviations of up to 4\%),\textsuperscript{21} demonstrating the limits of the latter technique for the extraction of quantitative structural information.

The second isotopologue which has been investigated is the 7D-phenol-Ar\textsubscript{1} cluster, which has its electronic origin at 36 312.74 cm\textsuperscript{-1} (spectrum not shown here). The linewidth of the rovibronic transitions in the deuterated cluster is considerably smaller than that of the undeuterated cluster, as is the case in the bare monomer.\textsuperscript{60} A comparison of the molecular parameters obtained from the ES fits of the phenol-Ar\textsubscript{1} and 7D-phenol-Ar\textsubscript{1} spectra with the results of quantum chemical calculations is also given in Table I.

C. Rotationally resolved electronic spectrum of phenol-Ar\textsubscript{2}

Figure 3 shows the rotationally resolved electronic spectrum of the phenol-Ar\textsubscript{2} origin at 36 280.94 cm\textsuperscript{-1}. As for the phenol-Ar\textsubscript{1} cluster, the spectrum is dominated by a strong Q-branch and can fully be simulated using selection rules for \(c\)-type bands. At 36 278.62 cm\textsuperscript{-1} the origin of its hydroxy deuterated isotopologue is found (Fig. 4). Also displayed are the simulations using the best fit parameters from Table II. Table II compares the molecular parameters obtained from ES fits of the phenol-Ar\textsubscript{2} and 7D-phenol-Ar\textsubscript{2} spectra with the results of quantum chemical calculations at different levels of theory and using different basis sets. For details about the calculations, cf. Sec. III E.

D. The structures of the phenol-Ar\textsubscript{1,2} clusters

The comparison of the experimental and calculated rotational constants of phenol-Ar\textsubscript{1} confirms that the cluster has a \(\pi\)-bound structure. Calculations also indicate the existence of a second stable structure, in which the argon atom is hydrogen bonded to the phenol OH group. However, this structure was not observed in the experiment. Both structures are depicted in Fig. 5. The structure of the phenol-Ar\textsubscript{2} cluster observed experimentally, however, has not been unequivocally determined yet. The most important clue concerning its

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{lcccccc}
\hline
 & \multicolumn{3}{c}{Phenol-Ar\textsubscript{2}} & \multicolumn{3}{c}{7D-phenol-Ar\textsubscript{2}} \\
 & Expt. & CC\textsuperscript{2}\textsuperscript{a} & B2PLYP-D\textsuperscript{b} & Expt. & CC\textsuperscript{2}\textsuperscript{a} & B2PLYP-D\textsuperscript{b} \\
\hline
A\textsuperscript{v}/MHz & 1777.6(5) & 1774.10 & 1779.87 & 1726.4(5) & 1724.23 & 1729.10 \\
B\textsuperscript{v}/MHz & 436.3(3) & 496.74 & 494.08 & 462.1(2) & 496.41 & 493.77 \\
C\textsuperscript{v}/MHz & 429.7(5) & 449.69 & 447.42 & 417.8(2) & 446.67 & 444.38 \\
\phi/(deg) & 0\textsuperscript{c} & 0.35 & \cdots & 0\textsuperscript{c} & 0.35 & \cdots \\
\Delta A/\text{MHz} & -18.44(2) & -25.92 & \cdots & -15.45(2) & -22.76 & \cdots \\
\Delta B/\text{MHz} & 13.31(2) & 19.23 & \cdots & 13.31(2) & 19.23 & \cdots \\
\Delta C/\text{MHz} & 13.23(2) & 18.97 & \cdots & 13.19(2) & 18.85 & \cdots \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Comparison of the molecular parameters from the fit to the rotationally resolved electronic spectrum of phenol-Ar\textsubscript{2} and 7D-phenol-Ar\textsubscript{2} shown in Figs. 3 and 4, respectively, to the results of \textit{ab initio} calculations of the (1|1) structure.}
\end{table}
structure is the rotationally resolved electronic spectrum of its $S_1$ origin. The rotational constants that can be expected for the different possible configurations (Fig. 6) are given in Table III. For the hydrogen bonded structure no changes in the rotational constants upon electronic excitation are given since no stable $S_1$ state minimum was found. Comparison with the experimental parameters from Table II provides unambiguous evidence for the (1|1) structure of this cluster.

### E. Structural parameters

The performance of different methods and basis sets for the prediction of the rotational constants and the distance of the argon atom(s) to the aromatic plane is compared in Table IV. Comparing the experimental with the calculated rotational constants, one has to bear in mind that the rotational constants are based on the $r_0$ structure, while the experimental values are $B^0_g$ values based on the vibrationally averaged $r_0$ structure. We used Dunning’s triple- and quadruple-$\zeta$ basis sets augmented with diffuse functions (aug-cc-pVTZ and aug-cc-pVQZ) as well as the Karlsruhe triple-$\zeta$ basis sets, augmented with single and double sets of polarization functions (TZVP and TZVPP) at the CC2 level. The argon atoms are located on the inertial $a$-axis, thus the motion of the argon atoms in the very shallow potentials parallel to the plane of phenol (the $\beta_s$ and $\beta_y$ vibrations, described in Sec. III F) will have a considerable effect on the $B$ and $C$ rotational constants. Especially, since the mean squared deviation due to zero-point vibration from the hypothetical equilibrium structure is positive, the experimental $B$ and $C$ rotational constants are expected to be smaller than the calculated ones. This is certainly the case here. A more thorough comparison of the effects of basis set size thus requires a correction of the calculated structure by zero-point vibrational effects in these weakly bound clusters. Calculations are on the way in order to obtain anharmonically corrected vibrationally averaged rotational constants on the respective level of theory. Since this procedure requires the computation of cubic and some of the quartic force constants at the respective level, this approach is extremely time-consuming and exceeds the scope of this article.

The intermolecular structures of the vdW bonded phenol-Ar$_{1,2}$ clusters were determined from the experimental rotational constants by means of a pseudo-Kraitchman fit as described by Schmitt et al. using the normal and hydroxy deuterated isotopologues. The use of pseudo-Kraitchman geometry parameters ($r_x$) has the advantage that the difference in the $r_x$ structural parameters is smaller than for the rotational constants, which are based on $r_0$ values.

For the $n=1$ cluster the perpendicular distance of the argon atom to the aromatic plane is given in Table IV and compared to the respective results from the B2PLYP-D/aug-cc-pVTZ and CC2/TZVP optimized structures. On electronic excitation, the argon distance decreases by more than 6 pm. This decrease can be traced back to the expected increase of dispersion energy for excited state complexes and to favorable orbital interactions that are repulsive in the ground state due to the Pauli exclusion principle.

For the $n=2$ cluster a slightly larger distance (about 2 pm) of the argon atom to the aromatic plane is observed for both the ground and the electronically excited state than for the $n=1$ cluster (cf. Table IV). For the pseudo-Kraitchman fit the distance of both argon atoms to the ring system was chosen to be the same. The experimentally determined dis-

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**TABLE III. CC2/TZVP calculated rotational constants for several possible phenol-Ar$_2$ complexes (Fig. 6).**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>$A^\alpha$/MHz</th>
<th>$B^\beta$/MHz</th>
<th>$C^\gamma$/MHz</th>
<th>Hydrogen bound</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$^1$</td>
<td>1774.1</td>
<td>1095.4</td>
<td>1133.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$^2$</td>
<td>496.7</td>
<td>651.7</td>
<td>443.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$^0$</td>
<td>449.7</td>
<td>512.4</td>
<td>384.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\Delta A$/MHz</td>
<td>-25.9</td>
<td>93.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\Delta B$/MHz</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>-52.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\Delta C$/MHz</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>-15.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
distances in the \( n=1 \) and \( n=2 \) clusters agree reasonably well with the calculated parameters, with all experimental values being larger by 10–18 pm compared to the calculated values depending on the level of theory and basis set employed. A similar overestimation of binding energy and corresponding underestimation of intermolecular distances as known for MP2 (Ref. 67) can be expected with CC2 for the here considered phenol-Ar\(_g\) complexes. Thus, also the currently most accurate DFT approach for noncovalent interactions, a double-hybrid functional including empirical dispersion corrections \(^8\) is included in Table IV and is compared to the CC2 values. It yields for both clusters better agreement than CC2 with the most appropriate basis set (aug-cc-pVQZ). The shorter distances of the calculations compared to the experiments have to be traced back to both overestimation of binding energy and the lack of inclusion of vibrational zero-point averaging in the calculations. Both typically contribute 5 pm in the intermolecular distances, yielding a very good agreement with the experimental value.

In order to understand why the distance of the argon atoms to the phenol plane is larger for the \( n=2 \) cluster, a decomposition of the total binding energy of the argon atoms to the phenol ring into its constituents [energy decomposition analysis (EDA), for details see, e.g., Ref. 68] is presented in Table V. Calculations were done at the B97-D/def2-TZVP EDA level of theory using the CC2/aug-cc-pVTZ optimized geometry. To enable this comparison the geometry used for the phenol-Ar\(_1\) complex was that of the Phenol-Ar\(_2\) complex with one of the argon atoms removed. The contribution per argon atom due to dispersion interaction is exactly equal for both \( n=1 \) and \( n=2 \) clusters due to the DFT-D approximation used in this analysis. The Pauli exchange repulsion is nearly equal due to the fixed geometries employed, and only the induction and electrostatic terms are notably different. While the electrostatic term tends to stabilize the \( n=2 \) cluster even more, the induction term overcompensates this effect. Half of the sum of electrostatic and induction interactions for the \( n=2 \) cluster is about 0.05 kcal/mol smaller than the sum of electrostatic and induction for the \( n=1 \) cluster. This small but significant decrease in binding energy for the phenol-Ar\(_2\) complex is consistent with a longer phenol-argon distance. The most likely explanation for the smaller induction component is that the symmetry of the phenol-Ar\(_2\) complex does not allow for the existence of an induced dipole moment perpendicular to the phenol plane.

Finally, we note that the total binding energy of 0.903 kcal/mol (316 cm\(^{-1}\)) for phenol-Ar\(_1\) is consistent with the experimental value of 364 ± 13 cm\(^{-1}\), \(^{23}\) demonstrating that this theoretical level accounts in a semiquantitative fashion for the intermolecular forces in this cluster.

### F. Vibrational frequencies

Table VI compares the vibrational frequencies for the phenol-Ar\(_2\) cluster obtained from its REMPI spectrum (Fig. 1) with the CC2 \( S_1\)-state vibrational frequencies for the (1|1) cluster. The frequencies are somewhat overestimated, but on the whole the agreement is satisfactory. To test whether the assignments given in Table VI are reasonable a FC simulation was performed using the geometries and the Hessian

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Complex</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Pauli</th>
<th>Electrostatic</th>
<th>Induction</th>
<th>Electrostatic + Induction</th>
<th>Dispersion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phenol-Ar(_1)</td>
<td>-0.903</td>
<td>3.632</td>
<td>-1.382</td>
<td>-0.675</td>
<td>-2.057</td>
<td>-2.478</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phenol-Ar(_2)</td>
<td>-1.684</td>
<td>7.273</td>
<td>-2.822</td>
<td>-1.178</td>
<td>-4.000</td>
<td>-4.956</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(</td>
<td>\upaarrow</td>
<td>)phenol-Ar(_2)</td>
<td>-0.849</td>
<td>3.636</td>
<td>-1.411</td>
<td>-0.589</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
matrix from the CC2 calculations of both electronic states and the changes in the rotational constants given in Table II. From the rotational constants of the two isotopologues phenol-Ar$_2$ and 7D-phenol-Ar$_2$ the changes of six rotational constants upon excitation are obtained and can be used in the fit. With these six changes in the rotational constants, five modes have been used as basis for the geometry distortion upon excitation. These modes are the lowest five intermolecular modes from Table VI. The result displayed in Fig. 7 shows good agreement with experiment, confirming the assignments of Table VI. In order to facilitate the comparison of the experimental and FC fitted spectrum the theoretical frequencies have been set to the values of the experimental ones.

The vibrational assignments show that all peaks in the REMPI spectrum can be explained as progressions and combinations of just two modes, $\beta_1$ and $\sigma_2$. For transitions from the ground state, these two modes are the only ones that are allowed in $C_{2v}$ symmetry, which is a near-symmetry group for the $(1|1)$ cluster. Under its proper symmetry group, $C_3$, $\beta_1$ also becomes allowed, although its transition strength is expected to be low. Indeed, this mode has been detected at 20 cm$^{-1}$ in the hole-burning spectrum of phenol-Ar$_2$ due to intensity enhancement arising from saturation effects of weak transitions. In contrast, the $(2|0)$ structure has $C_1$ symmetry and all six intermolecular vibrations are allowed in this isomer. The vibrational assignments of Table VI are therefore in agreement with the $(1|1)$ structure of the observed cluster.

### IV. CONCLUSIONS

The intermolecular structure of the phenol-Ar$_n$ ($n=1,2$) clusters has been investigated with high-resolution UV spectroscopy. From the rotational constants it could be deduced that in both clusters the argon atoms are vdW bonded to the phenol ring, with the $n=2$ cluster adopting a $(1|1)$ conformation where one argon atom is located on each side of the ring. Further evidence for these structures was extracted from REMPI spectra with the help of FC simulations. Quantum chemical calculations at the CC2 and B2PLYP-D levels of theory were performed to identify the most stable isomers, which are in full agreement with these assignments.

The distance between the argon atoms and the phenol ring was found to be slightly larger in the $n=2$ cluster than in the $n=1$ cluster. A decomposition of the cluster binding energy into individual contributions showed that this is due to a smaller inductive force between the ring and the argon atom in the $n=2$ cluster, arising from noncooperative three body induction interactions. Since the dominant inductive force arises from dipole-induced dipole interaction it was concluded that a small contribution to the induced dipole moment perpendicular to the phenol plane, which is forbidden by symmetry in the $n=2$ cluster, is most likely responsible for the smaller distance in the $n=1$ cluster.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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TABLE VI. Phenol-Ar$_2$ intermolecular vibrational frequencies (in cm$^{-1}$) as determined from Fig. 1 compared with CC2/TZVP calculated $S_1$-state vibrational frequencies for the $(1|1)$ cluster.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experiment</th>
<th>CC2</th>
<th>Assignment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>$\beta_1^0$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20$^a$</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>$\beta_1^0$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>28$^b$</td>
<td>$\beta_1^0$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>$\lambda_1$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>$\sigma_2$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>42$^b$</td>
<td>$\beta_2$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>$\lambda_1$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>$\sigma_2$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>69$^b$</td>
<td>$\sigma_1^0 + \beta_2^0$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$^a$From Ref. 35.

$^b$Harmonic combination and overtone bands.