

Hexacyclic Indole Alkaloids. The Structure of Cuanzine as an Experimental Test of Molecular Mechanics Calculations

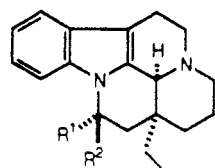
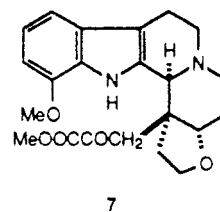
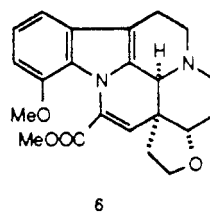
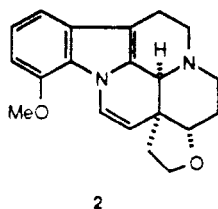
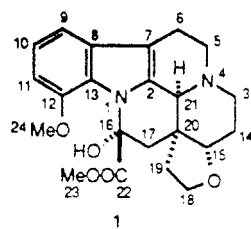
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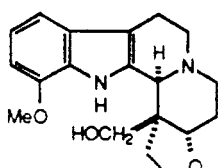
The conformational space of cuanzine was explored by employing MM2 force field for energy calculations and minimization. Location of the global minimum on the potential energy surface furnished a geometry which resembles the literature reported X-ray conformation of vincamine 3. Moreover, the global minimum of structure 1 was found at a higher energy value than the global minimum of its C(16) epimer 8, suggesting that the previous assignment of structure 1 to natural cuanzine should be revised into 8. Reinterpretation of the ¹H NMR data reinforced this suggestion which was ultimately confirmed by X-ray analysis of cuanzine hydrochloride.

Cuanzine 1 and decarbomethoxyapocuanzine 2 are two hexacyclic indole alkaloids that were first isolated from the root bark of *Voacanga chaltiana* (Apocynaceae) in the early 1970s.^{1,2} These compounds are of particular interest because of C(15)–C(18) linkage³ with interposition of an oxygen atom in the basic eburnane skeleton (e.g., vincamine 3), although a similar structural feature is not unusual in biogenetically related *Aspidosperma* alkaloids (e.g., modestamine, vandrikine, beninine, and vobtusine-like bisindoles).⁴



3: R¹ = COOMe, R² = OH

4: R¹ = OH, R² = COOMe



5

half-chair conformation (¹⁷H₁₆) with the α-OH occupying a pseudoaxial position. This hypothesis was advanced in order to explain the fact that the long-range *W* coupling of H(17β) to one of C(19) protons appeared evident after extensive decoupling experiments at low field (100 MHz). As a consequence of the pseudoaxial position of the OH group, cuanzine is very sensitive to acid catalysts due to its propensity to give the apo-derivative 6 through a concerted diaxial elimination process. Moreover, there is

ample precedent⁷ that 16-epivincamine 4 is susceptible to base-induced epimerization (MeONa, MeOH), producing the thermodynamically more stable vincamine 3, presumably, through the intermediacy of the α-keto ester 7. Surprisingly, we were unable to detect or induce any reactions that resulted in the inversion at C(16) in cuanzine,⁸ and this result prompted a reappraisal of the stereochemistry at C(16) in cuanzine.

The discovery⁵ of the vasodilating, antihypertensive, and antiarrhythmic activity of 1 prompted the development of a synthetic plan, which resulted in an expedient and stereocontrolled route to 5 based on intermolecular Diels–Alder formation of ring D.⁶ This intermediate represents an attractive precursor to cuanzine because it contains a functionality at C(17) needed for eventual introduction of additional carbons for the completion of ring E.

The structure of cuanzine was elucidated mainly by comparison of ¹H and ¹³C NMR spectra with those of vincamine 3 and 16-epivincamine 4.¹ These results led to the assignment of the structure 1 (i.e., 16-epivincamine-like) in which ring E is considered to be in a

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(2) Bombardelli, E.; Bonati, A.; Danieli, B.; Gabetta, B.; Martinelli, E. M.; Mustich, G. *Experientia* 1974, 30, 979–980.

(3) The numbering system for the alkaloids used in this paper is based upon the standard skeleton eburnane and corresponds with the proposal by Le Men and Taylor (Le Men, J.; Taylor, N. J. *Experientia* 1965, 21, 508–510).

(4) For a general review of the *Aspidosperma* alkaloids, see: Saxton, J. E. In *Heterocyclic Compounds. The Monoterpenoid Indole Alkaloids (The Aspidosperma Alkaloids)*; Saxton, J. E., Ed.; Wiley: New York, 1983; Vol. 25, Part 4, pp 331–437. See also, Cordell G. A. In *The Alkaloids (The Aspidosperma Alkaloids)*; Manske, R. H. F., Rodrigo, R. G. A., Eds.; Academic Press: New York, 1979; Vol. XVII, Chapter 4, pp 200–384.

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(8) At that time this dichotomous behavior was attributed to steric congestion near the reacting center resulting from the proximity of MeO group at C(12).

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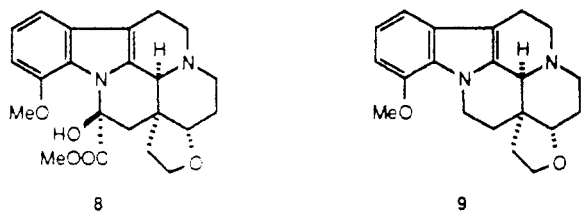
[‡] Dipartimento di Chimica Organica, Pavia.

Table I. Relative Energies (kcal/mol) and Selected Geometrical Features of Conformations I–VII of 9 and I₅ of 8 Compared with the Geometrical Features of the X-ray Structure of Cuanzine Hydrochloride, Vincamine,¹¹ and Vincamine Hydrobromide¹¹

| | <i>E</i> _{rel} | C/D fusion | ring puckering coordinates | | | | | | | | | | |
|----------------|-------------------------|------------|----------------------------|----------|----------|---------------------|----------|----------|---------------------|----------|----------|-----------------------|----------|
| | | | C ring ^a | | | D ring ^b | | | E ring ^c | | | F ring ^d | |
| | | | <i>Q</i> | ϕ_2 | θ | <i>Q</i> | ϕ_2 | θ | <i>Q</i> | ϕ_2 | θ | <i>q</i> ₂ | ϕ_2 |
| I | 0.0 | cis | 0.47 | 351 | 131 | 0.52 | 238 | 168 | 0.47 | 20 | 130 | 0.39 | 12 |
| II | 5.7 | cis | 0.45 | 323 | 130 | 0.52 | 259 | 155 | 0.57 | 289 | 83 | 0.38 | 8 |
| III | 5.1 | cis | 0.48 | 359 | 128 | 0.65 | 136 | 90 | 0.46 | 30 | 130 | 0.34 | 128 |
| IV | 12.8 | cis | 0.51 | 123 | 58 | 0.60 | 35 | 82 | 0.61 | 278 | 78 | 0.39 | 23 |
| V | 10.6 | cis | 0.57 | 86 | 74 | 0.64 | 79 | 84 | 0.45 | 31 | 131 | 0.31 | 51 |
| VI | 7.4 | trans | 0.48 | 346 | 132 | 0.67 | 6 | 84 | 0.53 | 264 | 68 | 0.41 | 13 |
| VII | 10.8 | trans | 0.56 | 15 | 123 | 0.67 | 29 | 84 | 0.43 | 54 | 126 | 0.43 | 15 |
| I ₅ | – | cis | 0.47 | 350 | 131 | 0.52 | 240 | 168 | 0.46 | 14 | 130 | 0.40 | 12 |
| 8·HCl | – | cis | 0.51 | 350 | 129 | 0.52 | 252 | 171 | 0.50 | 12 | 131 | 0.40 | 17 |
| 3 | – | cis | 0.50 | 352 | 127 | 0.57 | 275 | 174 | 0.50 | 18 | 126 | – | – |
| 3·HBr | – | cis | 0.51 | 343 | 133 | 0.55 | 314 | 174 | 0.47 | 16 | 143 | – | – |

^a C(7)–C(6)–C(5)–N(4)–C(21)–C(2). ^b N(4)–C(3)–C(14)–C(15)–C(20)–C(21). ^c N(1)–C(2)–C(21)–C(20)–C(17)–C(16). ^d C(20)–C(15)–O–C(18)–C(19).

We asked the reasons of this different configurational preference at an epimerizable center; as this preference should have been dictated by some conformational constraint specifically operating in cuanzine, molecular mechanics calculations on 1 and its epimer at C(16) 8 were performed and the results are herein reported.



Compounds 1 and 8 possess a certain degree of conformational flexibility so that a number of conformations are possible; while the indole moiety is rigidly planar, rings C–F can pucker in several ways, the N(4) lone pair can invert (*cis* \rightleftharpoons *trans*-quinolizidines), and the methoxyl and the methoxycarbonyl groups can rotate around the C(12)–O and C(16)–C(22) bonds, respectively. Thus, in principle, a number of conformers of these diastereomers can be envisaged, and to deal with this problem, we adopted the following strategy.

A preliminar approximation was made to simplify the calculations: the OH and COOMe groups at C(16) were replaced with two hydrogens (\rightarrow 9). By examination of molecular models of 9 we identified the candidate starting geometries. These were energetically minimized by using Allinger's MM2(85) force field,⁹ and the final steric energy of the most stable conformer I was set to zero. The relative stabilities of the other conformers II–VII are shown in Table I and the optimized geometries are illustrated in Figure 1.

These results indicated that I is by wide margins the lowest energy, no other minimum being found in a range of 5 kcal/mol above it, so that 9 is predicted to be locked in the conformation I at room temperature. The geometrical feature expressed by ring puckering parameters (*Q*, θ , ϕ)¹⁰ of conformations I–VII for 9 are reported in Table I in which the results¹¹ from X-ray crystallography of vincamine 3 are also included for comparison. X-ray analysis of 3 showed¹¹ that ring E was in an envelope

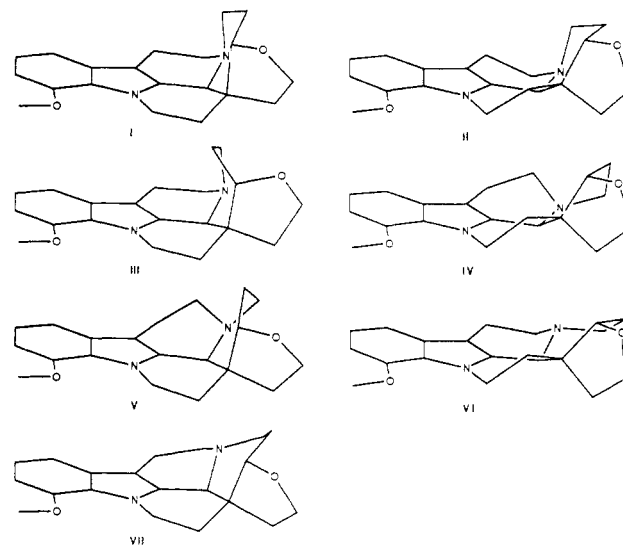


Figure 1. Representation of the MM2 calculated geometries for compound 9 with hydrogen atoms omitted for clarity.

conformation (²⁰E) distorted toward half-chair ²⁰H₁₇ (with COOMe occupying a pseudoequatorial position) and similarly ring C was intermediate between ⁴E and ⁴H₅, while ring D was in a chair conformation. All these features are retained when N(4) is protonated (Table I, compare data of 3 and 3·HBr). It is noteworthy that among conformations I–VII of compound 9, it is just the minimum-energy conformation I that corresponds to the X-ray geometry of vincamine 3, apart from ring F which does not exist in 3 and assumes in I the ²⁰T₁₅ twisted conformation. On the contrary, conformer II (with a steric energy of 5.7 kcal/mol above the global minimum), while about similar to I in rings C and D, exhibits for ring E about the same geometry (intermediate between B_{16,21} and ¹⁷H₁₆) as earlier proposed¹ for natural cuanzine.

As further improvement of calculations, the hydroxy and the carbomethoxy groups were added in two different orientations (α -COOMe, β -OH, and vice versa) to each of the three low-energy conformations (i.e., I–III) so that six starting geometries [three with 16S (I_S–III_S) and three with 16R configuration (I_R–III_R)] were obtained. The conformational space relative to the rotation of the methoxycarbonyl group around the C(16)–C(22) bond was fully explored with the DRIVER option of MM2(85), and each of the starting conformations exhibited a 2-fold minima (designated with the subscripts a and b) for this rotation (Table II).¹² The calculated differences in the energies

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Table II. Relative Energies (kcal/mol) and Selected Geometrical Features of Conformations of Compounds 1 and 8 Compared with the Geometrical Features of the X-ray Structure of Cuanzine Hydrochloride, Vincamine,¹¹ and Vincamine Hydrobromide¹¹

| compd | conformation | E_{rel} | C(16) configuration | torsional angle | |
|-------|------------------------------|-----------|---------------------|--------------------------------|----------------|
| | | | | N(1)-C(16)-C(22)-O(Me), τ | N(1)-C(16)-O-H |
| 8 | I _{S_a} | 0.0 | S | -145 | +71 |
| 8 | I _{S_b} | 0.0 | S | +32 | +83 |
| 1 | I _{R_a} | 1.3 | R | +163 | -81 |
| 1 | I _{R_b} | 1.3 | R | -6 | -99 |
| 8 | II _{S_a} | 7.9 | S | +176 | +89 |
| 8 | II _{S_b} | 6.9 | S | -51 | +90 |
| 1 | II _{R_a} | 7.2 | R | +132 | -62 |
| 1 | II _{R_b} | 7.5 | R | -48 | -67 |
| 8 | III _{S_a} | 4.5 | S | -143 | +62 |
| 8 | III _{S_b} | 4.6 | S | +34 | +70 |
| 1 | III _{R_a} | 6.3 | R | +160 | -81 |
| 1 | III _{R_b} | 6.0 | R | -12 | -96 |
| 8·HCl | - | - | S | -148 | +75 |
| 3 | - | - | S | +46 | +159 |
| 3·HBr | - | - | S | +41 | +129 |

Table III. ¹H NMR Data of Compounds 8 and 8·HCl; the Chemical Shifts Are Expressed in ppm Downfield from Tetramethylsilane, and the Couplings Constants Are Given in Hertz

| | compound (solvent) | | | | | |
|---------------|------------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|
| | 8 (C ₆ D ₆) | 8 (CDCl ₃) | 8·HCl (CDCl ₃) | 8 (C ₆ D ₆) | 8 (CDCl ₃) | 8·HCl (CDCl ₃) |
| H-3 α | 2.12, ddd | | 3.26, ddd | $J_{6\alpha,6\beta}$ | - | 17 |
| | | 2.46-2.56, m | | $J_{6\alpha,5\alpha}$ | - | 6.5 |
| H-3 β | 2.22, ddd | | 3.02, ddd | $J_{6\alpha,5\beta}$ | - | 2 |
| H-5 α | | | 3.70, ddd | $J_{6\beta,5\alpha}$ | - | 11.5 |
| | 2.96-3.05, m | 3.27-3.36, m | | $J_{6\beta,5\beta}$ | - | 6.5 |
| H-5 β | | | 3.80, ddd | $J_{5\alpha,5\beta}$ | - | 14 |
| H-6 α | 2.24-2.39, m | 2.50-2.70, m | 3.15, dddd | $J_{3\alpha,3\beta}$ | 11.5 | 12 |
| H-6 β | 2.61-2.76, m | 2.84-3.03, m | 3.08, dddd | $J_{3\alpha,14\alpha}$ | 5 | 4.5 |
| H-9 | 7.27, d | 7.13, dd | 7.14, dd | $J_{3\alpha,14\beta}$ | 3.5 | 3 |
| H-10 | 7.12, t | 7.06, t | 7.16, dd | $J_{3\beta,14\alpha}$ | 12 | 14 |
| H-11 | 6.44, d | 6.65, dd | 6.77, dd | $J_{3\beta,14\beta}$ | 3 | 3 |
| H-14 α | 1.70, dddd | | 2.29, dddd | $J_{14\alpha,14\beta}$ | 13 | 14 |
| | | 1.58-1.80, m | | $J_{14\alpha,15}$ | 10.5 | 11 |
| H-14 β | 1.52, dddd | | 1.79, dddd | $J_{14\beta,15}$ | 6.5 | 7 |
| H-15 | 4.74, dd | 4.41, dd | 4.54, dd | $J_{18\alpha,18\beta}$ | - | 8.5 |
| H-17 α | 1.90, br d | 2.01, dd | 2.12, dd | $J_{18\alpha,19\alpha}$ | - | 10 |
| H-17 β | 2.82, d | 2.65, d | 2.75, d | $J_{18\alpha,19\beta}$ | 3.5 | 4 |
| H-18 α | | | 4.19, ddd | $J_{18\beta,19\alpha}$ | - | 8.5 |
| | 3.70-3.95, m | 3.96-4.10, m | | $J_{18\beta,19\beta}$ | 8 | 7.5 |
| H-18 β | | | 4.05, q | $J_{19\alpha,19\beta}$ | 12 | 12 |
| H-19 α | 2.61-2.76, m | 2.72-2.90, m | 3.62, ddd | $J_{17\alpha,17\beta}$ | 14.5 | 14.5 |
| H-19 β | 1.09, ddd | 1.57, ddd | 1.76, ddd | $J_{9,10}$ | 7 | 7.5 |
| H-21 | 4.04, br s | 4.35, t | 4.96, br s | $J_{9,11}$ | - | 1.5 |
| Me-23 | 3.25, ^a s | 3.76, ^a s | 3.82, ^a s | $J_{10,11}$ | 7 | 7.5 |
| Me-24 | 3.34, ^a s | 3.87, ^a s | 3.91, ^a s | $J_{17\alpha,OH}$ | ~1 | 1.5 |
| OH | 4.82, br s | 4.52, d | 4.68, d | $J_{6\alpha,21}$ | ~2 | 2 |
| | | | | $J_{6\beta,21}$ | ~2 | 2 |

^a These assignments may be interchanged.

at the two minima ranged from 0.0 (I_{S_a}-I_{S_b} and I_{R_a}-I_{R_b}) to 1.0 kcal/mol (II_{S_a}-II_{S_b}) while the geometrical features of the rings were practically identical and remained about unchanged compared to the corresponding conformers of compound 9 (see, for example, in Table I the ring puckering coordinates of conformation I_{S_a} which are very close to that of I). Interestingly, these calculations led to virtually the same energetic ranking as noted in I-III, thereby implying that only conformations I_{S_a}-I_{S_b} and I_{R_a}-I_{R_b} (generated from I) significantly contribute to the Boltzmann distribution of compounds 8 and 1, respectively. This indicates that a conformation type I (i.e., vincamine-like) is probably adopted by cuanzine; moreover, as rotamers I_{S_a} ($\tau = -145^\circ$)-I_{S_b} ($\tau = +32^\circ$) are more stable (1.3 kcal/mol) than rotamers I_{R_a}-I_{R_b}, the S configuration at C(16)

appears to be sterically favored over the R configuration (Table II).

While the hexacyclic framework of cuanzine appeared secure on spectroscopic grounds, in light of molecular mechanics results, the stereochemistry at C(16) required at reinterpretation of the ¹H NMR data. Spectral data of cuanzine in CDCl₃ and C₆D₆ are summarized in Table III. Use of 300-MHz spectroscopy allowed analysis of the spectra by first-order approximations, and all signals were assigned in a straightforward way on the basis of chemical shifts, multiplicity, and ¹H-¹H correlation spectroscopy (COSY). Also included in Table III are the spectral data of cuanzine hydrochloride, and it is noteworthy that the coupling constants are similar in magnitude regardless of the ionization state of the nitrogen N(4).¹³ The ²J and

(12) Rotation of the OH group around C(16)-O bond was also carried out for each of the 12 minima I-III_{S_a}, I-III_{S_b}, I-III_{R_a}, I-III_{R_b}. Energies reported in Table II refer to the lowest in the three minima obtained for each of these rotations.

(13) As it might be expected, protonation at the bridgehead N(4) in cuanzine hydrochloride influenced the chemical shift of adjacent protons, which displayed a low-field shift in relation to the unprotonated compound.

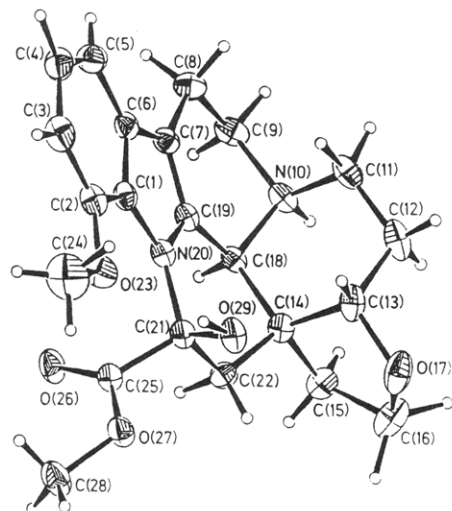


Figure 2. ORTEP¹⁵ drawing of 8-HCl as determined by X-ray crystallography. Thermal ellipsoids are drawn at 20% probability.

³J coupling pattern previously established¹ was confirmed while the chemical shift of two hydrogen atoms should be reversed [H(3 α) and H(6 β)]. Moreover, the H(17 α) showed a long-range coupling to the alcoholic proton rigidly oriented as a consequence of the hydrogen bonding to the C(12)methoxyl group.¹⁴ This ⁴J W coupling was confirmed by the disappearance of the coupling itself on D₂O exchange of the sample dissolved either in CDCl₃ or in C₆D₆ and by the presence of the proper cross peak in the COSY experiments in both the solvents.

The findings on the structure of cuanzine were ultimately confirmed by X-ray analysis of cuanzine hydrochloride. Figure 2 shows the perspective view of the compound as ethanol solvate and the numbering scheme adopted for crystallographic purposes. There is a very good agreement between the bond distances and angles in the X-ray structure of the hydrochloride of cuanzine and the calculated I_{S_a} conformation of 8 (see Tables I and II for a comparison of the two geometries). The four puckered rings (C-F) were in the same conformation found by calculations and the OH...OMe hydrogen bond was also evident from the analysis.

It can be safely concluded that molecular mechanics calculations, spectral data, and X-ray analysis all agree in defining 8 as the real structure of natural cuanzine.

Experimental Section

NMR Spectroscopy. ¹H NMR spectra were recorded on a Bruker CPX-300 (300MHz) instrument.

Conformational Analysis. Molecular mechanics calculations were performed with the MM2(85)⁹ program purchased from QCPE. The parameter set was updated using the parameter list 7-mar-1988 (VAX) kindly furnished by Prof. Allinger. A few parameters involving the N_{sp²} atom were not found in the list, so these parameters were given the values of the corresponding bending and torsional constants involving a C_{sp²} atom instead of

the N_{sp²}. Moreover for the stretching C_{sp³}-N_{sp²} the values of the C_{sp³}-N_{sp²} (amide) bond were assumed ($K_s = 3.52$ mdyn/Å, $l_0 = 1.437$ Å). Variation of these parameters over a reasonable range did not significantly affect the results. A value of 4.7 for the dielectric constant was used during the calculations; however, the results were virtually unaffected by use of other values (e.g., the default value of 1.5) or by complete suppression of the dipolar interactions.

X-ray Structure Determination. Crystals suitable for X-ray diffractometry were obtained from ethanol. Cell parameters and reflection intensities were measured with graphite monochromated Mo-K α radiation on a Enraf-Nonius CAD-4 diffractometer operating at room temperature in the $\omega/2\theta$ scan mode for a crystal having approximate dimensions $0.36 \times 0.32 \times 0.28$ mm. The scan range (ω) was calculated from $[1.00 + 0.35 \tan \vartheta]^\circ$. Reflections were scanned in the range $0 < \vartheta < 27.5^\circ$. Three standard reflections measured every 2 h showed no appreciable variation with time. The data were corrected for Lorentz and polarisation effects but not for absorption. A total of 3315 unique reflections were collected of which 2514 were considered to be observed [$I > \sigma(I)$] and used in the structure analysis.

Crystal data: (C₂₂H₂₇N₂O₅)⁺Cl⁻·C₂H₆O, $M = 481.0$, orthorhombic, space group $P2_12_12_1$ (established from systematic absence), $a = 8.248$ (1) Å, $b = 11.833$ (1) Å, $c = 24.595$ (3) Å, $V = 2400.4$ (5) Å³, $Z = 4$, $D_c = 1.331$ cm⁻³, $\mu(\text{Mo-K}\alpha) 0.71069$ Å⁻¹ = 2.0 cm⁻¹.

The structure was solved by direct methods;¹⁶ the "best" E-map gave the positions of the chlorine and other 23 heavy atoms. The remaining six C atoms of cuanzine, those of crystallization ethanol and the most part of hydrogen atoms, were obtained from difference Fourier maps. The ethanol molecule is disordered; we obtained the best rationalization of the disorder by assuming that the COH group is unique, while the remaining atoms are splitted in two positions (with population factor refined to 0.56 and 0.44, respectively); H atoms of this molecule were introduced in structure factor calculations but not refined. Final full-matrix least squares refinement for 416 parameters included atomic positions, temperature factors (anisotropic for non-hydrogen atoms), a secondary extinction parameter, an overall scale factor, and a population factor for the disordered ethanol. The refinement was terminated when all shifts concerning cuanzine were less than 0.02σ , and those of ethanol were less than 0.2σ . The final R was 0.054 (R_w 0.039), GOF = 1.74. The function minimized was $\sum w(|F_o| - |F_c|)^2$ with weight $w = 4F_o^2 / [\sigma(F_o^2) + 0.0004F_o^4]$. Final difference Fourier synthesis showed no significant residual electron density. Programs used include SDP,¹⁷ and various in-house programs for refinement and geometrical analysis running on a Gould 32/97 computer.

Acknowledgment. We are grateful to Prof. B. Danielli for helpful discussion during the course of this work. Financial support from Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione (Rome) is also acknowledged.

Registry No. 1, 125132-61-8; 3, 1617-90-9; 3-HBr, 124780-68-3; 8, 53492-09-4; 8-HCl·EtOH, 125072-51-7.

Supplementary Material Available: Tables of final atomic positional coordinates, equivalent isotropic thermal parameters, selected bond lengths, bond angles, and torsion angles for compound 8-HCl (4 pages). Ordering information is given on any current masthead page.

(14) Long-range ⁴J couplings for an atomic H-O-C-C-H arrangement were observed in sugars, with the necessary condition of a simultaneous axial position of the OH and the C-H bonds. (Gillet, B.; Nicole, D.; Delpuech, J.-J.; Gross, B. *Org. Magn. Reson.* 1981, 17, 28-36.)

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