Pd-Catalyzed Hydroamination of Alkoxyallenes with Azole Heterocycles: Examples and Mechanistic Proposal

Ivan Bernar,† Béla Fiser,§ Daniel Blanco-Ania,† Enrique Gómez-Bengoa,*‡ and Floris P. J. T. Rutjes*†

†Institute for Molecules and Materials, Radboud University, Heyendaalseweg 135, 6525 AJ Nijmegen, The Netherlands
‡Department of Organic Chemistry I, University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU), P.O. Box 1072, 20080 Donostia-San Sebastián, Spain
§Institute of Chemistry, Faculty of Materials Science and Engineering, University of Miskolc, H-3515, Egyetemváros-Miskolc, Hungary

Supporting Information

ABSTRACT: Palladium-catalyzed regio- and enantioselective addition of azole heterocycles to alkoxyallenes was developed (up to 92% yields and up to 94% ee). DFT calculations suggest a new Pd(0)-driven mechanistic pathway proceeding through protonation of the Pd-coordinated allene (4-PdL₂), which develops a strongly nucleophilic character at the central C atom.

The palladium-catalyzed addition of nitrogen nucleophiles to alkoxyallenes is a straightforward conversion to form the corresponding allylic N,O-acetals under mildly basic conditions.1 These reactive structures have been used as key intermediates in the synthesis of biologically active heterocycles and natural products.2 Examples from our group include the stereoselective synthesis of the natural product L-baikiain2b and a formal total synthesis of the alkaloid quinolizidine 233A.2c,3 To follow up on these results, we envisioned that also aromatic nitrogen nucleophiles, so-called azole heterocycles, would be of particular interest as reactants in such hydroaminations. Thus, we explored the potential of catalytic and enantioselective reactions at the azole nitrogen to gain access to a broad range of chiral, heteroaromatic allylic N,O-acetals 3. Additionally, while palladium hydride species have been invoked as reactive intermediates in most of the hydroamination studies,4,5 our current computational investigations argue against such intermediates. We present herewith DFT calculations that suggest an alternative mechanistic pathway that proceeds via coordination of the allene to Pd(0), and protonation with imidazole of the resulting 4-PdL₂ species at the central carbon atom (TS-1).

Table 1. Reaction Optimization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>entry</th>
<th>base</th>
<th>catalyst</th>
<th>yield (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>DBU</td>
<td>Pd(OAc)₂/dppp</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>DBU</td>
<td>Pd₃(dba)₃/dppp</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>DBU</td>
<td>Pd(PPh₃)₃</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>DBU</td>
<td>Pd₃(dba)₃/dppp</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>DBU</td>
<td>Pd₃(dba)₃/dppp</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>DBU</td>
<td>Pd₃(dba)₃/dppp</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Conditions: Pd catalyst (5.0 mol %), dppp (5.0 mol %), 1a (0.3 mmol), 2a (0.36 mmol), THF (3.0 mL), 60 °C, 12 h. †Isolated yield. ‡23 °C.

obtained by changing catalyst, temperature, and solvent (entries 2–5). Unexpectedly, in the absence of additional base and under the optimal reaction conditions (2.5 mol % of Pd₃dba₃, 5.0 mol % of dppp in THF) the reaction went to completion in 4 h at 60 °C, yielding the desired N,O-acetal 3a in 93% yield (entry 6).

Along with these results, different heterocyclic systems containing the azole framework were subjected to the reaction conditions described for 1a and 2a. Gratifyingly, the first attempt in the presence of a catalytic amount of Pd(OAc)₂/dppp (1.3-bis(diphenylphosphino)propane) in refluxing THF provided the desired product 3a in 82% yield as a single regioisomer (entry 1). Similar results were

Received: June 15, 2017
Published: August 8, 2017
optimized reaction conditions (Scheme 1A). Generally, the anticipated N,O-acetals 3a–w were obtained in modest to excellent yields (54–92%). In the case of asymmetrically substituted imidazoles, mixtures of the 4- and 5-substituted isomers 3e–h were obtained. Thus, 4-nitroimidazole and imidazole-4-carbaldehyde were converted into C-4 allylic N,O-acetals 3e and 3f in good yields with nearly complete regioselectivity. In contrast, 4-methylimidazole and 4-iodoimidazole showed almost no regioselectivity, yielding a close to 1:1 mixture of the 4- and 5-substituted isomers 3g and 3h.

Remarkably, in the case of pyrrole, only degradation of allene 1a was observed. Changing the conditions (solvent, temperature, Pd catalysts, addition of base) did not lead to product 3i either. In contrast, 4-methylimidazole and 4-iodoimidazole showed almost no regioselectivity, yielding a close to 1:1 mixture of the 4- and 5-substituted isomers 3g and 3h.

In analogy to this work, Rhee et al. recently reported several successful examples of Pd-catalyzed asymmetric hydroaminations, which opened up a route toward enantioselective allylic N,O-acetal formation. Modifying their procedure and performing the reaction in the presence of Pd2(dba)3 (2.5 mol%) and (R,R)-DACH-naphthyl Trost ligand L1 (5 mol%), we were pleased to observe that a number of alkoxyallene analogues reacted well with imidazole giving rise to products (S)-3s–w and (S)-3a, not only in good yields but in most cases also with high enantioselectivities (up to 94% ee).

To indicate the broader scope and reveal the absolute configuration of the obtained products, we performed the reaction with 1,3-dimethylxantine theophylline and allene 1a, and the crystal structure of the major enantiomer of product 3q (74%, 92% ee) was elucidated. The absolute configuration was assigned to be S in all cases based on the X-ray data of 3q and...
the CD profiles of the other products (see the SI), which is in correspondence with the expected stereochemistry.

The mechanism of the Pd-catalyzed additions of pronucleophiles with relatively acidic protons to allenes has been thoroughly investigated by Trost. Experimental studies have shown that this process is initiated by oxidative addition of palladium into the acidic C−H bond to form a cationic Pd−H species \((7, \text{Scheme 2})\). This intermediate can readily react with

\[ \text{Scheme 2. Classical Mechanism of the Hydroamination}^{\text{a}} \]

\[
PdL_2 + H-X \rightarrow X^- + H-PdL_2 \rightarrow \text{1a} \rightarrow \text{8} \]

\[ \text{imidazole, 22.5} \]

\[ \text{TFA, -4.8} \]

\[ \text{“Free energies (298 K) with respect to 6 are shown in kcal/mol.”} \]

the allene, thereby generating a π-allylpalladium species (8). Addition of the anion of the pronucleophile to this intermediate through trajectories \(a\) or \(b\) then forms the products with regeneration of the Pd(0) catalyst.

Since no studies have been reported on the protonation of low-valent palladium with weak acids (e.g., imidazole), we turned to DFT calculations to shed light on a plausible mechanism for our alkoxyallene/imidazole reaction and considered initially a pathway similar to that outlined in Scheme 2. Indeed, our preliminary calculations showed that 8 \((X = \text{imidazolide}, \text{L}_2 = 1,3\text{-bis(dimethylphosphino) propane, dmpp})\) is a reasonable intermediate for the reaction. Its computed free energy value was 5.6 kcal/mol lower than the sum of the initial substrates \((6 + \text{imidazole} + \text{allene 1a, Scheme 2})\), and its reaction with the imidazolide nucleophile preferentially occurs through the \(a\) trajectory (8.0 kcal/mol lower than \(b\)) to form the \(N,O\)-acetal product, in agreement with the experimental findings.

However, some critical inconsistencies were evidenced around the participation of intermediate 7 in the mechanism (Scheme 2) since its existence was incompatible with the following data: (a) A determining preference of 18.9 kcal/mol for the coordination of Pd(0) to allene 1a over imidazole (2a) was found \((10a \text{ vs } 9, \text{Figure 1})\), severely compromising any further participation of palladium species 9 and TS-3 in the mechanism of the reaction. (b) The formation of \(H-Pd^+ X^-\) species of type 7 has been exclusively described for strong \(H-X\) acids, and the hydride has not been observed when weaker acids were used. In agreement with these experimental facts, the computed equilibrium between Pd(0) and trifluoroacetic acid is shifted toward the formation of cationic \(H-Pd^+\) species \(7\) by 4.8 kcal/mol (Scheme 2), while using imidazole as a proton source, the hydride is disfavored by 22.5 kcal/mol. (c) The combination of factors \(a\) and \(b\) affords an unrealistic energy of 41.1 kcal/mol for hydride \(7\) over \(10a\), and even the formation of other less unstable \(Pd-H\) species (e.g., \(12\), see SI) is unreachable by any means (Figure 1). We can safely state that in these conditions, \(H-Pd^+\) species would never form. Therefore, the intriguing findings that intermediates 10a and 8 participate in the mechanism but are at the same time not connected through the cationic \(H-Pd^+\) species 7 led us to search for a pathway to connect both intermediates. Gratifyingly, after some computational effort, a new transition state \((\text{TS-1})\) was located for the direct protonation of the Pd-coordinated allene with imidazole with a moderate activation barrier of 19.7 kcal/mol (Figure 1). The structure is highly interesting and original and implies that the allene, after coordination to Pd(0) in \(10a\), becomes sufficiently basic at the central C atom to deprotonate imidazole.

Indeed, a very high-in-energy local minimum structure \((11, 19.1 \text{ kcal/mol higher than } 10a)\) was located during the intrinsic reaction coordinate (IRC) of the transition state TS-1, corresponding to a bidentate coordination mode of allene to palladium with high nucleophilic carbene character. The carbene-like species 11 is so close in energy \((\Delta AG^\pm = 0.6 \text{ kcal/mol})\)
mol) to the transition state that it could not be considered a stable reaction intermediate, but it is still very informative, revealing that during the protonation trajectory from 10a to TS-1, the allene bends and develops a significant negative charge at the central C atom. Finally, the attack of the imidazole to 8 was found to occur through pathway a, as in Scheme 2 (TS-2a, Figure 1), with an activation free energy of 11.3 kcal/mol.

In conclusion, we have developed highly effective Pd-catalyzed protocols for the addition of a wide scope of azole heterocycles to alkoxyallenes providing a unique way to synthesize aromatic allylic N,O-acetals in high yields (up to 95%) and enantiomeric excesses (up to 94%). A nonconventional Pd(0)-driven mechanistic pathway was proposed based on the DFT calculations of the studied process. This should be considered as an alternative pathway for nonacidic nucleophiles, where highly favorable coordination of allene to the palladium complex through cationic Pd−H species. Further studies on trapping the reaction intermediates and understanding the mechanism of this reaction, as well as the application of this methodology in target-oriented synthesis, are currently in progress.

**ASSOCIATED CONTENT**

Supporting Information

The Supporting Information is available free of charge on the ACS Publications website at DOI: 10.1021/acs.or-glett.7b01826.

Experimental procedures, spectroscopic characterizations, crystallographic analyses (CIF), and computational data (PDF).

General methods, complex formation, and Cartesian coordinates (PDF).

X-ray data for compound (S)-3q (CIF).

**AUTHOR INFORMATION**

Corresponding Authors

*E-mail: enrique.gomez@ehu.es (computational part).
*E-mail: floris.rutjes@ru.nl (experimental part).

Notes

The authors declare no competing financial interest.

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

Financial support for this research was provided by the FP7-Marie Curie Actions of the European Commission via the ITN ECHONET (MCITN-2012-316379). We also acknowledge technical and human support provided by IZOSGI SGiker of UPV-EHU. Prof. Dr. B. de Bruin and Dr. J. C. Slootweg (University of Amsterdam) are kindly acknowledged for useful suggestions.

**REFERENCES**


(6) (3,3-Bis(benzyloxy)prop-1-ene was formed as the major product. This side product is presumably formed after partial degradation of benzyloxyallene 1a followed by addition of released BnOH to 1a. For similar results see ref. 1b.

(7) M06/6-311+G**(SDD) level of theory was used in all cases, and for verification purposes, other theoretical levels were applied when necessary.

(8) Species 7 and 10a are the most stable structures among a series of isomeric Pd(0) complexes with imidazole and allene. The rest of the structures can be found in the Supporting Information.


(10) Other different Pd(II) hydride species (e.g., imidazolide-Pd−H) were also considered, and can be found in the Supporting Information. None of them is operative.

(11) Different computational levels show consistent activation energy values for TS-1: M06/6-311+G**(SDD): 19.7 kcal/mol; M06/defTZVPP: 19.0 kcal/mol; B3LYP-D3/6-31G**(LANL2DZ): 17.8 kcal/mol. CPCMC-McCN solvent model was used in all cases.

(12) For comparative Fukui nucleophilicity indexes and HOMO energies of 10a and 11, see the Supporting Information.

(13) The exact nature of structure 11, which could be a local minimum computational artifact along the reaction trajectory, does not compromise the low activation energy from 10a to TS-1. At some point during the formation of TS-1, the allene−Pd system should reorganize as in 11.