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# The Origin of Magnetic Anisotropy and Single-molecule Magnet Behavior in Chromium(II)-based Extended Metal Atom Chains

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## ABSTRACT

Chromium(II)-based Extended Metal Atom Chains have been the focus of considerable discussion regarding their symmetric vs. unsymmetric structure and magnetism. We have now investigated four complexes of this class, namely  $[\text{Cr}_3(\text{dpa})_4\text{X}_2]$  and  $[\text{Cr}_5(\text{tpda})_4\text{X}_2]$  with  $\text{X} = \text{Cl}^-$  and  $\text{SCN}^-$  [Hdpa = dipyridin-2-yl-amine;  $\text{H}_2\text{tpda} = N^2, N^6$ -di(pyridin-2-yl)pyridine-2,6-diamine]. By dc/ac magnetic techniques and EPR spectroscopy we found that all these complexes have easy-axis anisotropies of comparable magnitude in their  $S = 2$  ground state ( $|D| = 1.5\text{-}1.8 \text{ cm}^{-1}$ ) and behave as single-molecule magnets at low  $T$ . Ligand-field and DFT/CASSCF calculations were used to explain the similar magnetic properties of tri- vs. pentachromium(II) strings, in spite of their different geometrical preferences and electronic structure. For both X ligands, the ground structure is unsymmetric in pentachromium(II) species (i.e. with an alternation of long and short Cr-Cr distances), but symmetric in their shorter congeners. Analysis of the electronic structure using Quasi-Restricted Molecular Orbitals (QROs) showed that the four unpaired electrons in  $\text{Cr}_5$  species are largely localized in four 3d-like QROs centered on the terminal, “isolated”  $\text{Cr}^{2+}$  ion. In  $\text{Cr}_3$  complexes, they occupy four non-bonding combinations of 3d-like orbitals centered only on the two terminal metals. In both cases, then, QRO eigenvalues closely mirror the 3d-level pattern of the terminal ions, whose coordination environment remains quite similar irrespective of chain length. We conclude that the extent of unpaired-electron delocalization has little impact on magnetic anisotropy of these wire-like molecular species.

## INTRODUCTION

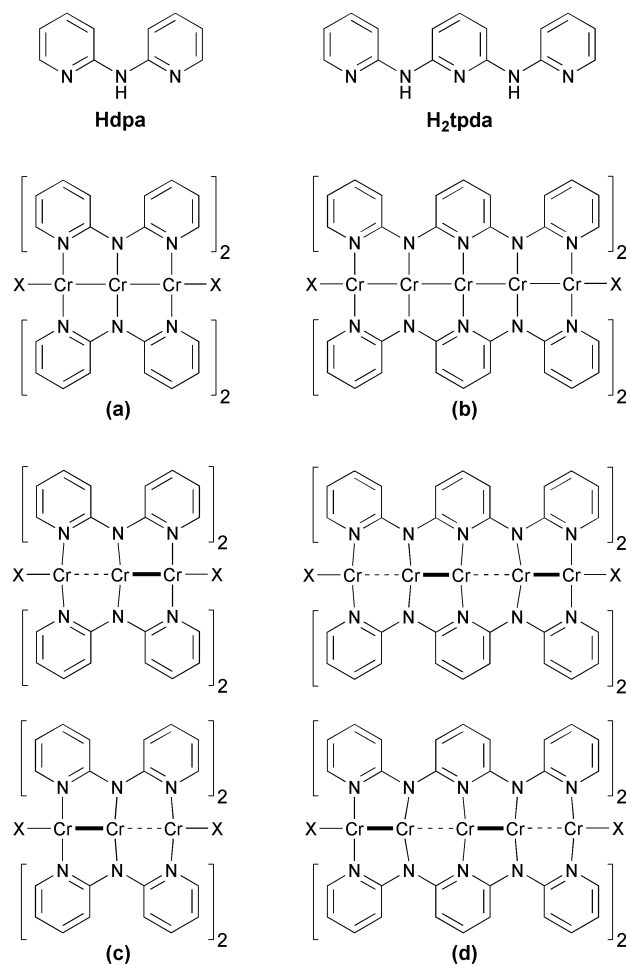
Single-molecule magnets (SMMs) are molecules comprising one or more metal centers and showing slow relaxation of the magnetization below a characteristic temperature, referred to as the blocking temperature ( $T_B$ ).<sup>1,2</sup> They are considered as the smallest chemically tunable components for spin-based devices and hold promise for applications in information storage<sup>3-5</sup> and quantum technologies.<sup>6-9</sup> A key ingredient for SMM behavior is magnetic anisotropy, which mainly originates from spin-orbit coupling and crystal-field effects.<sup>10,11</sup> Although cases of slow magnetic relaxation are known for predominantly easy-plane systems,<sup>12,13</sup> the vast majority of known SMMs have an easy-axis anisotropy in their ground state. The reversal of the magnetic moment is then subject to an energy barrier,  $U$ , whose height is one of the important factors that rule magnetic relaxation.<sup>14,15</sup> A recent breakthrough in the field was the discovery that remarkably large energy barriers can be achieved even in mononuclear species.<sup>13,16</sup> Lanthanoid complexes of this type are indeed among the best SMMs known to date,<sup>17-19</sup> with  $U/k_B$  values approaching 2000 K<sup>20-23</sup> and record observable  $T_B$ 's of up to 80 K.<sup>22-24</sup>

Examples of SMMs have been recently reported in polynuclear compounds containing metal-metal bonds and exhibiting, as a unique feature, a well-isolated high-spin ground state even at room temperature. The current record spin value is  $S = 11$  for a mixed-valent hexa-iron complex with an octahedral metal topology.<sup>25</sup> Similar features are encountered in the so-called Extended Metal Atom Chains (EMACs), which have attracted attention as molecular analogues of macroscopic wires and benchmark systems for understanding metal-metal interactions.<sup>26-29</sup> EMACs consist of three or more metal centers forming a linear array supported by three or four deprotonated oligo- $\alpha$ -pyridylamine (or related) ligands, most often arranged in a helical fashion.<sup>30-32</sup> Their molecular wire-like structure has either rigorous or idealized axial symmetry and makes high-spin EMACs potential SMMs. In fact, the tri- and pentachromium(II) compounds  $[\text{Cr}_3(\text{dpa})_4\text{Cl}_2]\cdot\text{CH}_2\text{Cl}_2$  (**1a** $\cdot\text{CH}_2\text{Cl}_2$ )<sup>33</sup> and  $[\text{Cr}_5(\text{tpda})_4\text{Cl}_2]\cdot 4\text{CHCl}_3\cdot 2\text{Et}_2\text{O}$  (**2a** $\cdot 4\text{CHCl}_3\cdot 2\text{Et}_2\text{O}$ )<sup>34</sup> have a well-isolated  $S = 2$  state, display an easy-axis anisotropy of similar magnitude and behave as SMMs with energy barriers of 10.6(6) and 8.6(5) K, respectively (Hdpa = dipyridin-2-yl-amine; H<sub>2</sub>tpda =  $N^2, N^6$ -di(pyridin-2-

yl)pyridine-2,6-diamine; see Scheme 1).<sup>35-37</sup> The similarity in magnetic behavior is surprising since the electronic structure of the two string-like complexes is thought to be different. After considerable initial controversy,<sup>38</sup> there is now a general consensus that the abnormally elongated displacement ellipsoids of inner metal ions in the crystal structures of pentachromium(II) species reflect a disordered superposition of two unsymmetric structures with alternating short ( $d_{<}$ ) and long ( $d_{>}$ ) Cr-Cr distances (Scheme 1d). Resolution of the disorder afforded  $d_{<} = 1.86\text{-}2.07 \text{ \AA}$ ,  $d_{>} = 2.50\text{-}2.66 \text{ \AA}$  and  $\Delta d = d_{>} - d_{<} \sim 0.5\text{-}0.8 \text{ \AA}$  in compounds  $[\text{Cr}_5(\text{tpda})_4\text{X}_2]\cdot\text{solv}$  ( $\text{X} = \text{Cl}^-$ ,  $\text{SCN}^-$ )<sup>38</sup> at 213 K, suggesting the presence of two pairs of quadruply-bonded  $[\text{Cr}_2]$  units *plus* one terminal  $\text{Cr}^{2+}$  ion. Density Functional Theory (DFT) indeed predicts the gas phase unsymmetric structure of **2a** to be more stable than the symmetric one by 2.9 kcal/mol (Scheme 1b,d,  $\text{X} = \text{Cl}^-$ ).<sup>39</sup> As a result, the  $S = 2$  state of **2a** is largely localized on one of the terminal five-coordinate high-spin  $\text{Cr}^{2+}$  ions. Other penta-<sup>40</sup> as well as hepta-<sup>41</sup> and nonachromium(II)<sup>42</sup> strings exhibit similar structural features, sometimes with attenuated  $\Delta d$  values. It should be mentioned that  $^1\text{H}/^2\text{H}$  NMR signals from **2a** in dichloromethane solution reveal a symmetric configuration, suggesting fast switching between the two unsymmetric forms on the NMR timescale.<sup>39</sup>

Things are different in trichromium(II) EMACs, which exhibit greater structural diversity as a function of both axial and equatorial ligands.<sup>33,43-45</sup> The largest structural study so far available was performed by Cotton, Murillo et al., who used X-ray crystallography to investigate fourteen compounds with the formula  $[\text{Cr}_3(\text{dpa})_4\text{X}_2]\cdot\text{solv}$  ( $\text{X} = \text{BF}_4^-$ ,  $\text{NO}_3^-$ ,  $\text{CH}_3\text{CN}$ ,  $\text{Cl}^-$ ,  $\text{Br}^-$ ,  $\text{I}^-$ ,  $\text{SCN}^-$ ,  $\text{OCN}^-$ ,  $\text{CN}^-$ ,  $\text{PhCC}^-$ ) at the same temperature (213 K).<sup>33,43,44</sup> For all axial ligands, with the exception of the strongest  $\sigma$  donors ( $\text{X} = \text{CN}^-$  and  $\text{PhCC}^-$ ), the central  $\text{Cr}^{2+}$  ion features an abnormally elongated displacement ellipsoid, which was taken as evidence of an orientationally disordered unsymmetric structure (Scheme 1c). Refinement using a split-atom model was then undertaken,<sup>43</sup> which in the vast majority of cases gave  $\Delta d$  values of  $0.22\text{-}0.32 \text{ \AA}$ , *i.e.* distinctly *smaller* than in the pentachromium(II) complexes. Only with very weak axial ligands ( $\text{X} = \text{BF}_4^-$ ,  $\text{NO}_3^-$ ) geometrical distortion reaches  $0.6\text{-}0.7 \text{ \AA}$ , thereby approaching those observed in the higher-

membered congeners and in  $[\text{Cr}_3(\text{dpa})_4\text{XY}]$  structures with two different axial groups ( $\text{X} = \text{Cl}^-$ ;  $\text{Y} = \text{BF}_4^-$ ,  $\text{PF}_6^-$ ).<sup>33</sup>



**Scheme 1.** Hdpa and H<sub>2</sub>tpda ligands and structure of the  $[\text{Cr}_3(\text{dpa})_4\text{X}_2]$  (a,c) and  $[\text{Cr}_5(\text{tpda})_4\text{X}_2]$  (b,d) complexes in their symmetric (a,b) and unsymmetric (c,d) forms.

In 2014, an illuminating temperature-dependent structural study was published by Overgaard, Iversen et al.. They showed that at 15 K the structure of **1a**·Et<sub>2</sub>O is symmetric (Scheme 1a) within 0.002 Å and that at this temperature the vibrational amplitude of the central Cr<sup>2+</sup> ion along the chain axis is only slightly larger than for the terminal ions ( $\Delta U < 30 \cdot 10^{-4} \text{ \AA}^2$ ). The difference becomes threefold larger at 100 K, indicating that the central metal is not positionally disordered but lies in a shallow potential energy

surface.<sup>46</sup> It was argued that the  $S = 2$  state of **1a** is a delocalized molecular state in the temperature regime where SMM behavior manifests itself.<sup>36</sup> The observed low-temperature structure perfectly matches DFT theoretical predictions published in 2001 by Bérnard, Rohmer et al..<sup>47</sup> These authors first showed that **1a** has a quintet ground state in the gas phase, with a symmetric equilibrium structure supported by a 3-center-3-electron  $\sigma$  bond involving the metal  $3d_{z^2}$  orbitals. The remaining  $\pi$  and  $\delta$  orbitals contribute negligibly to the bonding and distortion of the symmetric structure is an energetically facile process ( $\sim 1$  and  $\sim 4$  kcal/mol for  $\Delta d = 0.106$  and  $0.679$  Å, respectively). More recent theoretical work on other  $[\text{Cr}_3(\text{dpa})_4\text{X}_2]$  derivatives depicted a similar scenario,<sup>48–50</sup> with very flat potential energy landscapes and a prominent role of thermal energy and crystal packing on molecular geometry.<sup>51</sup> This interpretation is also consistent with the fact that solutions of **1a**<sup>52</sup> and  $[\text{Cr}_3(\text{dpa})_4(\text{N}_3)_2]$ <sup>53</sup> in dichloromethane show three  $^1\text{H}$  NMR resonances, that is, only one less than expected for a symmetric structure over NMR timescale. The *ortho* protons of  $\text{dpa}^-$  ligands are most probably paramagnetically shifted and broadened beyond detection, as found in **2a**.<sup>39</sup>

We have now undertaken a wider magnetic and spectroscopic study on odd-membered chromium(II)-based EMACs, focusing on magnetic anisotropy and SMM behavior as a function of chain length and axial ligands. Our investigation covers chlorido derivatives **1a** $\cdot\text{Et}_2\text{O}$  and **2a** $\cdot 4\text{CHCl}_3\cdot 2\text{Et}_2\text{O}$  as well as the isothiocyanato adducts  $[\text{Cr}_3(\text{dpa})_4(\text{NCS})_2]\cdot 0.4\text{CH}_2\text{Cl}_2$  (**1b** $\cdot 0.4\text{CH}_2\text{Cl}_2$ ) and  $[\text{Cr}_5(\text{tpda})_4(\text{NCS})_2]$  (**2b**). We found that an easy-axis anisotropy and magnetic blocking observed under an applied magnetic field are general properties of these EMACs. With the aid of Angular Overlap Model (AOM) and DFT/CASSCF calculations, our findings throw new light on an old controversy concerning the amount of spin delocalization in these systems and give an explanation on the reason why similar magnetic properties arise in tri- and pentachromium(II) species despite their different structural preferences and electronic structure.

## EXPERIMENTAL SECTION

**Materials and Methods.** Unless otherwise noted, reagents and solvents were of commercial origin and were used without further purification. Acetonitrile and dichloromethane were purified using an Inert Technologies solvent purification system, while anhydrous *n*-hexane (Sigma-Aldrich) was degassed by bubbling Ar before use. All reactions involving chromium(II) complexes were carried out under Ar or N<sub>2</sub> atmosphere using Schlenk techniques or glovebox methods. Compounds **1a**·Et<sub>2</sub>O,<sup>33,43,46,52</sup> **2a**·4CHCl<sub>3</sub>·2Et<sub>2</sub>O<sup>34</sup> and **2b**<sup>34,41</sup> were prepared by literature procedures or slight modifications thereof (see Supporting Information and Table S1). Elemental analysis was carried out on a Thermofisher Scientific Flash EA1112 elemental analyzer by the PLACAMAT service (University of Bordeaux-CNRS UMS 3626). The IR spectra were measured on a Nicolet 6700 FT-IR spectrometer using a Smart iTR accessory between 600 and 4000 cm<sup>-1</sup> with 4 cm<sup>-1</sup> resolution.

**Synthesis of [Cr<sub>3</sub>(dpa)<sub>4</sub>(NCS)<sub>2</sub>]·0.4CH<sub>2</sub>Cl<sub>2</sub> (**1b**·0.4CH<sub>2</sub>Cl<sub>2</sub>).** Preparation was accomplished by a modification of the literature procedure reported by Cotton, Murillo et al..<sup>43</sup> In a glovebox, **1a**·Et<sub>2</sub>O (100 mg, 0.102 mmol) and TIBF<sub>4</sub> (64 mg, 0.21 mmol) were dissolved in CH<sub>3</sub>CN (15 mL). The mixture was stirred overnight and then filtered through a PTFE filter (0.2 μm porosity, VWR). To this solution a solution of KSCN (22 mg, 0.23 mmol) in CH<sub>3</sub>CN (5 mL) was added and a dark green precipitate formed immediately. The mixture was filtered and the precipitate washed with CH<sub>3</sub>CN and dissolved in CH<sub>2</sub>Cl<sub>2</sub> (15 mL). The solution was filtered and layered with *n*-hexane in a Schlenk tube. After one week, the brownish-green rectangular platelets so obtained were collected in a glovebox and washed with *n*-hexane (65 mg, 64%). Anal. Calcd for C<sub>42.4</sub>H<sub>32.8</sub>Cl<sub>0.8</sub>Cr<sub>3</sub>N<sub>14</sub>S<sub>2</sub> (**1b**·0.4CH<sub>2</sub>Cl<sub>2</sub>, 986.89): C, 51.60; H, 3.35; N, 19.87. Found: C, 51.41; H, 3.45; N, 19.49. IR (ATR):  $\tilde{\nu}_{\max}$  (cm<sup>-1</sup>) 2025m (C≡N), 1605m, 1595s, 1547w, 1463s sh, 1456s, 1420s, 1364s br, 1309m, 1277w, 1153s, 1106w, 1052w, 1013m, 917w, 880m, 856w, 800w, 761s, 737m, 644m.

**Single-crystal X-ray diffraction.** A single-crystal X-ray diffraction measurement on **1b**·0.4CH<sub>2</sub>Cl<sub>2</sub> was carried out using a Bruker Quazar SMART APEXII diffractometer with Mo-Kα radiation. The



compound crystallized as brownish-green plates, which had the tendency to stack upon one another. This difficulty, compounded by the large unit cell, made it challenging to obtain a high quality structure. A small, thin plate suitable for X-ray diffraction was finally selected under immersion oil in ambient conditions and attached to a MiTeGen MicroLoop™. The crystal was mounted in a stream of cold N<sub>2</sub> at 120(2) K and centered in the X-ray beam using a video camera. The data were collected using a routine to survey reciprocal space, and reduction was performed using software included in Bruker Apex2 suite.<sup>54</sup> The structure was solved using direct methods and refined by least-squares cycles on  $F^2$  followed by difference Fourier syntheses.<sup>55</sup> All hydrogen atoms were included in the final structure factor calculation at idealized positions and were allowed to ride on the neighboring atoms with relative isotropic displacement coefficients. Three independent Cr<sub>3</sub> complexes were found in the asymmetric unit. In all Cr<sub>3</sub> units the electron density associated with the central metal was invariably single peaked and was modelled in two different ways: as a single Cr atom undergoing anisotropic displacement (Model I or “unsplit atom” model)<sup>33</sup> or as a Cr atom disordered over two positions; in this case the two components were constrained to have the same isotropic displacement parameter and their occupancies were freely-refined but forced to sum up to unity (Model II, or “split atom” model).<sup>43</sup> As an outcome of Model I, the central metal atoms have significantly larger mean-square displacement amplitudes ( $U$ ) along the Cr-Cr directions than the terminal metal atoms.  $\Delta U$  values range from 87 to  $164 \cdot 10^{-4} \text{ \AA}^2$  and are hence comparable to those found in **1a**·Et<sub>2</sub>O at 100 K ( $98\text{-}110 \cdot 10^{-4} \text{ \AA}^2$ ).<sup>46</sup> By contrast the Cr-N(CS) bonds are much more rigid ( $\Delta U \leq 30 \cdot 10^{-4} \text{ \AA}^2$ ). Since only in molecule Cr1-Cr2-Cr3 is the displacement ellipsoid of the central metal atom distinctly prolate along the chain axis, Model II was applied to Cr2 only. Crystal and refinement data (Model I) are available as Table S2, whereas selected geometrical parameters are gathered in Tables 1 and S3.

**Magnetic measurements.** The magnetic measurements were obtained with a Quantum Design MPMS-XL SQUID magnetometer and a PPMS-9 susceptometer. The MPMS-XL instrument works between 1.8 and 400 K with applied direct current (dc) fields ( $H$ ) ranging from  $-70$  to  $70$  kOe. The alternating current (ac) susceptibility measurements were performed using an oscillating field of  $3\text{-}5$  Oe for

frequencies from 1 to 1500 Hz (MPMS-XL) and an oscillating field of 1-6 Oe for frequencies from 10 Hz to 10 kHz (PPMS-9). Details on sample preparation are given in the Supporting Information. All magnetic data were corrected for the sample holder and for addenda (when used), and were reduced using the appropriate molar mass and a correction for diamagnetism.<sup>56</sup> The dc magnetic susceptibility ( $\chi$ ) was obtained as  $M/H$  from magnetization ( $M$ ) measurements at 1 and 10 kOe in the temperature ranges 1.85-295 K (**1a**·Et<sub>2</sub>O), 1.85-300 K (**1b**·0.4CH<sub>2</sub>Cl<sub>2</sub> and **2b**), 1.85-320 K (**2a**), and 1.86-255 K (**2a**·4CHCl<sub>3</sub>·2Et<sub>2</sub>O). Isothermal magnetization data were also recorded between 1.8 and 10 K in fields up to 70 kOe for all samples. Above 1.8 K, no hysteresis effects were observed in the field dependence of the magnetization for field sweep rates between about 70 and 600 Oe/min. The ac susceptibility data were measured down to 1.8 K at frequencies up to 10 kHz, with applied dc fields of zero to 10 kOe. In the available temperature and frequency ranges, all samples displayed slow relaxation of the magnetization only observable in an applied dc field. The optimal dc field value was determined by variable-field ac studies at the lowest reachable temperature. All ac measurements were fitted to the generalized Debye model (using  $\chi'$  and  $\chi''$  vs.  $\nu$  data)<sup>57,58</sup> in order to extract the characteristic relaxation time ( $\tau$ ), the  $\alpha$  parameter describing the width of the distribution of relaxation times, as well as the values of  $\chi_0$  and  $\chi_\infty$ . The  $\alpha$  values at the lowest temperatures were ~0.07 (**1a**·Et<sub>2</sub>O), ~0.3 (**1b**·0.4CH<sub>2</sub>Cl<sub>2</sub>), and ~0.2 (**2a**, **2a**·4CHCl<sub>3</sub>·2Et<sub>2</sub>O and **2b**) and decreased to ~0 upon heating. Detailed results of dc and ac magnetic characterization are presented in Figures S1-S30 and Table S4.

**EPR spectroscopy.** W-band EPR spectra were recorded using a Bruker Elexsys E600 spectrometer, equipped with a continuous <sup>4</sup>He flow CF935 Cryostat (Oxford Instruments). Microcrystalline powder samples were prepared by crushing single crystals of the different compounds in a glovebox. The sample was mixed with wax to avoid preferential orientation due to magnetic torque and to minimize the loss of crystallization solvent (when present) from the lattice. The resulting mixture was then inserted in an open-end quartz tube (0.80 mm outer diameter). To further reduce exposure to air, the tube was taken out of the

glovebox in a sealed Schlenk, mounted on the sample holder rod under N<sub>2</sub> flux, pre-cooled in a bath of liquid N<sub>2</sub> and inserted in the spectrometer at 100 K.

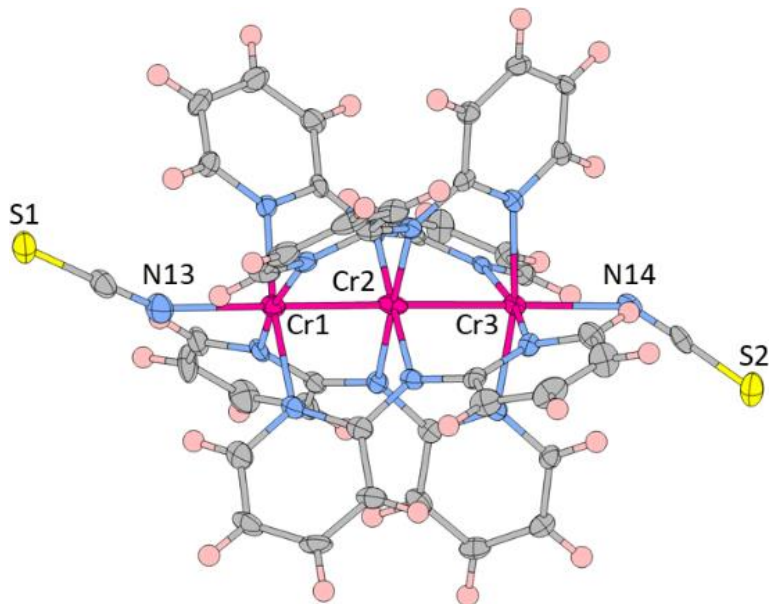
High-Frequency EPR powder spectra were recorded on a multifrequency spectrometer operating in a double-pass configuration. A 110 GHz frequency source (Virginia Diodes Inc.), associated with either a doubler or a tripler, was used. The propagation of this exciting light was performed with a Quasi-Optical bridge (Thomas Keating) outside the cryostat and with a corrugated waveguide inside it. The detection was carried out with a hot electron InSb bolometer (QMC Instruments). The main magnetic field was supplied by a 16 T superconducting magnet associated with a VTI (Cryogenic). The sample was prepared in a glovebox by thoroughly grinding large crystals of **2a**·4CHCl<sub>3</sub>·2Et<sub>2</sub>O immersed in a mixture of Et<sub>2</sub>O and CHCl<sub>3</sub> (5:1 v/v) in an EPR tube, which was subsequently flame sealed. The presence of the solvent allowed to preserve crystallinity and to prevent torqueing effects at low temperature. This preparation technique led to somewhat imperfect powder averaging, which however did not preclude a straightforward interpretation of the spectra. The powder spectra were simulated using parameters obtained through the fitting of the resonance positions.<sup>59,60</sup> Details on EPR experiments are given in Figures S31-S35.

**Angular Overlap Model (AOM) calculations.** Ligand-field (LF) calculations within AOM<sup>61</sup> were performed using  $B$ ,  $C$ ,  $\zeta_{3d}$  and  $k$  values reported in Refs.<sup>62,63</sup> LF parameters were also taken from Ref.<sup>62</sup> and adapted to provide a reasonable reproduction of the electronic spectra reported in the literature for [Cr(4-Mepy)<sub>4</sub>Cl<sub>2</sub>].<sup>62,64</sup> This was achieved by considering a completely anisotropic  $\pi$ -interaction for the pyridine-type ligands, and a completely isotropic  $\pi$ -interaction for the axial ligands X. Angular coordinates were either made to correspond to idealized C<sub>4</sub> point-group symmetry to study the dependency of the calculated  $D$  on axial and equatorial LF strength, or taken directly from X-ray structures. In the first case, the pyridine-type ligands were oriented so as to form a dihedral angle  $\psi = 18^\circ$  with the X-Cr-N<sub>py</sub> planes, in agreement with the structure of **2a**.

**DFT/CASSCF calculations.** DFT calculations were performed with the ORCA<sup>65</sup> program package, version 3.0.3.33 (see Figures S36-S38 for further information). The same computational setup used to

optimize **2a** in the gas-phase<sup>39</sup> was applied to **1a**, **1b** and **2b**. In detail, the PBE<sup>66</sup> functional with D3 dispersion<sup>67</sup> correction scheme was used. Scalar relativistic re-contracted versions of the Ahlrichs triple- $\zeta$  basis set, def2-TZVP, were chosen for Cr, N, and Cl atoms while single- $\zeta$  basis set, def2-SVP, was chosen for S, C and H atoms.<sup>68,69</sup> Resolution of identity (RI) was used to approximate two-electron integrals. Considering the possibility to face very flat potential energy surfaces, symmetric and unsymmetric arrangements of the Cr atoms were imposed as guess geometries. However, all geometries were fully optimized with no constraints on symmetry<sup>47</sup> or on the position of any Cr atom.<sup>50</sup> All the calculations were performed on a Broken Symmetry (BS) state with  $S = 2$ . A tight convergence threshold was also used (TightOpt). The SCF calculations were tightly converged (TightSCF) with unrestricted spin (UKS). Numerical integrations during all DFT calculations were done on a dense grid (ORCA grid4) while the final run was also performed on a denser one (ORCA grid5). Second-order anisotropy parameters ( $D$ ,  $E$ ) for the optimized unsymmetric structures of pentachromium(II) species **2a** and **2b** (**2a<sub>unsym</sub>** and **2b<sub>unsym</sub>**) were computed at *post*-HF (CASSCF) level. The use of *post*-HF approach is needed since the anisotropy tensor calculations at the UDFT level require the electronic spin density of the system to be consistent with an  $\hat{S}^2$  eigenstate. Unfortunately, this is not the case since the value of  $\langle \hat{S}^2 \rangle$  from DFT significantly deviates from the expected spin-only value of 6 for a quintet state.<sup>39</sup> However, due to hardware computational limits *post*-HF methods can be applied to systems with a couple of magnetic centers and a reduced number of non-magnetic atoms. For such a reason we chose a *divide et impera* approach by extrapolating two subunits from **2a<sub>unsym</sub>** and **2b<sub>unsym</sub>**: the monomer Cr1 and the dimer Cr2-Cr3, which represent the two basic units present in the lowest energy structure of pentachromium(II) strings. The Cr1 and Cr2-Cr3 models were obtained from optimized structures by simplifying the ligands to four pyridines and four (*E*)-*N,N'*-diethenylmethanimidamido anions, respectively (Figure S38). Since the geometry of Cr2-Cr3 fragment shows only negligible differences in **2a<sub>unsym</sub>** and **2b<sub>unsym</sub>**, Cr2-Cr3 model was based on **2a<sub>unsym</sub>**. CASSCF calculations were done employing a def2-TZVP basis set for chromium(II) ions and their first neighbors, while def2-SVP basis set was used for all the other atoms. The RI-J approximation along with the def2-

TZVP/J auxiliary basis set for all the elements was used. Grids were set to 5 and VeryTightSCF. Using def2-TZVP for all atoms showed no significant differences on the energy ladder of the excited states, thus supporting the choice of our computational setup.



**Figure 1.** Structure of one of the independent molecules in **1b**·0.4CH<sub>2</sub>Cl<sub>2</sub> (molecule A), in which the thermal ellipsoid of the central Cr<sup>2+</sup> ion is distinctly prolate along the chain axis.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Synthesis and Structures.** Trichromium(II) compounds **1a**·Et<sub>2</sub>O and **1b**·0.4CH<sub>2</sub>Cl<sub>2</sub>, and pentachromium(II) compounds **2a**·4CHCl<sub>3</sub>·2Et<sub>2</sub>O and **2b** were synthesized by following (or by slight modification of) literature procedures.<sup>33,34,41,43,46,52</sup> Only **1b**·0.4CH<sub>2</sub>Cl<sub>2</sub> is a new crystal phase and is the fourth published solvatomorph of **1b**, after **1b**·2C<sub>6</sub>H<sub>6</sub>,<sup>43</sup> **1b**·2C<sub>7</sub>H<sub>8</sub>,<sup>43</sup> and **1b**·2C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>4</sub>Cl<sub>2</sub>.<sup>70</sup> It was prepared by first reacting **1a**·Et<sub>2</sub>O with TlBF<sub>4</sub> in CH<sub>3</sub>CN to replace the axial chlorido ligands with CH<sub>3</sub>CN, then precipitating the isothiocyanato derivative with KSCN and finally recrystallizing it from CH<sub>2</sub>Cl<sub>2</sub>/*n*-hexane. The new method does not require isolation of a [Cr<sub>3</sub>(dpa)<sub>4</sub>(NCCH<sub>3</sub>)<sub>2</sub>]X<sub>2</sub> intermediate but results in comparable overall yield with respect the published two-step synthesis of the benzene and toluene solvates.<sup>43</sup> The structure

contains two-and-a-half trichromium(II) complexes and one disordered interstitial molecule of dichloromethane per asymmetric unit.

**Table 1.** Selected bond distances (Å) and angles (°) in **1b**·0.4CH<sub>2</sub>Cl<sub>2</sub> resulting from Model I.<sup>a</sup>

	molecule A	molecule B	molecule C
Cr <sub>T1</sub> –Cr <sub>C</sub>	2.3060(12)	2.3446(13)	2.3527(8)
Cr <sub>C</sub> –Cr <sub>T2</sub>	2.3526(11)	2.3565(13)	2.3527(8)
Cr <sub>T1</sub> –N <sub>eq</sub>	2.115[4]	2.115[4]	2.108[5]
Cr <sub>C</sub> –N <sub>eq</sub>	2.026[4]	2.024[5]	2.032[6]
Cr <sub>T2</sub> –N <sub>eq</sub>	2.109[4]	2.110[5]	2.108[5]
Cr <sub>T1</sub> –N <sub>ax</sub>	2.200(4)	2.226(5)	2.216(5)
Cr <sub>T2</sub> –N <sub>ax</sub>	2.208(4)	2.197(5)	2.216(5)
Cr <sub>T1</sub> –Cr <sub>C</sub> –Cr <sub>T2</sub>	179.14(5)	177.73(5)	179.32(8)
Cr <sub>T1</sub> –N <sub>ax</sub> –C	153.4(4)	147.6(4)	165.1(5)
Cr <sub>T2</sub> –N <sub>ax</sub> –C	144.2(4)	155.8(5)	165.1(5)
(Cr <sub>T1</sub> )N <sub>ax</sub> –C–S	178.7(5)	177.6(6)	179.2(6)
(Cr <sub>T2</sub> )N <sub>ax</sub> –C–S	177.6(5)	179.1(6)	179.2(6)

<sup>a</sup> Cr<sub>C</sub> = central Cr<sup>2+</sup> ion, Cr<sub>T1</sub> and Cr<sub>T2</sub> = terminal Cr<sup>2+</sup> ions, N<sub>eq</sub> = equatorial nitrogen donor from dpa<sup>−</sup>, N<sub>ax</sub> = axial nitrogen donor from isothiocyanate.

Two [Cr<sub>3</sub>] moieties [molecule A: Cr1,Cr2,Cr3 (Figure 1); molecule B: Cr4,Cr5,Cr6] are entirely in general positions; the third one (molecule C: Cr7,Cr8,Cr7') lies with its central metal site (Cr8) and two amido N atoms on a twofold axis and consequently has crystallographically imposed C<sub>2</sub> symmetry. When the central metal atom is modelled as a single, full-occupancy anisotropic scatterer (Model I), the three independent molecules in **1b**·0.4CH<sub>2</sub>Cl<sub>2</sub> show a more or less symmetric arrangement of metal atoms, with Cr–Cr distances ranging from 2.31 to 2.36 Å (Table 1). Splitting of Cr2 in molecule A (Model II) gave Δd values typical of trichromium(II) strings (0.23–0.30 Å).<sup>43</sup> The Cr–Cr–Cr moieties are linear within 2.5°, whereas the Cr–NCS units are bent at the N atom, with Cr–N<sub>ax</sub>–C angles ranging from 144 to 165° (Table 1).

As a final remark, it is important to stress that the four EMACs under investigation have either idealized (**1a**·Et<sub>2</sub>O, **1b**·0.4CH<sub>2</sub>Cl<sub>2</sub>, **2a**·4CHCl<sub>3</sub>·2Et<sub>2</sub>O) or crystallographic (**2b**) fourfold symmetry. The analysis of the terminal chromophores (CrN<sub>4</sub>Cl or CrN<sub>4</sub>N) using program SHAPE v2.1<sup>71</sup> indeed indicates very small deviations from square-pyramidal (SPY-5) and vacant-octahedral (vOC-5) geometries, both of which have C<sub>4v</sub> symmetry (Table S3). In chlorido derivatives the coordination spheres are closer to SPY-5, with shape measures ranging from 0.30 to 0.51, whereas in isothiocyanato-terminated strings deviation is minimal from vOC-5 (0.29-0.34).

**Magnetic Measurements and EPR spectra.** The dc and ac magnetic measurements were performed on polycrystalline samples of **1a**·Et<sub>2</sub>O, **1b**·0.4CH<sub>2</sub>Cl<sub>2</sub> and **2b**. Compound **2a**·4CHCl<sub>3</sub>·2Et<sub>2</sub>O was studied both in solvated crystalline form and after solvent removal under vacuum. The solvated and unsolvated samples display very similar static and dynamic magnetic properties (see below). In an applied field of 1 kOe, the  $\chi T$  product of all compounds remains constant at 2.9-3.1 cm<sup>3</sup> K mol<sup>-1</sup> between room temperature and 10-15 K, signaling a well-isolated  $S = 2$  ground state. At lower temperatures,  $\chi T$  rapidly drops as expected from magnetic anisotropy effects. Isothermal molar magnetization ( $M$ ) vs.  $H$  data do not saturate at 70 kOe and 1.8-1.9 K, although the highest obtained values (ca. 3.8  $N_{\text{A}}\mu_{\text{B}}$ ) are close to the expected saturation value for an  $S = 2$  state ( $4N_{\text{A}}\mu_{\text{B}}$  with  $g = 2$ ). When plotted vs.  $H/T$ , the magnetization curves display a pronounced nesting, suggesting deviation from the Brillouin function and the presence of magnetic anisotropy. The quantitative analysis of  $M$  vs.  $H$  data (see Supporting Information for details) was based on zero-field-splitting (zfs) *plus* Zeeman Hamiltonian in Eq. (1):

$$\hat{H} = D[\hat{S}_Z^2 - S(S + 1)/3] + E(\hat{S}_X^2 - \hat{S}_Y^2) + \mu_{\text{B}}\mathbf{B} \cdot \bar{\mathbf{g}} \cdot \hat{\mathbf{S}} \quad (1)$$

where  $D$  and  $E$  are the axial and rhombic zfs parameters, respectively.  $\mathbf{S}$  is the total spin vector, with component  $S_z$  along the anisotropy axis ( $Z$ ) ( $XYZ$  label here the principal magnetic axes; as molecular symmetry is approximately fourfold,  $Z$  must be close to the chain axis). For simplicity, rhombic anisotropy was disregarded ( $E = 0$ ) and an isotropic Landé factor was assumed, i.e.  $\bar{\mathbf{g}} = g\bar{\mathbf{I}}$ , where  $\bar{\mathbf{I}}$  is the identity

matrix. The best-fit anisotropy parameters so obtained (Table 2) confirm an easy-axis anisotropy ( $D < 0$ ) for all compounds, with  $|D| = 1.5\text{-}1.7\text{ cm}^{-1}$  (the complete set of best-fit parameters is provided as Table S4).

**Table 2.** Magnetic parameters of chromium(II)-based EMACs with different nuclearity ( $n$ ) and axial ligands (X), as determined by EPR spectroscopy and dc/ac magnetic measurements.

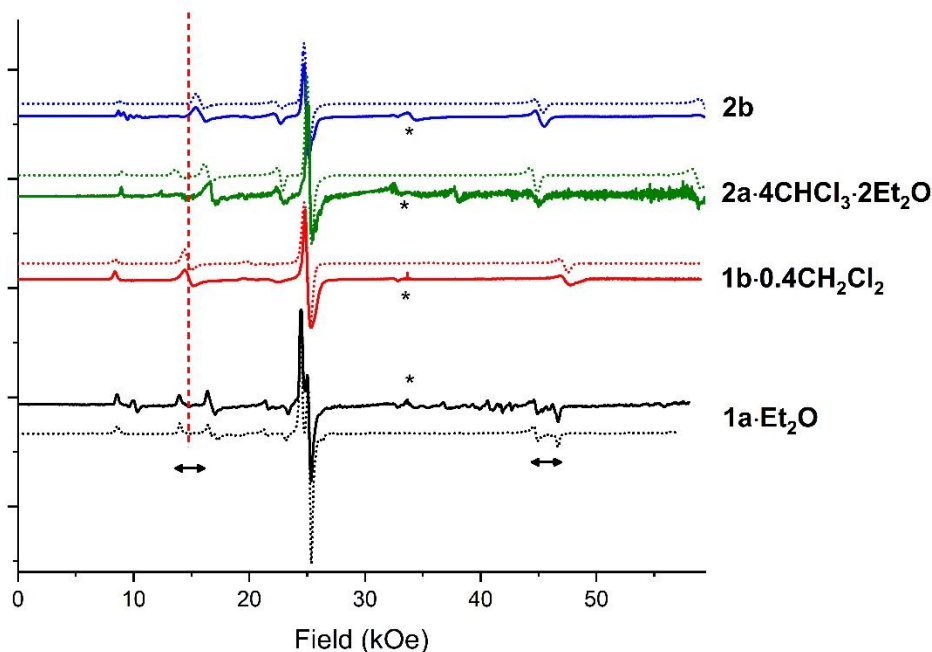
Compound	$n$	X	$D\text{ (cm}^{-1}\text{)}^a$	$ E/D ^a$	$g_{x,y}^a$	$g_z^a$	$D\text{ (cm}^{-1}\text{)}^b$	$U_{\text{eff}}/k_B\text{ (K)}^c$	$\tau_0\text{ (}\mu\text{s)}^c$	Ref.
<b>1a</b> ·CH <sub>2</sub> Cl <sub>2</sub>	3	Cl <sup>-</sup>	-1.640 <sup>d</sup>	0.021 <sup>d</sup>	1.998 <sup>d</sup>	1.981 <sup>d</sup>		10.6(6) <sup>e</sup>	2.9(5) <sup>e</sup>	36,37
<b>1a</b> ·Et <sub>2</sub> O	3	Cl <sup>-</sup>	-1.66(5)	0.020(5)	2.000(5)	1.995(5)	-1.656(16)	10.5(5) <sup>e</sup>	3.1(5) <sup>e</sup>	this work
<b>1b</b> ·0.4CH <sub>2</sub> Cl <sub>2</sub>	3	SCN <sup>-</sup>	-1.78(5)	0.000(3)	1.998(3)	1.970(2)	-1.711(12)	12.4(5) <sup>f</sup>	0.26(5) <sup>f</sup>	this work
<b>2a</b> ·4CHCl <sub>3</sub> ·2Et <sub>2</sub> O	5	Cl <sup>-</sup>	-1.53(1)	0.006(2)	1.990(3)	1.975(2)	-1.507(2)	8.6(5) <sup>g</sup>	11(5) <sup>g</sup>	35
<b>2a</b>	5	Cl <sup>-</sup>					-1.510(6)	9.2(5) <sup>g</sup>	2.2(5) <sup>g</sup>	35
<b>2b</b>	5	SCN <sup>-</sup>	-1.61(5)	0.003(2)	2.000(5)	1.985(2)	-1.696(4)	10.2(5) <sup>g</sup>	3.3(5) <sup>g</sup>	this work

<sup>a</sup> From W-band EPR, unless otherwise noted. <sup>b</sup> From isothermal  $M$  vs.  $H$  data. <sup>c</sup> From ac susceptometry. <sup>d</sup> From high-frequency EPR (240 GHz). <sup>e</sup> Under an applied dc field of 2.0 kOe. <sup>f</sup> Under an applied dc field of 3.5 kOe. <sup>g</sup> Under an applied dc field of 2.5 kOe.

For a more accurate, state-of-the-art determination of  $D$  and  $E$ , as well as of the principal components of the  $\bar{\mathbf{g}}$  matrix, we used W-band ( $\nu \sim 94$  GHz) EPR spectroscopy. In spite of the difficulties in obtaining pure powder pattern spectra, the low temperature W-band EPR traces (Figure 2) provide an unequivocal picture over the trend of  $D$  values in the studied series of complexes. Because of the condition  $|D| \sim h\nu$ , the analysis of the spectra using Eq. (1) is not straightforward and requires careful consideration of the angular dependence of the transitions.<sup>59</sup> Most of them are actually occurring at off-axis turning points, the most intense one being close to 25 kOe, and as looping transitions (Figure S31). Only a couple of signals, expected to occur at 16 and 60 kOe for  $D = -1.6\text{ cm}^{-1}$ ,  $g = 1.99$  and  $\nu = 94.27$  GHz, can be attributed to perpendicular transitions (Figure S32). The separation between these two lines (or the position of the first one, when the second exceeds the field range of the spectrometer, as occurring in **1b**·0.4CH<sub>2</sub>Cl<sub>2</sub>) shows that  $|D|$  is slightly larger for tri- as compared to pentachromium(II) complexes, and for isothiocyanato as compared to chlorido derivatives. On the other hand, the EPR transition observed around 25 kOe is



essentially independent of the  $D$  value but can be used to obtain a more accurate estimate of  $g_{X,Y}$ , since it arises from microcrystallites oriented with their main anisotropy axes at  $55^\circ < \theta < 90^\circ$  from the applied field (Figure S31).



**Figure 2.** W-band (94.27 GHz) EPR spectra recorded at 6 K for **1a**·Et<sub>2</sub>O, **1b**·0.4CH<sub>2</sub>Cl<sub>2</sub>, **2a**·4CHCl<sub>3</sub>·2Et<sub>2</sub>O and **2b**. Continuous lines: experimental spectra; dotted lines: best simulations obtained using the parameters reported in the text. The double arrows evidence the splitting of the transitions due to the non-negligible rhombicity of **1a**·Et<sub>2</sub>O. The vertical dashed line is centered on the perpendicular transition occurring furthest from the center of the spectrum, indicating the largest  $|D|$  value in the series. The asterisk indicates a signal from an impurity in the cavity walls. The spectrum of **2a**·4CHCl<sub>3</sub>·2Et<sub>2</sub>O and the corresponding simulation were originally reported in Ref.<sup>35</sup>.

With one exception, the observed experimental spectra indicate very weak rhombicity ( $|E/D| \sim 0$ ), consistent with the idealized or crystallographic fourfold molecular symmetry. In **1a**·Et<sub>2</sub>O, the twofold splitting of both perpendicular and looping transitions points to significant deviation from axially. Following these

considerations the spectra were simulated<sup>72</sup> to obtain the best-fit parameters gathered in Table 2 (an axial  $\bar{g}$  matrix was assumed to reduce the number of parameters). We stress that the evolution of the spectra at higher temperatures is only compatible with a negative  $D$  parameter (Figure S33), consistent with previous literature reports.<sup>35–37</sup> As for the rhombicity of **1a**·Et<sub>2</sub>O, best simulations were obtained with  $|E/D| = 0.020(5)$ , i.e. the same value reported for the dichloromethane solvate.<sup>36,37</sup> Unexpectedly, the inclusion of a small rhombic term was necessary to accurately reproduce the spectra of **2b**, suggesting that the actual molecular symmetry is lower than the reported crystallographic symmetry.<sup>34</sup> The  $g_{x,y}$  values are always very close to the free electron value, indicating a negligible effect of spin-orbit coupling over this parameter, whereas  $g_z$  is always unequivocally smaller. Finally, the spectra of **1b**·0.4CH<sub>2</sub>Cl<sub>2</sub> could be reproduced with a single set of spin Hamiltonian parameters. The structural differences among the three crystallographically independent molecules are thus undetectable by EPR.

For derivative **2a**·4CHCl<sub>3</sub>·2Et<sub>2</sub>O, the accuracy of the spin Hamiltonian parameters obtained from W-band EPR spectra was confirmed by a high-frequency EPR study at 220.8 and 331.2 GHz. The spectra show the pattern expected for an  $S = 2$  spin system but some lines are split (Figures S34-S35). For instance, at 331.2 GHz the signal observed close to 7 T ( $M_S = -2 \rightarrow -1$  transition for the  $Z$  orientation) comprises a dominant and a satellite component at 6.93 and 6.96 T, respectively. The dominant peaks are consistent with the spin Hamiltonian parameters extracted from W-band spectra; their positions and those of the W-band signals were simultaneously fitted to give:  $D = -1.534(12) \text{ cm}^{-1}$ ,  $E = 0.008(5) \text{ cm}^{-1}$ ,  $g_x = 1.995(3)$ ,  $g_y = 1.993(3)$ ,  $g_z = 1.985(11)$ . The weaker signals, some of which *exceed* the highest fields of the dominant set, are attributed to a minority species (~20% molar fraction) with slightly different anisotropy parameters ( $D = -1.55 \text{ cm}^{-1}$ ,  $E = 0.011 \text{ cm}^{-1}$ ,  $g_x = 1.98$ ,  $g_y = 1.97$ ,  $g_z = 1.98$ ), which remains unresolved in W-band spectra. The uncertainty on this second parameter set is larger because signals are weaker and less resonances can be identified; especially, no W-band signal could be introduced in the fit, thereby limiting the frequency range explored.

The ac magnetic susceptibility studies on all compounds revealed no out-of-phase component in zero dc field within the available range of temperature (down to 1.8 K) and frequency (up to 10 kHz). Application of a static field was however effective to reveal the magnetization relaxation leading to the appearance of an out-of-phase signal. The optimal field value (2.0-3.5 kOe) was located in a preliminary scan from 0 to 10 kOe at 1.8-1.9 K and was used for subsequent temperature and frequency dependent studies. Plots of  $\ln \tau$  vs.  $1/T$  were found to be linear in **1b**·0.4CH<sub>2</sub>Cl<sub>2</sub>, **2a** and **2a**·4CHCl<sub>3</sub>·2Et<sub>2</sub>O, while a slight curvature was detected in **1a**·Et<sub>2</sub>O and **2b**. Linear fits to all the data (or to the linear, high-temperature region) gave the effective anisotropy barriers ( $U_{\text{eff}}$ ) and the attempt times ( $\tau_0$ ) gathered in Table 2. For all derivatives but **1b**·0.4CH<sub>2</sub>Cl<sub>2</sub> the value of  $U_{\text{eff}}$  is, within uncertainty, coincident with the total splitting of the  $S = 2$  multiplet ( $U = |D|S^2$ ), as calculated from the  $D$  parameter determined by EPR and when accounting for an external dc field. We note in this respect that **1b**·0.4CH<sub>2</sub>Cl<sub>2</sub> shows the widest distribution of relaxation times ( $\alpha$ ) at the measuring field. This has recently been shown<sup>73</sup> to result in a large uncertainty on the actual relaxation time and thus on the parameters of the relaxation process. We can then conclude that all the data lend support to an overbarrier Orbach mechanism for magnetic moment reversal.

In spite of the small  $S$  value, all chromium(II)-based EMACs considered in this and previous works<sup>35,36</sup> behave as SMMs, although the observation of magnetic bistability by ac susceptibility measurements requires the application of a dc magnetic field. In this respect, their magnetic properties are similar to those of the mononuclear square planar complexes [Cr(N(SiMe<sub>3</sub>)<sub>2</sub>)(py)<sub>2</sub>] and [Cr(N(SiMe<sub>3</sub>)<sub>2</sub>)(THF)<sub>2</sub>], which also feature a negative  $D$  value, very weak rhombicity and slow relaxation of their magnetization observed under dc field.<sup>74</sup>

**Angular Overlap Model Calculations.** The Angular Overlap Model (AOM)<sup>61</sup> proved remarkably successful in predicting the anisotropy of **2a**·4CHCl<sub>3</sub>·2Et<sub>2</sub>O starting from the coordination environment of its structurally-isolated terminal ion.<sup>35</sup> We herein show that the same approach offers a straightforward explanation of the slightly enhanced anisotropy observed in the isothiocyanato derivative **2b**. Calculations were performed starting from the experimental atomic coordinates of **2a**·4CHCl<sub>3</sub>·2Et<sub>2</sub>O and **2b** and using

the same Ligand-Field (LF) parameters as reported in Ref.<sup>35</sup> (except for a larger  $Dq$  value for  $\text{SCN}^-$  compared to  $\text{Cl}^-$ , in agreement with their relative position in the spectrochemical series). The calculated  $g$  values are in accordance with EPR spectra, with  $g_{X,Y}$  very close to 2.00 and  $g_Z$  always around 1.98 (Table 3). More important, the resulting  $D$  parameters quantitatively agree with experiment, including the larger  $|D|$  value of **2b**. The role of excited triplet states emerges clearly from side calculations in which triplets are disregarded: in this case the  $|D|$  parameters are dramatically underestimated (ca. 0.6 vs. 1.4-1.6  $\text{cm}^{-1}$ ) and the differences between the two complexes become negligible (Table 3).

**Table 3.** Magnetic parameters for terminal ion (Cr1) in chromium(II)-based EMACs with different nuclearity ( $n$ ) and axial ligands (X), evaluated within the AOM.<sup>a</sup>

	$n, X$	$D$ ( $\text{cm}^{-1}$ ) <sup>b</sup>	$D$ ( $\text{cm}^{-1}$ ) <sup>c</sup>	$E$ ( $\text{cm}^{-1}$ ) <sup>b</sup>	$g_X^b$	$g_Y^b$	$g_Z^b$	Ref.
<b>1a</b> ·Et <sub>2</sub> O	3, Cl <sup>-</sup>	-1.42	-0.61	0.010	1.998	1.998	1.978	this work
<b>1b</b> ·0.4CH <sub>2</sub> Cl <sub>2</sub> <sup>d</sup>	3, SCN <sup>-</sup>	-1.55	-0.61	$5 \cdot 10^{-3}$	1.998	1.998	1.977	this work
<b>2a</b> ·4CHCl <sub>3</sub> ·2Et <sub>2</sub> O	5, Cl <sup>-</sup>	-1.44	-0.61	$6 \cdot 10^{-3}$	1.998	1.998	1.978	this work, <sup>35</sup>
<b>2b</b>	5, SCN <sup>-</sup>	-1.60	-0.64	0	1.998	1.998	1.976	this work

<sup>a</sup> LF parameters:  $B = 800 \text{ cm}^{-1}$ ,  $C = 3300 \text{ cm}^{-1}$ ,  $\zeta_{3d} = 235 \text{ cm}^{-1}$ ,  $k = 0.82$ ,  $10Dq(\text{N}) = 16500 \text{ cm}^{-1}$ ,  $10Dq(\text{Cl}^-) = 5000 \text{ cm}^{-1}$ ,  $10Dq(\text{SCN}^-) = 8000 \text{ cm}^{-1}$ ,  $(e_{\pi_c} + e_{\pi_s})/e_{\sigma} = 0.3$  for all ligands,  $e_{\pi_c}(\text{N})/e_{\pi_s}(\text{N}) = 0.0$ ,  $e_{\pi_c}(\text{X})/e_{\pi_s}(\text{X}) = 1.0$  ( $X = \text{Cl}^-$ ,  $\text{SCN}^-$ ).  
<sup>b</sup> Calculated by including all the states arising from  $3d^4$  configuration. <sup>c</sup> Calculated by considering only states arising from  $^5D$  term. <sup>d</sup> Calculated for molecule C (Cr7,Cr8,Cr7') with crystallographic  $C_2$  symmetry.

These results are easily rationalized by analyzing idealized tetragonal structures containing four equatorial pyridine-type ligands and two weaker axial ligands (i.e.  $Dq_{ax} < Dq_{eq}$ ). When the LF parameters of equatorial sites are held fixed, the  $D$  value is crucially determined by the global LF strength of the two axial coordination sites, i.e. by the sum of their  $Dq$  values. In particular, as the average  $Dq$  of axial ligands is increased towards that of equatorial ligands, i.e. on lowering distortions from octahedral symmetry, the AOM predicts a more negative  $D$  value (Figure 3a). While this might look counterintuitive, one has to consider that the  $3d^4$  configuration in octahedral symmetry is characterized by a  $^5E_g$  ground state, which

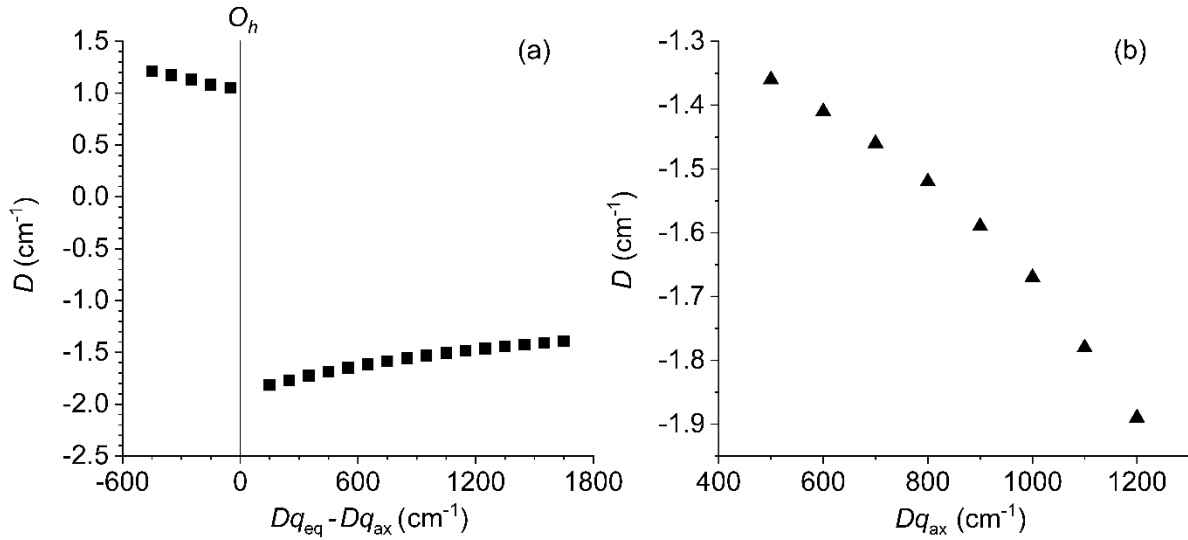
cannot be mapped on a simple spin Hamiltonian such as Eq. (1), even including higher-order terms. However, as soon as the octahedral degeneracy is lifted by tetragonal elongation, the spin Hamiltonian formalism can be applied: in a perturbative approach the magnitude of  $|D|$  is then inversely dependent on the distortion.<sup>75</sup> This effect is triggered primarily by the strength of the  $\sigma$  interaction with the axial ligand(s) (see Figure 3b). Furthermore, it crucially depends on the contribution of excited triplet states, which takes the form:<sup>76,77</sup>

$$D' = -\frac{\zeta_{3d}^2/4}{6B+5C-\Delta E} \quad (2)$$

where  $\zeta_{3d}$  is the single 3d-electron spin-orbit coupling constant,  $B$  and  $C$  are Racah parameters and

$$\Delta E = 2e_{\sigma}^{\text{ax}} + e_{\sigma}^{\text{eq}} - 2e_{\pi}^{\text{ax}} - 2e_{\pi}^{\text{eq}} \quad (3)$$

is the energy difference between the  $3d_{z^2}$  orbital and the  $3d_{xz}, 3d_{yz}$  pair [please note that Eq. (2) was misprinted in Ref.<sup>78</sup>]. From Eq. (3), it follows that  $\Delta E$  increases with increasing  $\sigma$  donor strength of the axial ligands, causing  $D'$  to become more negative (Eq. (2)). By contrast, the contribution of quintet states is smaller<sup>79</sup> and independent of  $e_{\sigma}^{\text{ax}}$ , while singlets essentially do not contribute to the anisotropy.



**Figure 3.** Calculated  $D$  value for a  $3d^4 \text{ML}_4\text{X}_2$  system in  $D_{4h}$  symmetry: (a) as a function of the difference between equatorial and axial LF strength [ $(e_{\pi c} + e_{\pi s})/e_{\sigma} = 0.3$  for all ligands]; (b) as a function of axial

LF strength for constant  $e_{\pi C}^{ax} = e_{\pi S}^{ax} = 312.5 \text{ cm}^{-1}$ . For both plots the other parameters were:  $B = 800 \text{ cm}^{-1}$ ,  $C = 3300 \text{ cm}^{-1}$ ,  $\zeta_{3d} = 235 \text{ cm}^{-1}$ ,  $k = 0.82$ ,  $Dq_{eq} = 1650 \text{ cm}^{-1}$ .

In trichromium(II) strings (**1a** and **1b**), the coordination environment of terminal ions remains quite similar to their longer congeners and, rather unsurprisingly, AOM predicts comparable single-ion anisotropies and  $g$  factors (Table 3). Based on the available experimental and theoretical knowledge, however, the origin of magnetic anisotropy in **1a** and **1b** is much less straightforward. While chlorido derivative **2a** entails a fairly isolated Cr1 center and two formally diamagnetic chromium(II) pairs,<sup>39</sup> the ground structure of **1a** is symmetric.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, contributions to magnetic anisotropy potentially arise from both terminal ions as well as from central ion. One might reason that three localized  $s = 2$  spins with strong antiferromagnetic coupling would also yield a well-isolated  $S = 2$  ground state, whose  $D$  parameter relates to projected single-ion anisotropies.<sup>80</sup> At this stage, shedding light on the origin of magnetic anisotropy clearly requires a more accurate electronic description of these EMACs based on *ab initio* methods. The DFT/CASSCF calculations described in next section indeed disprove a spin-localized model of trichromium(II) strings, while providing a simple explanation as to why the two types of strings have similar magnetic anisotropy.

**DFT Structure Optimization.** In our *ab initio* investigation of **1a**, **1b**, **2a** and **2b**, the Cr centers were numbered as Cr1, Cr2,...Cr5 along the chain, with Cr1 representing the formally “isolated” metal center in the unsymmetric structures. The results of structural optimization on **2a** were published in Ref.,<sup>39</sup> where we probed the two different energy minima corresponding to a symmetric (**2a<sub>sym</sub>**) and an unsymmetric (**2a<sub>unsym</sub>**) structure (these data are collected in Table 4 for convenience). In agreement with the structural model proposed by Cotton et al.,<sup>38,81</sup> the unsymmetric structure was found more stable by 2.9 kcal mol<sup>-1</sup>.<sup>39</sup> The same calculation protocol applied to **2b** gave a similar energy profile, with **2b<sub>unsym</sub>** more stable than **2b<sub>sym</sub>** by 1.7 kcal mol<sup>-1</sup>, and overall geometrical parameters in close agreement with the experimental structure (including perfectly linear Cr-NCS units). These results confirm the occurrence of a shallow

potential energy surface in both pentachromium(II) species. Furthermore, terminal ligands have little influence on the geometry of both symmetric and unsymmetric structures. For instance, the two inner Cr-Cr distances in **2a**<sub>sym</sub> (Cr2-Cr3 and Cr3-Cr4) are shorter (2.21-2.22 Å) than Cr1-Cr2 and Cr4-Cr5 (2.31-2.32 Å) (see Table 4).<sup>39</sup> The pattern is similar in **2b**<sub>sym</sub>, albeit with a smaller difference between the two sets of distances (2.25 Å for inner and 2.28 Å for outer Cr-Cr separations). Notice that a Cr-Cr distance of ~2.2 Å corresponds to a multiple bond.<sup>82</sup>

**Table 4.** Computed Cr-Cr distances (in Å) in the symmetric and unsymmetric structures of **2a** and **2b** (BS  $S = 2$  state).

	X	Cr1-Cr2	Cr2-Cr3	Cr3-Cr4	Cr4-Cr5	Ref.
<b>2a</b> <sub>sym</sub>	Cl <sup>-</sup>	2.319	2.207	2.221	2.308	<sup>39</sup>
<b>2b</b> <sub>sym</sub>	SCN <sup>-</sup>	2.285	2.246	2.246	2.285	this work
<b>2a</b> <sub>unsym</sub>	Cl <sup>-</sup>	2.550	1.862	2.606	1.904	<sup>39</sup>
<b>2b</b> <sub>unsym</sub>	SCN <sup>-</sup>	2.547	1.865	2.604	1.908	this work

In the unsymmetric structures, the  $C_2$  symmetry element located on Cr3 is lost and an alternation of short and long distances is found, with  $d_< = 1.86-1.91$  Å and  $d_> = 2.55-2.61$  Å (see Table 4). It is worth to mention that Cr-Cr distances of 1.8-1.9 Å are in agreement with a third/fourth-order Cr-Cr bond<sup>82</sup> while a very weak Cr-Cr interaction is expected for distances longer than ~2.5 Å. Such results strongly suggest that one of the terminal Cr<sup>2+</sup> ions in the most stable, unsymmetric structure of pentachromium(II) strings can be considered as “isolated” and with a square-pyramidal coordination environment featuring the Cl<sup>-</sup> or SCN<sup>-</sup> ligands in apical position.

The computed spin densities (Löwdin analysis) and expectation values  $\langle \hat{S}^2 \rangle$  for the BS  $S = 2$  state, reported in Table 5, are very similar for corresponding structures of **2a** and **2b**. On average, the spin densities in **2b** are slightly reduced as compared with **2a** while  $\langle \hat{S}^2 \rangle$  is practically unchanged.

**Table 5.** Computed spin densities (in unpaired electrons) and  $\langle \hat{S}^2 \rangle$  values in the symmetric and unsymmetric structures of **2a** and **2b** (BS  $S = 2$  state).

	X	Cr1	Cr2	Cr3	Cr4	Cr5	$\langle \hat{S}^2 \rangle$	Ref
<b>2a<sub>sym</sub></b>	Cl <sup>-</sup>	3.10	-2.45	2.50	-2.44	3.12	10.46	<sup>39</sup>
<b>2b<sub>sym</sub></b>	SCN <sup>-</sup>	3.01	-2.39	2.60	-2.37	3.01	10.41	this work
<b>2a<sub>unsym</sub></b>	Cl <sup>-</sup>	3.40	-1.40	1.60	-1.54	1.73	8.04	<sup>39</sup>
<b>2b<sub>unsym</sub></b>	SCN <sup>-</sup>	3.31	-1.40	1.62	-1.52	1.71	8.03	this work

The alternating signs and the magnitudes of the spin densities support the goodness of the BS solution obtained for  $S = 2$  and, in addition, evidence the impact of an unsymmetric vs. symmetric configuration on the electronic structure. Indeed, in the symmetric structures the spin densities are almost homogeneous in absolute value among the five metal centers (3.0-3.1 unpaired electrons on Cr1 and Cr5; 2.4-2.6 unpaired electrons on Cr2, Cr3 and Cr4). On the contrary, in the unsymmetric structures 3.3-3.4 unpaired electrons are localized on Cr1 while only 1.4-1.7 unpaired electrons are present on each of the remaining metal centers. The amount of spin density left on Cr2, Cr3, Cr4 and Cr5 suggests that a bond order larger than three is unlikely to occur within the formally quadruply-bonded Cr2-Cr3 and Cr4-Cr5 pairs, while a practically isolated Cr1 is confirmed. Therefore, a bond localization is clearly evident compared to the symmetric case.

The expectation value  $\langle \hat{S}^2 \rangle$  calculated by DFT gives an indication of the closeness of the spin ground state of a molecule to the multi-spin picture suggested by the atomic spin density values.<sup>83,84</sup> The latter suggest the presence of antiferromagnetically coupled spins along the chain. In an unrestricted DFT formalism this should correspond to an  $\langle \hat{S}^2 \rangle$  calculated value of 10.81 (10.69) for **2a<sub>sym</sub>** (**2b<sub>sym</sub>**) and 8.83 (8.78) for **2a<sub>unsym</sub>** (**2b<sub>unsym</sub>**).<sup>83,84</sup> In all cases, the calculated values reported in Table 5 are underestimated. This points to a deviation from a multi-spin picture and the presence of significant overlap between the orbitals bearing the unpaired spins. Moreover, this effect is stronger in the unsymmetric case, further supporting the previous analysis in terms of spin densities and bond-lengths.



The structure optimization procedure was extended to trichromium(II) species **1a** and **1b** (Table 6). In agreement with previous studies,<sup>46-51</sup> the energy difference between **1a<sub>unsym</sub>** and **1a<sub>sym</sub>** is now 5.4 kcal mol<sup>-1</sup>, but in favor of the symmetric structure. Unfortunately, it was not possible to fully converge on an unsymmetric structure for isothiocyanato derivative **1b** because the optimization procedure kept on converging on a symmetric one. At any rate, such behavior hints to symmetric and unsymmetric structures of very similar energy, with a slight preference for the symmetric one.

The spin densities and  $\langle \hat{S}^2 \rangle$  values are also presented in Table 6. Also in this case, the DFT calculated  $\langle \hat{S}^2 \rangle$  values deviate from those expected from multi-spin picture (8.44, 8.46 and 7.41 for **1a<sub>sym</sub>**, **1b<sub>sym</sub>** and **1a<sub>unsym</sub>**, respectively) confirming that trichromium(II) strings cannot be described as three localized, exchange-coupled  $s = 2$  spins.<sup>83,84</sup> To further support our analysis, we calculated the exchange-coupling constants between Cr<sup>2+</sup> ions in **1a<sub>sym</sub>** at the BS-DFT level (see Supporting Information for more details).<sup>83</sup> Use of the spin Hamiltonian  $\hat{H} = J_1(\hat{s}_1 \cdot \hat{s}_2 + \hat{s}_2 \cdot \hat{s}_3) + J_2 \hat{s}_1 \cdot \hat{s}_3$ , where  $s_i$  is the spin vector localized on Cr<sub>*i*</sub>, gives large antiferromagnetic interactions between nearest neighbors ( $J_1 = 1635$  cm<sup>-1</sup>) and next-nearest neighbors ( $J_2 = 606$  cm<sup>-1</sup>), clearly indicating the presence of a delocalized bond all over the three Cr ions. We conclude that, in the gas phase, the preferred geometry of tri- and pentachromium(II) species with terminal Cl<sup>-</sup> or SCN<sup>-</sup> ligands is symmetric and unsymmetric, respectively.

**Table 6.** Computed Cr-Cr distances (in Å), spin densities (in unpaired electrons) and  $\langle \hat{S}^2 \rangle$  values in the symmetric and unsymmetric structures of **1a** and **1b** (BS  $S = 2$  state).

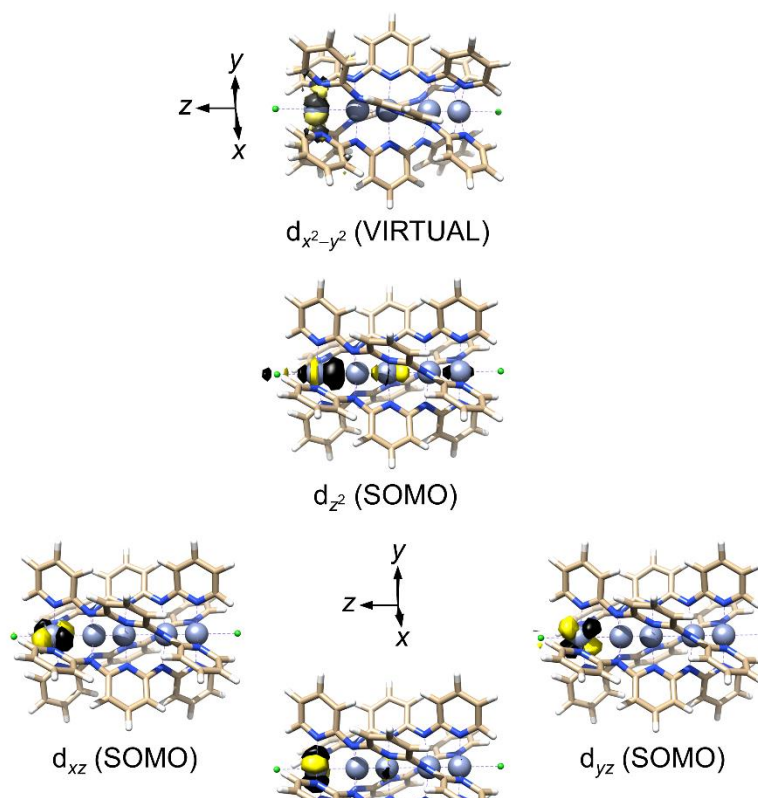
	X	Cr1-Cr2	Cr2-Cr3	Cr1	Cr2	Cr3	$\langle \hat{S}^2 \rangle$
<b>1a<sub>sym</sub></b>	Cl <sup>-</sup>	2.335	2.335	3.17	-2.54	3.17	8.38
<b>1b<sub>sym</sub></b>	SCN <sup>-</sup>	2.337	2.337	3.18	-2.56	3.18	8.41
<b>1a<sub>unsym</sub></b>	Cl <sup>-</sup>	2.686	1.886	3.50	-1.52	1.79	7.08
<b>1b<sub>unsym</sub></b>	SCN <sup>-</sup>	-	-	-	-	-	-

**Electronic Structures.** We analyzed in greater detail the electronic structures of the chlorido derivatives **1a** and **2a** through the use of Quasi-Restricted Molecular Orbitals (QROs), computed at the DFT level.<sup>85</sup> Figures 4 and 5 depict the singly-occupied QROs (SOMOs) for the optimized unsymmetric and symmetric structures of **2a** and **1a**, respectively (from now on, the principal quantum number will be dropped from orbital symbols, unless when strictly necessary). In **2a<sub>unsym</sub>**, these four frontier QROs have strong d-like character ( $d_{xy}$ ,  $d_{xz}$ ,  $d_{yz}$  and  $d_{z^2}$ ) and are well localized on Cr1 (Figure 4). The  $d_{x^2-y^2}$ -like orbital is found at higher energy and is empty (VIRTUAL). Such a result suggests that the unsymmetric structures can be considered as the superposition of two sub-units, Cr1 and Cr2-Cr3-Cr4-Cr5, marginally interacting with each other. Indeed, only the  $d_{z^2}$ -like QRO on Cr1 is slightly delocalized over the Cr2-Cr3-Cr4-Cr5 fragment, as expected since the  $d_{z^2}$  metal orbitals have the most efficient overlap along the metal chain. Turning now to the Cr2-Cr3-Cr4-Cr5 fragment, the  $\sigma(\sigma^*)$  interactions are delocalized over the four ions, whereas  $\pi(\pi^*)$  and  $\delta(\delta^*)$  interactions are pretty localized on the Cr2-Cr3 and Cr4-Cr5 pairs, as suggested by the computed short Cr-Cr distances (Figure S36).

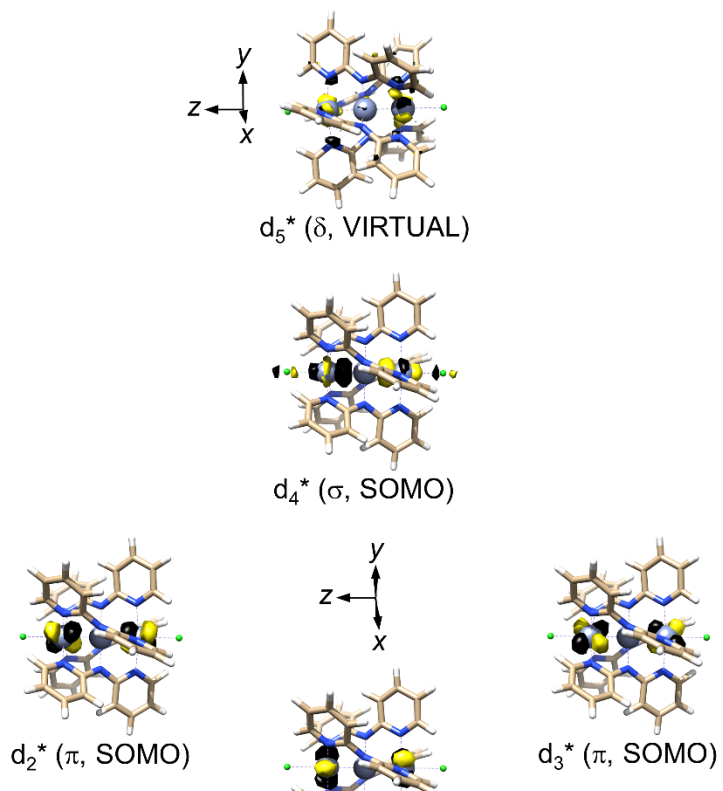
Considering a symmetric structure (**2a<sub>sym</sub>**) of the complex, a completely different picture would result (Figure S37). The unpaired electrons would now be found in four QROs (SOMOs) which can be described as one  $\sigma$ , two  $\pi$  and one  $\delta$  non-bonding linear combinations of metal d orbitals. Nodal planes are present on Cr2 and Cr4 in all four QROs except for  $\sigma$  molecular orbital, where some electron density is still present on Cr2 and Cr4. A fifth  $\delta$ -type non-bonding combination, with contributions from odd sites only, remains unoccupied (VIRTUAL); it was included in Figure S37 for consistency with the composition of SOMOs, although it is not the LUMO. The four unpaired electrons in **2a<sub>sym</sub>** are thus *shared* among Cr1, Cr3 and Cr5, whereas they are *localized* on Cr1 in **2a<sub>unsym</sub>**. However, the presence of a nodal plane on Cr2 and Cr4 makes each terminal  $\text{Cr}^{2+}$  ion in **2a<sub>sym</sub>** almost equivalent to Cr1 in **2a<sub>unsym</sub>** *in terms of electronic structure*.

A scenario similar to **2a<sub>sym</sub>** occurs in trichromium(II) string **1a<sub>sym</sub>**. The four unpaired electrons are in one  $\sigma$ , two  $\pi$  and one  $\delta$  non-bonding linear combinations of d orbitals centered on Cr1 and Cr3 (SOMOs), with a nodal plane now located on central metal Cr2 (Figure 5). A fifth  $\delta$ -type molecular orbital also

delocalized on Cr1 and Cr3 is found at higher energy and is empty (VIRTUAL); although it is not the LUMO, it was included in our analysis for symmetry consistency with the composition of the SOMOs.



**Figure 4.** Frontier QROs in  $2a_{\text{unsym}}$ . The given reference frame is used to label the d-like QROs, which are almost completely localized on the leftmost  $\text{Cr}^{2+}$  ion (Cr1). A slightly different molecular orientation is used for a better representation of the  $d_{x^2-y^2}$ -like QRO. Positive and negative signs of the wave function are plotted in yellow and black, respectively.



**Figure 5.** Frontier QROs in  $1a_{\text{sym}}$ . The reference frame is defined by the coordination environment of Cr1 and is used to label the d-like contributions to QROs, as given by Eqs. (4a-e). A slightly different molecular orientation is used for a better representation of  $d_5^*$ . Positive and negative signs of the wave function are plotted in yellow and black, respectively.

Since the Cr1N<sub>4</sub> and Cr3N<sub>4</sub> basal planes are twisted by ~45° with respect to each other along the chain axis, the wave function composition in terms of d orbitals can be worked out by simple inspection of Figure 5:

$$d_1^* = 2^{-1/2} (d_{xy}^{\text{Cr1}} - d_{x^2-y^2}^{\text{Cr3}}) \quad (4a)$$

$$d_2^* = 2^{-1/2} (d_{yz}^{\text{Cr1}} - d_{yz}^{\text{Cr3}}) \quad (4b)$$

$$d_3^* = 2^{-1/2} (-d_{xz}^{\text{Cr1}} + d_{xz}^{\text{Cr3}}) \quad (4c)$$

$$d_4^* = 2^{-1/2} (-d_{z^2}^{\text{Cr1}} + d_{z^2}^{\text{Cr3}}) \quad (4d)$$

$$d_5^* = 2^{-1/2} (-d_{x^2-y^2}^{\text{Cr1}} - d_{xy}^{\text{Cr3}}) \quad (4e)$$

Notice that d orbitals on Cr1 and Cr3 are expressed in two collinear reference frames, whose orientation is defined by the coordination environment of Cr1 (see Figure 5 and Supporting Information for more details). These results provide a starting point to explain the similar magnetic behavior observed in tri- and pentachromium(II) derivatives, in spite of their different structural preferences and electronic structure.

**The Origin of Magnetic Anisotropy.** The “isolated” Cr<sup>2+</sup> ion (Cr1) in the ground, unsymmetric structures of pentachromium(II) strings (**2a<sub>unsym</sub>** and **2b<sub>unsym</sub>**) displays a square-pyramidal coordination environment, with the metal only slightly out of the basal plane. Calculations at CASSCF(4,5) level on truncated Cr1 models (Figure S38a,b) afford an easy-axis anisotropy in the ground quintet state, with  $D = -1.513$  and  $-1.592$  cm<sup>-1</sup> in **2a<sub>unsym</sub>** and **2b<sub>unsym</sub>**, respectively (see Table 7).

**Table 7.** Magnetic parameters (cm<sup>-1</sup>) determined by CASSCF calculations on Cr1 and Cr1Zn<sub>4</sub> models of **2a<sub>unsym</sub>** and **2b<sub>unsym</sub>**.

Model	<b>2a<sub>unsym</sub></b> (X = Cl <sup>-</sup> )		<b>2b<sub>unsym</sub></b> (X = SCN <sup>-</sup> )	
	$D$	$E/D$	$D$	$E/D$
Cr1	-1.513	0.000	-1.592	0.000
Cr1Zn <sub>4</sub>	-1.441	0.000	-1.248	0.000

These CASSCF results compare well with the experimental data gathered in Table 2 and with the predictions of AOM (Table 3), and correctly reproduce the larger axial anisotropy of the isothiocyanato (**2b**) vs. chlorido (**2a**) derivative.

To check the validity of the truncated models, we also calculated the magnetic properties of the neighboring Cr2-Cr3 pair (Figure S38c). As suggested by the short Cr-Cr distance and confirmed by the computed Unrestricted Natural Orbitals (UNOs), the two chromium(II) ions are strongly coupled and for this reason both static and dynamic correlations are supposed to be relevant. Therefore, CASSCF(8,8) was used to determine the electronic structure for this fragment. The active space was built with  $\sigma$ ;  $\pi$ ;  $\pi$ ;  $\delta$  and  $\sigma^*$ ;  $\pi^*$ ;  $\pi^*$ ;  $\delta^*$  orbitals (derived from the combination of d orbitals except for  $d_{x^2-y^2}$ ) and the wave function was allowed to converge on both the first triplet and singlet CI solutions. As expected, the singlet state was found more stable by  $3927.95 \text{ cm}^{-1}$ , indicating that the Cr2-Cr3 unit can be regarded as a diamagnetic fragment. UNO analysis gave a bond order of 2.27 for the singlet ground state solution, which significantly deviates from the expected value of 4. As reported in the literature,<sup>50</sup> this is due to the partial occupation of antibonding orbitals as an effect of electron correlation. The twist of neighboring equatorial  $N_4$  planes results in a deviation from a perfectly eclipsed configuration,<sup>86</sup> which reduces the overlap between  $d_{xz}$ ,  $d_{yz}$ , and  $d_{xy}$  orbitals, i.e. the ones responsible for  $\pi$  and  $\delta$  interactions. In turn, this effect leads to a lower energy splitting between their bonding and antibonding combinations, causes a larger spread of electron occupation numbers all over the Fermi energy region and reduces the effective bond order of the chromium pair. According to the above considerations, the Cr2-Cr3-Cr4-Cr5 unit is expected to behave as a diamagnetic fragment and to only marginally affect the electronic structure of Cr1. Moreover, the long Cr1-Cr2 distance and the almost complete separation between UNOs of the two different fragments strongly suggest that the magnetic behavior of these unsymmetric EMACs is ruled *only by the Cr1 fragment*.

To further evaluate the effect of the Cr2-Cr3-Cr4-Cr5 fragment on the  $D$  value of Cr1, we performed a CASSCF calculation replacing the four  $\text{Cr}^{2+}$  with  $\text{Zn}^{2+}$  ions, without any structural relaxation (Cr1Zn4 model). Such a choice was necessary since the explicit inclusion of the four  $\text{Cr}^{2+}$  ions would be

computationally too demanding. The magnetic anisotropy parameters for Cr1 and Cr1Zn<sub>4</sub> models based on the structures of **2a<sub>unsym</sub>** and **2b<sub>unsym</sub>** are compared in Table 7. The Zn<sup>2+</sup> ions have a limited impact on calculated *D* values, which become somewhat less negative. We can therefore conclude that an axial “diamagnetic substitution” approach does not significantly alter the main contributions to the anisotropy, which originate almost totally from the N<sub>4</sub>Cl or N<sub>4</sub>N(CS) coordination environments.

Unfortunately, CASSCF calculations cannot be applied to the symmetric structure of trichromium(II) complexes; for a correct representation of their electronic structure, the CAS space should be extended over the 3d sets of the three Cr<sup>2+</sup> ions, and this would be unmanageable in terms of computational resources.

A unified treatment of both types of complexes can however rely on an approach devised by Neese et al.,<sup>85,87,88</sup> in which the electronic structure is described in terms of QROs. For simplicity, we herein limit our analysis to the d-like molecular orbitals that are depicted in Figures 4 and 5 and whose energies, as provided by DFT/PBE calculations, are reported in Table 8. As discussed above, in **2a<sub>unsym</sub>** and **2b<sub>unsym</sub>** these frontier QROs essentially correspond to the d orbitals of Cr1 (Figure 4). Notice that their energy ordering for  $\alpha$  spin components is consistent with the square-pyramidal coordination geometry of Cr1, namely:

$$\varepsilon^{\alpha}(\text{d}_{xy}^{\text{Cr1}})^1 < \varepsilon^{\alpha}(\text{d}_{xz}^{\text{Cr1}})^1 = \varepsilon^{\alpha}(\text{d}_{yz}^{\text{Cr1}})^1 < \varepsilon^{\alpha}(\text{d}_{z^2}^{\text{Cr1}})^1 < \varepsilon^{\alpha}(\text{d}_{x^2-y^2}^{\text{Cr1}})^0 \quad (5)$$

where we have included information on electronic occupation as superscript. The contribution of quintet and triplet excited states to the axial zfs parameter (*D*) of the ground *S* = 2 state is then described in terms of single-particle  $\alpha \rightarrow \alpha$  (SOMO  $\rightarrow$  VIRTUAL) and  $\alpha \rightarrow \beta$  (SOMO  $\rightarrow$  SOMO) spin excitations, respectively (details are available in the Supporting Information). The values of *D* <sub>$\alpha \rightarrow \alpha$</sub> , *D* <sub>$\alpha \rightarrow \beta$</sub>  and *D* = *D* <sub>$\alpha \rightarrow \alpha$</sub>  + *D* <sub>$\alpha \rightarrow \beta$</sub>  obtained by setting the 3d spin-orbit coupling constant ( $\zeta_{3d}$ ) for Cr<sup>2+</sup> to the free-ion value are presented in Table 9. Such results are only semi-quantitative since several other excitations involving doubly-occupied and empty orbitals, as well as spin-spin contributions, were not included.<sup>88</sup>

**Table 8.** Calculated frontier d QRO eigenvalues (eV) for **1a<sub>sym</sub>**, **1b<sub>sym</sub>**, **2a<sub>unsym</sub>** and **2b<sub>unsym</sub>**.

	<b>1a<sub>sym</sub></b>		<b>1b<sub>sym</sub></b>	
	$\epsilon^\alpha$	$\epsilon^\beta$	$\epsilon^\alpha$	$\epsilon^\beta$
d <sub>1</sub> <sup>*</sup> (SOMO)	-4.694	-1.769	-4.915	-2.032
d <sub>2</sub> <sup>*</sup> (SOMO)	-4.422	-1.460	-4.605	-1.759
d <sub>3</sub> <sup>*</sup> (SOMO)	-4.422	-1.460	-4.605	-1.759
d <sub>4</sub> <sup>*</sup> (SOMO)	-3.429	-1.294	-3.501	-1.334
d <sub>5</sub> <sup>*</sup> (VIRTUAL)	-1.628	– <sup>a</sup>	-1.918	– <sup>a</sup>
	<b>2a<sub>unsym</sub></b>		<b>2b<sub>unsym</sub></b>	
	$\epsilon^\alpha$	$\epsilon^\beta$	$\epsilon^\alpha$	$\epsilon^\beta$
d <sub>xy</sub> <sup>Cr1</sup> (SOMO)	-4.705	-1.828	-4.846	-2.031
d <sub>xz</sub> <sup>Cr1</sup> (SOMO)	-4.495	-1.334	-4.595	-1.587
d <sub>yz</sub> <sup>Cr1</sup> (SOMO)	-4.494	-1.333	-4.594	-1.586
d <sub>z<sup>2</sup></sub> <sup>Cr1</sup> (SOMO)	-3.649	-1.618	-3.662	-1.651
d <sub>x<sup>2</sup>-y<sup>2</sup></sub> <sup>Cr1</sup> (VIRTUAL)	-1.583	– <sup>a</sup>	-2.019	– <sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Not reported since not needed in calculations.

Table 9 clearly shows that spin-forbidden ( $\alpha \rightarrow \beta$ ) LF excitations can by no means be neglected. From the relevant equations reported in the Supporting Information, it is seen that the  $D_{\alpha \rightarrow \alpha}$  contribution becomes more negative as  $d_{xy}$  and  $d_{x^2-y^2}$  get closer in energy. Considering  $\sigma$  interactions as dominant, this condition is fulfilled on lowering the  $\sigma$  LF contributions of the equatorial ligands. On the other hand,  $D_{\alpha \rightarrow \beta}$  contribution becomes more negative if the  $\alpha$  ( $\beta$ ) component of  $d_{z^2}$  and the  $\beta$  ( $\alpha$ ) component of  $d_{xz}/d_{yz}$  pair get closer in energy, i.e. on increasing the axial LF strength given by the terminal ligand and by the Cr2-Cr3-Cr4-Cr5 fragment. All these considerations are in agreement with the results obtained in AOM section and with previous work on other isoelectronic systems.<sup>75–79,89</sup>

In the case of **1a<sub>sym</sub>** and **1b<sub>sym</sub>**, frontier QROs are no longer single-center d orbitals, although they exhibit a similar energy pattern to pentachromium(II) strings (Table 8). With the wave functions given by Eqs. (4a-e) and the corresponding spin-resolved energies (Table 8), Neese’s approach yields the  $D_{\alpha \rightarrow \alpha}$ ,  $D_{\alpha \rightarrow \beta}$  and overall  $D$  parameters also presented in Table 9 (details are available in the Supporting Information).



**Table 9.** Calculated values of  $D_{\alpha\rightarrow\alpha}$ ,  $D_{\alpha\rightarrow\beta}$  and overall  $D$  (in  $\text{cm}^{-1}$ ) with  $\zeta_{3d} = 230 \text{ cm}^{-1}$ .

	<b>1a<sub>sym</sub></b>	<b>1b<sub>sym</sub></b>	<b>2a<sub>unsym</sub></b>	<b>2b<sub>unsym</sub></b>
$D_{\alpha\rightarrow\alpha}$	-0.46	-0.47	-0.38	-0.42
$D_{\alpha\rightarrow\beta}$	-1.18	-1.25	-1.30	-1.36
$D$	-1.64	-1.72	-1.68	-1.79

These data give numerical support to the similar anisotropy displayed by tri- and pentachromium(II) derivatives, primarily because frontier MOs with dominant d character follow a similar energy pattern. The ultimate reason is that frontier orbitals in trichromium(II) chains are non-bonding linear combinations of d orbitals of Cr1 and Cr3 and their energy thus largely reflects the d-level pattern of terminal ions. Furthermore our treatment also accounts for the slightly enhanced anisotropy of isothiocyanato vs. chlorido derivatives.

## CONCLUSION

The present work is the first systematic attempt to extend magnetic studies on odd-membered ( $n = 3, 5$ ) chromium(II)-based EMACs beyond  $S$ -value determination. As a first important result, we found that both tri- and pentachromium(II) strings have a negative zfs parameter  $D$  ( $|D| = 1.5\text{-}1.8 \text{ cm}^{-1}$ ), weak rhombicity ( $|E/D| \leq 0.02$ ) and display slow relaxation of their magnetization. These properties are only marginally affected by the axial ligands ( $X = \text{Cl}^-, \text{SCN}^-$ ), with the isothiocyanato derivatives slightly more anisotropic than the chlorido complexes. Such similarities in electronic structure over remarkably small energy scales are surprising in light of the different structural preferences as chain length is varied. Confirming previous experimental and theoretical investigations,<sup>39,46-51</sup> our DFT calculations showed that the preferred structure is symmetric ( $D_4$ ) for  $n = 3$  but unsymmetric ( $C_4$ ) for  $n = 5$ . The subsequent step of our work then consisted in investigating the impact of a symmetric vs. unsymmetric structure on the distribution of unpaired electrons and on the zfs of the  $S = 2$  state. DFT studies on pentachromium(II) complexes clearly showed the occurrence of a structurally-isolated terminal  $\text{Cr}^{2+}$  ion (Cr1), whose d orbitals provide the leading contribution to the four SOMOs. CASSCF-level calculations on terminal  $\text{Cr}_1\text{N}_4\text{Cl}$  and  $\text{Cr}_1\text{N}_4\text{N}(\text{CS})$

chromophores in fact yielded  $D$  and  $E$  parameters in remarkable agreement with experiment and with elementary LF arguments based on the spectrochemical series.

Such a structural confinement is absent in the symmetric structure of trichromium(II) strings, whose terminal metals are equivalent by symmetry. However, a major simplification arises from the fact that, to a good approximation, the four SOMOs are non-bonding linear combination of d orbitals centered on terminal metals (Cr1 and Cr3), with no contribution from Cr2. For this reason, their energies closely mirror the pattern of LF-split d orbitals of terminal metals, whose coordination environment is only weakly affected by chain length. To achieve an estimate of the zfs in both symmetric and unsymmetric structures at the same level of theory, we followed the quasi-restricted DFT approach devised by Neese et al..<sup>85,87,88</sup> We found that, in spite of the very different extent of unpaired electron delocalization, in both tri- and pentachromium(II) species the  $D$  parameter is expected to be negative and of similar magnitude, with SCN<sup>-</sup> axial ligands triggering a slightly higher anisotropy.

In conclusion, the similar  $S$  value, magnetic anisotropy and spin dynamics of tri- and pentachromium(II) EMACs implies by no means a similar pattern of Cr-Cr distances, i.e. the occurrence of a structurally confined Cr<sup>2+</sup> ion plus one or two diamagnetic [Cr<sub>2</sub>] pairs. In both cases, the d orbitals of terminal ions are invariably the most important contributors to the four SOMOs, at the same time explaining why axial ligands have a small but detectable impact on magnetic anisotropy. However, it should be mentioned that the LF strengths of the axial ligands studied here are quite similar, and therefore the influence of the axial ligand may be more clearly revealed by comparing complexes with strong (e.g. CN<sup>-</sup>) and weak (e.g. BF<sub>4</sub><sup>-</sup>) donors. A series of Cr<sub>3</sub> compounds with a variety of axial ligands is currently under examination to confirm the degree of their influence on the magnitude of the relaxation barrier.

## ASSOCIATED CONTENT

**Supporting Information.** The Supporting Information is available free of charge on the ACS Publications website at DOI: XXX.

Additional synthetic procedures, crystallographic and structural tables, details of dc/ac magnetic analyses, EPR diagrams and spectra, additional DFT figures, details of BS-DFT calculation of exchange-coupling constants, description of the quasi-restricted DFT approach to the  $D$  value in tri- and pentachromium(II) EMACs (.pdf), DFT (.docx) and CASSCF (.txt) input files.

**Accession codes.** CCDC 1953230 contains the supplementary crystallographic data for this paper. These data can be obtained free of charge via [www.ccdc.cam.ac.uk/data\\_request/cif](http://www.ccdc.cam.ac.uk/data_request/cif), or by emailing [data\\_request@ccdc.cam.ac.uk](mailto:data_request@ccdc.cam.ac.uk), or by contacting The Cambridge Crystallographic Data Centre, 12 Union Road, Cambridge CB2 1EZ, UK; fax: +44 1223 336033.

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### **Author contributions**

The manuscript was written through contributions of all authors. All authors have given approval to the final version of the manuscript.

### **Notes**

The authors declare no competing financial interest.

While our manuscript was close to submission, an *ab initio* investigation of **1a** was published by Sakaki et al..<sup>90</sup> They report a similar composition of SOMOs, although their study is unrelated to magnetic anisotropy.

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## SYNOPSIS

A **drastically greater extent of unpaired-electron delocalization** occurs in symmetric trichromium vs. unsymmetric pentachromium(II) molecular wires, but magnetic anisotropy and slow magnetic relaxation are nevertheless only marginally affected. Key is the similar pattern of molecular orbitals coupled by spin-orbit interaction.

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