DFT, Monte Carlo and molecular dynamics simulations for the prediction of corrosion inhibition efficiency of novel pyrazolylnucleosides on Cu(111) surface in acidic media

Rachid Oukhrib¹, Youness Abdellaoui², Avni Berisha³, Hicham Abou Oualid⁴,⁵, Jeton Haliili⁶, Kaltrina Jusufi³, Mustapha Ait El Had⁶,⁷, Hassan Bourzi¹, Souad El Issami¹, Fatmah Ali Asmary⁸, Virinder S. Parmar⁹ & Christophe Len¹⁰

Five novel pyrazolylnucleosides have been evaluated theoretically for their corrosion inhibition efficiency on the Cu(111) surface in acidic media. DFT calculations were carried out to exhibit the intrinsic properties such as lowest unoccupied (ELUMO) and highest occupied (EHOMO) molecular orbital energies, as well as energy gap (∆E), chemical hardness (η), chemical softness (σ), electronegativity (χ), electrophilicity (ω) and nucleophilicity (ε). The theoretical FT-IR spectra were recorded to indicate the presence of the specific bonds in the studied molecules. The surface interactions between the inhibitor molecules and the metal surface were investigated using molecular dynamics simulations and Monte Carlo (MC) simulations. As a result, we have found that the inhibitor pyrazolylnucleosides 5a–e have strong interactions with Cu(111) surface, and therefore have excellent predictive inhibition power against copper corrosion.

Copper corrosion is a serious challenge faced in the industry because of the broad applications of this metal and its alloys. Despite the corrosion resistance property of this metal in the atmosphere and some chemical environments, the pitting corrosion may occur on copper surface in the presence of oxygen and some aggressive anions, especially in acidic media¹. However, this kind of corrosion is challenging and difficult to predict, detect, and protect against². Therefore, and regarding the widespread use of copper in different industries, copper’s corrosion protection issue has attracted much attention resulting in many conducted and ongoing studies³. The employment of corrosion inhibitors is the most efficient and less expensive approach to control the copper corrosion in acidic media. Chromates, molybdates, and tetraborates were the choice corrosion inhibitors for copper, but unfortunately, their use was accompanied by some challenges represented in toxicity, low efficiency and instability of the protective layer⁴. In contrast, organic adsorption inhibitors such as imidazolines and their derivatives were more efficient in protecting copper because of their high corrosion inhibition. The presence of

¹Apply Chemistry-Physic Team, Faculty of Sciences, Ibn Zohr University, Agadir, Morocco. ²Faculty of Engineering, Environmental Engineering Department, Autonomous University of Yucatan, Mérida, Mexico. ³Department of Chemistry, Faculty of Natural and Mathematics Science, University of Prishtina, 10000 Pristina, Kosovo. ⁴Laboratory of Biotechnology, Materials and Environment, Faculty of Sciences, Ibn Zohr University, Agadir, Morocco. ⁵Green Energy Park, IRESEN, Ben Guerir, Morocco. ⁶Laboratoire de Chimie Biomoléculaire, substances naturelles et Réactivité (URAC 16), Faculté des Sciences Semlalia, Université Cadi Ayyad, B.P. 2390, Marrakech, Morocco. ⁷Laboratoire de Chimie Bioorganique et Macromoléculaire, Faculty of Sciences and Technics Marrakech (FSTMG), Université Cadi Ayyad, Marrakech, Morocco. ⁸Chemistry Department, College of Science, King Saud University, Riyadh 11451, Saudi Arabia. ⁹Department of Chemistry and Environmental Science, Medgar Evers College, The City University of New York, 1638 Bedford Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11225, USA. ¹⁰Chimie ParisTech, PSL Research University, CNRS, Institute of Chemistry for Life and Health Sciences, 11 rue Pierre et Marie Curie, 75005 Paris, France. *email: christophe.len@chimieparistech.psl.eu
heteroatoms like N, O, P, and S in these corrosion inhibitors' molecular structure serves as adsorption centers and facilitates adsorption on the copper surface. In recent years, some nucleoside-based molecules have been reported as a new class of corrosion inhibitors in acidic media. Nucleosides are the building blocks of nucleic acids consisting of nitrogen-rich heterocyclic linked sugar moieties via a N-glycosidic linkage. These platform molecules are of great importance to all living beings and determine the inherited features of every Life as they are considered subunits of nucleic acids. However, most of the nucleoside analogs exhibit antiviral activities and are also shown to possess fungicidal and antitumor applications. The art of modifications of nucleosides has gained great attention as a promising area of developing antiviral agents such as anti-HIV drugs, e.g. the heterocyclic ring replacement of the nucleoside sugar moieties has lead to a potent anti-HIV drug, 3TC.

The combination of pyrazole and nucleoside moieties has been extensively explored to develop bioactive compounds against many diseases, but their side-effects still pose major problems in developing them for clinical uses. Indeed, the employment of pyrazolynucleosides compounds in several applications has gained success by dint of their chemical and structural property. The novel pyrazolynucleosides is pinning as an axis of further study and application in a relevant field to the metallic surface treatment to protect them against corrosion in a corrosive medium. The inhibition efficiency of pyrazolynucleosides is undoubtedly due to the adsorption of their active sites, which are nitrogen and oxygen atoms. Otherwise, Several studies have shown that the novel pyrazolynucleosides were devoid of any significant toxicity properties.

In this work, five novel synthetic pyrazolynucleosides, which showed potential anticancer activities have been theoretically studied for the first time as suitable effective corrosion inhibitors on copper surface Cu(111) in acidic medium. In this regard, various theoretical methods such as density functional theory (DFT) calculations, dynamic molecular simulations (MD) and Monte Carlo (MC) techniques were carried out to study the intrinsic properties of the studied inhibitors to support this theoretical study.

Computational details
DFT calculations. DFT calculations were conducted using the Dmol3 software (Biovia). Geometry optimization was completed via the use of the double numerical polarization basis set (DND) in combination with the M-11L functional within GGA. Water was used as a solvent in DFT calculations in the Conductor-like Screening Model (COSMO).

Monte Carlo simulations and molecular dynamics. For the Monte Carlo (MC) and Molecular dynamic (MD) simulations, the interaction of the copper surface and the inhibitor molecules in the simulated corrosion media was performed via the Cu(111) model (under Periodic Boundary Condition) employing the size of 30.672 Å × 30.672 Å × 8.477 Å with the inclusion of a 30 Å vacuum layer at C axis including 600 water molecules/one inhibitor molecule/15 hydronium + 15 chloride ions. MC calculations were realized by applying five cycles (2000 steps in each cycle) of simulated annealing. The lowest potential energy configurations were sampled at the steps of low temperatures. MD was obtained using an NVT canonical ensemble at 298 K and simulation time of 300 ps (1 fs time step). Temperature control was achieved via the use of the Berendsen thermostat. A frequently employed COMPASSII force field was used for the simulations. For the computation of the Radial Distribution Function (RDF), the total trajectory was used.

Results and discussion
DFT results. The synthesis of the novel pyrazolynucleosides used in the present study has been reported earlier by our Groups. The inhibitory efficiency of the pyrazolynucleosides (Fig. 1) has been studied by finding out the local parameters and quantifying the global parameters such as chemical hardness (η), softness (γ), electronegativity (χ), electrophilicity (ω) and nucleophilicity (ε). The protection abilities of these inhibitors have been evaluated based on the understanding of the distinctive and determining factors involved in their inhibitory capacities. The optimized structures of the pyrazolynucleosides are presented in Fig. 2. Figure S1 illustrates the labeled model. Using density functional theory (DFT) calculations, these geometric structures were established using the Dmol3 software (Biovia). Optimization of the structure is a specific preliminary procedure that allows for a complete study of the reactivity of the inhibitors to interpret their effectiveness. In our approach, the optimized structures of the pyrazolynucleosides were achieved by using the double numerical polarization basis set (DND) in combination with the M-11L functions within GGA.

Optimized structures were further subjected to the quantum chemical calculations in order to describe local properties such as the frontier molecular orbital (FMO) density distributions, i.e., the HOMO and the LUMO which, as presented in the discussion to follow, allowed us to determine the global parameters. These studies collectively helped us to obtain insight into the inhibition mechanisms of these pyrazolynucleosides towards the Cu(111) surface by examining the structure-reactivity correlation.

Figures 3 and 4 show, respectively, the density distributions in frontier molecular orbitals, i.e. the HOMO and the LUMO; both HOMOs and LUMOs distributions are marked by inequality in all of the molecules. These results indicate that the pyrazolynucleoside molecules possess active sites through which they can react with the metallic surface. This finding could be explained by the fact that HOMOs are often associated with the ability to give electrons by inhibitor molecules to a suitable acceptor such as surface atoms to be protected from corrosion, this could be explained later by the high values of HOMO energies which are indicative of the tendency of the molecule to donate an electron. Further, we have noticed that HOMOs and LUMOs distributions of these five pyrazolynucleosides were concentrated preferentially within the structure around nitrogen (N) atoms and with a similar degree also around the oxygen (O) atoms despite their presence in several sites. This finding indicates that the reactions of these molecules with the surface Cu(111) will presumably take place through the...
parts of the pyrazolylcucleoside structure containing nitrogen and oxygen atoms such as \([\text{N=N, C=N and C–N}]\) and \([\text{C–O, O}]\). These results have shed light on sites through which the inhibitors could interact with the studied surface\(^{53,54}\). Donor sites, as we reported previously, are the suitable sites for molecules preferentially bonded with positively polarized anodic reaction sites as with copper surface Cu(111) in acid media\(^{55–57}\), thereby reducing the migration of corrosive species onto the copper surface, which reflects a decreased rate of anodic copper dissolution reaction\(^{58}\). LUMO distribution depicts acceptor parts of the molecules\(^{59}\); this could explain the possibility of an interaction (adsorption) of the inhibitor molecules through its acceptor atoms on the metallic surface, often having a positive charge as mentioned previously\(^{55–57}\).

**Electrostatic potential maps (ESP).** By convention, the ESP map is related to nucleophilic and electrophilic activity sites in molecules; the red refers to the negative region while the green and blue ones refer to the positive region. As evidenced in Fig. 5, all of the red to yellow regions were distributed in negatively charged groups with heteroatoms, such as O, N atoms and around a few carbon atoms on their side or O-heterocyclic and N-heterocyclic rings\(^{60,61}\). The ESP maps reveal the reactive sites of inhibitors; in the case of pyrazolynucleosides, oxygen and nitrogen atoms are shown to be the main adsorption sites. Therefore, it makes reasonable sense to consider that the pyrazolynucleosides inhibitors contain several adsorption sites which are distinguished from each other predominantly by the N, O atoms.

**Mulliken charges.** Table 1 lists the charges of C, Br, N, O, F, Cl atoms of the five studied pyrazolynucleosides inhibitors. Many studies indicate a correlation between the corrosion inhibition efficiency of an inhibitor and its Mulliken charges\(^{48,60,62–64}\). It has been previously shown that atoms bearing most negative charges will share electrons more easily with the unoccupied orbital of the metal surface atoms with which they react\(^{49}\). Besides, such studies have indicated that the reactivity of these atom sites increases as the absolute value of charge density increases\(^{66–68}\). Consequently, the atoms that carry a pronounced negative charge in the pyrazolynucleosides 5a–e act probably as the active sites, through which these inhibitors adsorb onto the metallic surface Cu(111), the surface under studies in the present work. Indeed, the obtained results conclusively show that the negative charges concentrated on atoms like O, N, F, Br and Cl are the active sites in the five pyrazolynucleosides as highlighted in Fig. 5 showing the charge distribution over the entire structures of the inhibitors under study.

**Vibrational spectroscopy.** Figure 6 shows the vibrational spectra using an FT-IR spectrometer for the compounds 5a–e. As shown in Fig. 6, the appearance of the characteristic bands of the base molecules was observed\(^{69,70}\) which confirmed their structures.

**Monte Carlo simulations.** In the present study, the pyrazolynucleosides 5a–e are present in the protonated forms in the aqueous acidic media, the visual top and side surface configurations of the optimized inhibitors/Cu(111) are presented in Figs. 7 and 8, respectively. The closer positioning of the inhibitor molecules to the Cu(111) surface helps in the equilibrium adsorption configuration of the pyrazolynucleosides to help them act as the corrosion inhibitors on the Cu(111) surface. It is clear from the side view pictures in Fig. 8 that all the pyrazolynucleoside molecules are almost parallel to the Cu(111) surface, and all the five inhibitor molecules appear laying flat on the Cu(111) surface in the top view as seen in Fig. 7. Further, in the side view pictures shown in Fig. 8, the pyrazolynucleosides 5a, 5c and 5e look parallel to the Cu(111) surface and the pyrazolynucleosides 5b and 5d are seen as quasi-parallel to the metal surface. This may be due to the differences between the sizes and
the extents of their −I or +I effects of the five substituents (CH₃, OCH₃, F, Cl and Br)⁷¹–⁷⁴. These MC simulations, as seen in the later discussion are quite useful in understanding the detailed mechanism of adsorption behavior of these inhibitors on the Cu(111) surface.

In order to demonstrate and confirm the equilibration of the systems, the correlation between the stable mean values of temperature and energy fluctuation was studied⁴³. Figure 9 shows thermal fluctuations of the pyrazolylnucleosides 5a–e, according to simulation time.

Molecular dynamics (MD) calculations. To explain the interactions between the studied surface of copper and the active sites of the pyrazolylnucleosides 5a–e, we launched the MD simulations in a system containing 600 water molecules and one molecule of each of the five inhibitors on the Cu(111) surface⁴³,⁷⁵; the visual simulations showed the corresponding adsorption mechanism of the pyrazolylnucleoside derivatives on the copper surface to gain a deeper understanding of the interaction between each inhibitor and Cu(111) surface. The results presented in Figs. 10 and 11 show, respectively, the top and side views of the realistic simulations⁷⁶,⁷⁷ of the pyrazolylnucleosides 5a–e on the studied copper surface Cu(111) at equilibrium in the aqueous phase. All of the novel five inhibitors 5a–e adsorb tightly onto the copper surface with a parallel orientation, more particularly the inhibitor 5e, which appears close and parallel with the Cu(111) surface. It is entirely consistent with the previous results shown earlier by Monte Carlo simulations. This positioning is facilitated by the formation of bonds between the inhibitor and copper surface, formed through the sharing of p electrons from the active donor sites of the inhibitor pyrazolylnucleosides to the vacant orbitals of the positively charged copper surface⁷⁸.

Figure 2. Optimized structures of the pyrazolylnucleosides 5a–e.
The adsorption of the inhibitor by adopting parallel placement of the inhibitor molecule and the Cu(111) surface explains how an inhibitor can minimize the contact area between corrosive elements and surface of Cu(111) in a corrosive environment, in addition to the distinction between studied inhibitors according to the predictive efficacy. The different energies of the studied inhibitor molecules \(5a-e\) and Cu(111) substrate have been calculated and are summarized in the Tables S1, S2, S3, S4 and S5 (supporting informations). We have taken into account other corrosive species such as \(H_3O^+\), \(Cl^-\) and \(H_2O\) present in the environment in these calculations. The output data determined via this simulation method gives the total energy (symbolized as \(E_{tot}\)), which equals the sum of the internal and the adsorption energies of the inhibitor as an adsorbate on the metallic surface. The total energy can be envisaged to correlate the reactivity of the inhibitor and we noticed that the pyrazolylnucleosides \(5a-e\) are quite stable since their energies are small, not exceeding \(-7.21 \times 10^3\). The average of all the total energies calculated was found to be \(-7.23 \times 10^3\). Adsorption energy (\(E_{ads}\)) is the energy released when an inhibitor molecule (adsorbate) attaches to the metal surface Cu(111) (substrate), and includes the rigid adsorption energy and the deformation energy. The adsorption energy refers to the energy released during the adsorption of the inhibitor on the Cu(111) surface in its stable state (also called the geometric optimization step), and the deformation energy is that released when the adsorbed inhibitor is released from the Cu(111) surface. It can be seen from the

**Figure 3.** HOMO representations of the pyrazolylnucleosides \(5a-e\).

**Figure 4.** LUMO representations of the pyrazolylnucleosides \(5a-e\).
results tabulated in Tables S1, S2, S3, S4 and S5 that the pyrazolynucleosides 5a–e adsorb spontaneously on the Cu(111) surface as the values of the adsorption energies are negative. The results also show that despite the presence of the corrosive elements such as H₂O, H₃O⁺ and Cl⁻, the inhibitors 5a–e adsorb preferentially on the Cu(111) surface without significant competition because the adsorption of the pyrazolynucleosides requires less energy. The adsorption energy (Eₐd) of the pyrazolynucleoside 5e was −1.96 × 10⁴, while the average Eₐd values of the other four pyrazolynucleosides 5a–d were −1.93 × 10⁴. Also the desorption energy (dEₐd/dN) for the pyrazolynucleoside 5e was the lowest viz. −438.8210 as compared to those of −147.9912 for 5b, −146.7689 for 5a, −144.7019 for 5c and −137.7662 for 5d. This indicates that 5e requires slightly less energy for adhesion (adsorption) to the Cu(111) surface compared to the other inhibitors 5a–d, which require more energy (Eₐd) for adsorption. On the other hand, the pyrazolynucleoside 5e can be released from the Cu(111) surface requiring much less desorption energy (dEₐd/dN) as compared to the other four inhibitors 5a–d that need more desorption energy. From this study, an important result could be drawn viz. it is not possible to predict the inhibitory power of a molecule accurately from its adsorption energy alone; other elements also contribute in determining the effectiveness of an inhibitor, one of them being the desorption energy (dEₐd/dN). These results can help in picking efficient inhibitors against corrosion of any metallic surface in a corrosive environment combining the two factors viz. the adsorption energy and the desorption energy. Also, one can predict the inhibitory efficacy of the inhibitors as these studies help in classifying them according to their effectiveness against corrosion of Cu(111) surface; we conclude from these results that the effectiveness of the pyrazolynucleoside inhibitors under study follows the order: 5e > 5b > 5a > 5c > 5d.

Figure 5. ESP graphic maps of the pyrazolynucleosides 5a–e.
Mulliken atomic charges of the pyrazolynucleosides inhibitors in their protonated forms. Bold values indicate the negative charges of main atoms that belong to the active regions which assisting in the corrosion inhibition.

| Atoms | 5a | Atoms | 5b | Atoms | 5c | Atoms | 5d | Atoms | 5e |
|-------|----|-------|----|-------|----|-------|----|-------|----|
| N (1) | −0.240 | N (1) | −0.268 | N (1) | −0.234 | N (1) | −0.261 | N (1) | −0.234 |
| C (2) | 0.369 | C (2) | 0.383 | C (2) | 0.368 | C (2) | 0.383 | C (2) | 0.374 |
| C (3) | −0.478 | C (3) | −0.488 | C (3) | −0.473 | C (3) | −0.478 | C (3) | −0.492 |
| C (4) | 0.398 | C (4) | 0.407 | C (4) | 0.396 | C (4) | 0.413 | C (4) | 0.373 |
| N (5) | −0.356 | N (5) | −0.353 | N (5) | −0.356 | N (5) | −0.365 | N (5) | −0.346 |
| C (6) | −0.758 | C (6) | −0.761 | C (6) | −0.757 | C (6) | −0.770 | C (6) | −0.763 |
| C (7) | 0.491 | C (7) | 0.492 | C (7) | 0.488 | C (7) | 0.495 | C (7) | 0.453 |
| N (8) | −0.520 | N (8) | −0.519 | N (8) | −0.516 | N (8) | −0.530 | N (8) | −0.507 |
| C (9) | 0.080 | C (9) | 0.089 | C (9) | 0.072 | C (9) | 0.086 | C (9) | 0.074 |
| C (10) | −0.297 | C (10) | −0.298 | C (10) | −0.290 | C (10) | −0.298 | C (10) | −0.320 |
| C (11) | −0.288 | C (11) | −0.336 | C (11) | −0.333 | C (11) | −0.261 | C (11) | −0.263 |
| C (12) | 0.253 | C (12) | 0.613 | C (12) | 0.664 | C (12) | 0.138 | C (12) | 0.125 |
| C (13) | −0.284 | C (13) | −0.362 | C (13) | −0.339 | C (13) | −0.267 | C (13) | −0.266 |
| C (14) | −0.295 | C (14) | −0.302 | C (14) | −0.284 | C (14) | −0.289 | C (14) | −0.314 |
| C (15) | −0.807 | O (15) | −0.675 | F (15) | −0.499 | Cl (15) | −0.131 | Br (15) | −0.179 |
| C (16) | 0.305 | C (16) | 0.315 | C (16) | 0.297 | C (16) | 0.311 | C (16) | 0.277 |
| O (17) | −0.670 | O (17) | −0.675 | O (17) | −0.663 | O (17) | −0.672 | O (17) | −0.656 |
| C (18) | 0.124 | C (18) | 0.136 | C (18) | 0.116 | C (18) | 0.120 | C (18) | 0.095 |
| C (19) | 0.117 | C (19) | 0.099 | C (19) | 0.121 | C (19) | 0.110 | C (19) | 0.086 |
| C (20) | −0.559 | C (20) | −0.558 | C (20) | −0.556 | C (20) | −0.580 | C (20) | −0.629 |
| C (21) | −0.118 | C (21) | −0.114 | C (21) | −0.120 | C (21) | −0.132 | C (21) | −0.178 |
| O (22) | −0.845 | O (22) | −0.836 | O (22) | −0.845 | O (22) | −0.849 | O (22) | −0.850 |
| O (23) | −0.846 | O (23) | −0.842 | O (23) | −0.845 | O (23) | −0.852 | O (23) | −0.855 |
| H (24) | 0.223 | H (24) | 0.224 | H (24) | 0.225 | H (24) | 0.233 | H (24) | 0.257 |
| H (25) | 0.315 | H (25) | 0.316 | H (25) | 0.314 | H (25) | 0.323 | H (25) | 0.342 |
| H (26) | 0.314 | H (26) | 0.316 | H (26) | 0.314 | H (26) | 0.322 | H (26) | 0.342 |
| H (27) | 0.232 | H (27) | 0.234 | H (27) | 0.243 | H (27) | 0.250 | H (27) | 0.276 |
| H (28) | 0.226 | H (28) | 0.241 | H (28) | 0.258 | H (28) | 0.258 | H (28) | 0.283 |
| H (29) | 0.226 | H (29) | 0.251 | H (29) | 0.258 | H (29) | 0.256 | H (29) | 0.283 |
| H (30) | 0.224 | H (30) | 0.228 | H (30) | 0.237 | H (30) | 0.246 | H (30) | 0.274 |
| H (31) | 0.247 | H (31) | 0.228 | H (31) | 0.233 | H (31) | 0.236 | H (31) | 0.257 |
| H (32) | 0.247 | H (32) | 0.221 | H (32) | 0.223 | H (32) | 0.229 | H (32) | 0.250 |
| H (33) | 0.236 | H (33) | 0.226 | H (33) | 0.225 | H (33) | 0.232 | H (33) | 0.258 |
| H (34) | 0.230 | H (34) | 0.277 | H (34) | 0.276 | H (34) | 0.284 | H (34) | 0.303 |
| H (35) | 0.222 | H (35) | 0.269 | H (35) | 0.266 | H (35) | 0.274 | H (35) | 0.305 |
| H (36) | 0.225 | H (36) | 0.225 | H (36) | 0.228 | H (36) | 0.236 | H (36) | 0.257 |
| H (37) | 0.277 | H (37) | 0.215 | H (37) | 0.220 | H (37) | 0.226 | H (37) | 0.242 |
| H (38) | 0.267 | H (38) | 0.527 | H (38) | 0.535 | H (38) | 0.542 | H (38) | 0.547 |
| H (39) | 0.227 | H (39) | 0.528 | H (39) | 0.531 | H (39) | 0.534 | H (39) | 0.538 |
| H (40) | 0.220 | C (40) | −0.385 |
| H (41) | 0.534 | H (41) | 0.231 |
| H (42) | 0.531 | H (42) | 0.247 |
| H (43) | 0.223 |

Table 1. Mulliken atomic charges of the pyrazolynucleosides 5a–e inhibitors in their protonated forms. Bold values indicate the negative charges of main atoms that belong to the active regions which assisting in the corrosion inhibition.

To further confirm our results, we have performed the energy fluctuation curves as obtained from MD simulations; the equilibration of the system is confirmed by the stable mean values of energy fluctuations, as shown in Fig. 12.

The pair correlation function quantifies how other particles surround the particle of interest (or the targeted atom); based on this, we have used the radial distribution function (RDF) to estimate the length of the bond g(r)60–65. Knowing that the peak between 1 and 3.5 Å corresponds to chemisorption and that physisorption is
associated with peaks greater than 3.5 Å, we have carried out RDF calculations as shown in Fig. 13a,b, respectively, for the RDF O and RDF N. The optimal short distances between the probable active sites of the studied inhibitors 5a–e and the copper(111) surface atoms were: length of the bond of Cu–O (2.85 to 3.36 Å) and Cu–N (3.16 to 3.40 Å) which are less than 3.5 Å. The obtained RDF results show that the five pyrazolynucleoside inhibitors have a great capacity to adsorb on Cu(111) surface, and subsequently protect it from dissolution.

**Mechanism of adsorption and inhibition.** We have worked out a simple approach to explain the reaction of the inhibitor molecules 5a–e and the surface of copper, which is positively charged; interactions of organic inhibitors with metal surfaces involve donor–acceptor interactions. Figure 14 illustrates the adsorption mechanism of the organic corrosion inhibitors 5a–e on the copper metal surface in the acidic medium (1 M HCl). The metallic element Cu undergoes rapid oxidation due to the aggressive environment that makes the metal surface positively charged, which in turn favors the fixation of negatively charged counter chloride ions resulting in a negative metallic surface. As shown in Fig. 14, neutral nitrogen atoms of the five-membered pyrazole rings of the inhibitor molecules 5a–e get protonated in the acidic solution according to the following reaction:

\[
\text{[Inh]} + x\text{H}^+ \leftrightarrow \text{[Inhx]}^{x+}
\]

The protonated inhibitor molecules bind to the negatively charged metal surface through attractive electrostatic forces. In parallel, the lone pair electrons of the –CN moiety, the non-protonated pyrazole ring nitrogen atom and the oxygen atom of the sugar moiety of the inhibitor molecules, as well as the π-electrons of the benzene ring, could supply electrons to the vacant d-orbitals of the Cu atoms which leads to the phenomenon of chemisorption and retro-donation, respectively. However, this type of electron transfer causes electrons to accumulate in the d-orbitals of the metal atoms resulting in inter-electron repulsions. In order to avoid this repulsion phenomenon, a reverse transfer of electrons takes place from the d-orbitals of the surface metal atoms to the unoccupied molecular orbitals of the inhibitor molecules (retro-donation), thus reinforcing the adsorption of the inhibitor molecules on the metal surface.

Consequently, it can be expected that the adsorption of different inhibitor molecules on the metal surface of copper in an aggressive acidic solution (1 M HCl) happens by three types of phenomena: physisorption, chemisorption and retro-donation. Furthermore, theoretical studies presented here show a good correlation with electrochemical studies, which show that these inhibitors have high metal corrosion inhibition performance. The presence of electron-donating mesomeric substituents –OCH₃, Cl, Br and F further enhances the inhibitory efficacy of the pyrazolynucleosides 5a–e against copper corrosion.
Conclusion

The inhibitory effects of five novel pyrazolynucleosides have been evaluated theoretically against corrosion of copper surface in an acidic environment. Density functional theory (DFT) calculations were carried out to exhibit their intrinsic properties and reactivities. We used molecular dynamics simulation to describe the different probable interactions such as van der Waals and electrostatic interactions between the inhibitors 5a–e and Cu(111) surface. The following conclusions can be drawn from the results:

1. Molecular dynamic simulations show that the inhibitor pyrazolynucleosides 5a–e have strong interactions with Cu(111) surface.
2. Molecular quantum chemical calculations showed that the reactive sites in the inhibitors 5a–e are mainly the N-atoms and O-atoms.
3. Based on the analysis of the different outputs, we have suggested a probable reaction mechanism for the binding of the pyrazolynucleosides 5a–e at the Cu(111) surface.
4. A combination of adsorption energy ($E_{\text{ads}}$) and the desorption energy ($dE_{\text{ads}}/dN_i$) values helps in determining the effectiveness of the pyrazolynucleosides 5a–e against corrosion of Cu(111) surface.
5. Molecular dynamic simulations reveal that the effectiveness of these inhibitors follows the order: 5e > 5b > 5a > 5c > 5d.
Figure 8. Side view of adsorption configurations of 5a–e on Cu(111) in aqueous phase.
Figure 9. Energy fluctuation curves obtained from MC simulations for 5a–e.
Figure 10. Lowest energy MD top view of 5a–e onto Cu(111) surface.
Figure 11. Lowest energy MD side view of 5a–e onto Cu(111) surface.
Figure 12. Temperature equilibrium curves obtained from MD simulations for 5a–e.

Figure 13. RDF O (a) and RDF N (b) of the pyrazolynucleosides 5a–e on the Cu(111) surface in solution.
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Figure 14. Schematic illustration of the adsorption mechanism of organic corrosion inhibitors 5a–e on the surface of copper in a 1 M HCl solution.
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Author contributions
A.B., J.H. and K.J. did the theoretical calculations; H.A.O., Y.A., MAEH, F.A.A. and R.O. drafted the manuscript; H.B., S.E.I., F.A.A., V.S.P. and C.L. revised the manuscript; H.A.O., Y.A., R.O. and C.L. planned and designed the whole study and finalized the manuscript. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Competing interests
The authors declare no competing interests.

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Correspondence and requests for materials should be addressed to C.L.

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