



REPORT

Structures of Cage, Prism, and Book Isomers of Water Hexamer from Broadband Rotational Spectroscopy

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Cage, Book, and Prism

The array of hydrogen bonds governing the extended structure of liquid water is so intricate that chemists have often sought to understand it by studying simpler clusters. Even so, it has been challenging to get a handle on the preferred arrangement adopted by just six water molecules. Interdependent theoretical and spectroscopic studies have narrowed down the lowest-energy hexamer structures to three isomers—respectively designated the cage, the

book, and the prism—but their relative energies remain uncertain. Now, **Pérez *et al.*** (p. 897; see the Perspective by **Saykally and Wales**) have observed all three isomers in a single experiment, using Fourier transform microwave spectroscopy, and were able to establish definitively their energy ordering.

Abstract

Theory predicts the water hexamer to be the smallest water cluster with a three-dimensional hydrogen-bonding network as its minimum energy structure. There are several possible low-energy isomers, and calculations with different methods and basis sets assign them different relative stabilities. Previous experimental work has provided evidence for the cage, book, and cyclic isomers, but no experiment has identified multiple coexisting structures. Here, we report that broadband rotational spectroscopy in a pulsed supersonic expansion unambiguously identifies all three isomers; we determined their oxygen framework structures by means of oxygen-18–substituted water (H_2^{18}O). Relative isomer populations at different expansion conditions establish that the cage isomer is the minimum energy structure. Rotational spectra consistent with predicted heptamer and nonamer structures have also been identified.

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