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Hydrated [3+2] Cyclotelomerization of Butafulvenes to Create Multiple Contiguous Fully Substituted Carbon Centers

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Abstract: The construction of multiple continuous fully substituted carbon centers, which serve as unique structural motif in natural products, is a challenging topic in organic synthesis. Herein, we report a hydrated [3+2] cyclotelomerization of butafulvenes to create contiguous fully substituted carbon backbone. In the presence of scandium triflate, all-carbon skeleton with spiro fused tricyclic ring can be constructed in high diastereoselectivity by utilizing butafulvene as the synthon. Mechanistic studies suggest that this atomeconomic reaction probably proceeds through a synergistic process containing butafulvenes dimerization and nucleophilic attack by water. In addition, the tricyclic product can undergo a series of synthetic derivatizations, which highlights the potential applications of this strategy. The recyclability of Sc(OTf)₃ has also been demonstrated to show its robust performance in this hydrated cyclotelomerization.

Introduction

Fully substituted carbon, possessing *sp*³-rich chemical space, is a predominant structural feature of natural products and drugs, which accounts for one of the most synthetically challenging blocks due to its conformational rigidity and bulky three-dimensional environment.^[1] The synthetic difficulty increases exponentially when continuous fully substituted carbon centers moieties are present and even embedded in polyfused/bridged ring systems.^[2] Using traditional synthetic strategy, the construction of uninterrupted multiple fully substituted carbon core frameworks required well-designed routes but consumed a lot of time and materials to accomplish (Figure 1a).^[3]

During the past decade, owing to the significant progress in synthetic methodologies, several strategies for the construction of vicinal fully substituted carbon centers have been documented.^[4] The traditional approach to obtain multiple contiguous fully substituted carbon centers (three and more) generally relies on stepwise introduction of fully substituted carbon centers onto pre-prepared substrate containing fully substituted carbon through multistep synthesis process.^[5] To date, there have been rare reports on the one-pot synthesis of multiple contiguous fully substituted carbon frameworks, and reported methods primarily focused on light-induced cycloadditions (Figure 1b). For example, in 2018 and 2020 respectively, Bach and Dell'Amico groups achieved the synthesis of three contiguous fully substituted carbon centers polyfused rings products via intermolecular [2+2] dearomative cycloadditions.^[6] Subsequently, You and Xu groups developed intramolecular [4+2]/[2+2] dearomative cycloaddition to access three and four contiguous fully substituted carbon centers using pre-designed substrates.^[7] Therefore, the development of a new approach to create contiguous multiple fully substituted carbon center frameworks in one step is still highly desirable.

Owing to their varied structural diversity and conformational constraints, five-membered carbocycles containing fully substituted carbon center are prevalent and play significant roles in natural compounds and drugs.^[8] Hence, their synthesis is always an important topic in organic synthesis. A commonly employed strategy is to effectuate [3 +2] cycloaddition reactions via the alignment of polarities between 1,3-dipoles and dipolarophiles. Common 1,3-dipoles have been classified into the following categories (i) the zwitterionic allyl-palladium intermediates,^[9] (ii) the phosphine-allenoate zwitterionic intermediates,^[10] and (iii) zwitterionic intermediates for ring-opening the of cyclopropanes.^[11] Butafulvene is a constitutional isomer of benzene, featuring a triple conjugated system that providing numerous potential reaction sites. Collaborating with Ma group, our group have reported an efficient synthesis of butafulvenes from readily available materials under Pdcatalysis.^[12] Herein, we employed butafulvene as a synthon to create a polycyclic scaffold featuring multiple continuous fully substituted carbon centers via a hydrated [3+2] cyclotelomerization reaction, thus achieving a transformation from 2D to 3D molecular structures.

Results and Discussion

Initially, unsymmetric butafulvene (1a) was chosen as the model substrate to optimize the reaction condition (Ta-

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Figure 1. Hydrated [3+2] cyclotelomerization of butafulvenes.

ble 1). When the reaction was performed in MeCN at room temperature (rt) for 12 h with $In(OTf)_3$ as a promoter, hydrated telomer 2a was obtained in 48% yield, together with trace amount of cyclobutanol 3a/4a (Entry 1). The structure of 2a was confirmed by single-crystal X-ray crystallography (CCDC: 2282886).^[13] The further investigation on the Lewis acids (LA) indicated that Sc(OTf)₃ was the best promoter (Entries 2-5). No better result was observed from the evaluation of other solvents (Entries 6-8). When the loading of $Sc(OTf)_3$ was increased to 1.0 eq., the yield of the hydrated telomer 2a was greatly improved to 86 % (Entries 9–11). While adding additional 1.0 eq. H_2O to the reaction system, the yield of 2a was decreased to 56% accompanied by some side product 3a (Entry 12). To our delight, the use of naphthalene additive could significantly enhance the solubility of **1a** in acetonitrile (Entry 13), which shortened the reaction time to 6 h and further increased the yield of 2a to 98% (isolated yield 89%). Without the presence of naphthalene, the solubility of 1a

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decreased and only gave desired product 2a in 50% yield (Entry 14). The use of other aromatic additives such as toluene, benzene and chlorobenzene gave lower yields (see the Supporting Information, Table S2 for details).

With the optimized conditions in hand, we then evaluated the substrate scope for this scandium-induced hydrated [3+2] cyclotelomerization of substituted butafulvenes (Figure 2). Unsymmetric butafulvenes 1 bearing methyl group at the *para* and *meta* positions of phenyl motif, afforded the products **2b–2c** in moderate yields. Due to the steric cumbrance, the substrate with *ortho*-methyl substitution (**2d**) was delivered only in 25 % yield. Replacing methyl with other alkyl groups, such as ethyl (**2e**) and *tert*-butyl (**2f**), the substituted butafulvenes were amenable under the standard condition, giving target products in 67 % and 39 % yields, respectively. The reaction of substrates with halogen substituents all proceeded smoothly to afford the desired products in 55–83 % yields (**2g–2j**). The presence of strong electron-donating group (OMe) still gave the product **2k** in

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Table 1: Optimization of Reaction Conditions.

	H_2O LA, Solvent, rt, time				ОН	ОН	
	1a		2a		3a	4a	
Entry	Lewis acid	Solvent ^a	Time	2a (%)	3a (%)	4a (%)	
1	In(OTf) ₃ (0.20 eq.)	MeCN	12 h	48	< 5	< 5	
2	Sc(OTf)₃ (0.20 eq.)	MeCN	12 h	64	< 5	< 5	
3	AlCl ₃ (0.20 eq.)	MeCN	12 h	< 5	< 5	< 5	
4	BF ₃ · Et ₂ O (0.20 eq.)	MeCN	12 h	nd	5	< 5.	
5	Zn(OTf) ₂ (0.20 eq.)	MeCN	12 h	nd	nd	nd	
6	Sc(OTf)₃ (0.20 eq.)	DCM	12 h	30	< 5	< 5	
7	Sc(OTf) ₃ (0.20 eq.)	MeOH	12 h	nd	nd	nd	
8 ^c	Sc(OTf)₃ (0.20 eq.)	THF	12 h	16	< 5	< 5	
9	Sc(OTf)₃ (0.50 eq.)	MeCN	12 h	68	< 5	< 5	
10	Sc(OTf) ₃ (1.00 eq.)	MeCN	12 h	86	< 5	< 5	
11	Sc(OTf)₃ (1.25 eq.)	MeCN	12 h	80	< 5	< 5	
12 ^d	Sc(OTf)₃ (1.00 eq.)	MeCN	12 h	56	8	< 5	
13 ^e	Sc(OTf)₃ (1.00 eq.)	MeCN	6 h	98 (89) ^b	< 5	< 5	
14	Sc(OTf) ₃ (1.00 eq.)	MeCN	6 h	50	< 5	< 5	

Standard condition: **1a** (0.10 mmol), Sc(OTf)₃ (0.10 mmol), naphthalene (0.05 mmol), MeCN (1.0 mL), rt, 6 h. Yields were determined by ¹H NMR spectroscopy using 1,3,5-trimethoxybenzene as the internal standard. ^{*b*}Water content of MeCN or THF = 0.16 mmol/mL or 0.027 mmol/mL. ^{*b*}Isolated yield. ^{*c*}Water content of THF = 0.027 mmol/mL, additional H₂O (0.10 mmol) was added. ^{*d*}Additional H₂O (0.10 mmol) was added. ^{*c*}Naphthalene = 0.05 mmol. nd = no detection.

42 % yield. However, substrates with electron-withdrawing groups, such as Ac and CO_2Me , delivered the products **21** and **2m** respectively in decreased yields. When introducing a phenyl at the *para* position of the benzene ring, a highly aryl substituted spiro product **2n** could be obtained in 53 % yield. The structure of **2h** was further confirmed by single-crystal X-ray crystallography.

Subsequently, substituent effect on the upper aromatic ring of unsymmetric butafulvenes 5 was investigated (Figure 3). The presence of alkyl groups, such as methyl, ethyl, tert-butyl, at the para and meta positions were all tolerated to give the products in decent yields (6a-6d). Substrates possessing halides were also compatible under current standard reaction conditions (6e-6f). The presence of strong electron-withdrawing group delivered product 6g in a low yield. However, highly aryl substituted spiro product 6h was obtained in a higher yield. The presence of 1-naphthyl group led to the formation of a pair of diastereoisomers (6i). Naturally abundant 1,3-benzodioxole motif was compatible to give the target product 6j in 58% yield. Probably owing to the weakened coordination ability heteroatom with Sc(OTf)₃, substrates with the thienyl group underwent the current reaction inefficiently (6k-6l). When a phenyl group was introduced onto the exocyclic double bond of butafulvenes 5, it reacted at the cyclic olefinic bond to give a different regioisomer 6m. Replacing methyl with bulky npropyl group (6n) led to a decrease in reactivity. The reaction with alkyl-substituted butafulvene 50 failed to yield the corresponding product. The structures of 6f and 6m were further confirmed by single-crystal X-ray crystallography.

Corresponding control experiments were carried out to shed light on mechanistic insights (Figure 4). A mixture of butafulvene 1g, Sc(OTf)₃ (1.0 eq.) and naphthalene (0.5 eq.) in MeCN were stirred for 6 h, and the desired product 2g was obtained in 83% yield (Figure 4a, Entry 1). No conversion was found in the absence of Sc(OTf)₃, indicating its indispensable role (Figure 4a, Entry 2). The product 2g was formed in only a slightly decreased yield (80%) without naphthalene. It is attributed to the influence of the para-F substituent on increasing the solubility of 1g in MeCN during the reaction process (Figure 4a, Entry 3). When adding additional H₂O (0.1 mmol), a significant decrease on the yield of 2g was observed. Meanwhile, it increased the formation of side product 3g (Figure 4a, Entry 4). As expected, no reaction occurred by adding 50 mg 4 Å molecular sieve (Figure 4a, Entry 5). Then, an isotopic labeling experiment was conducted to determine the origin of oxygen atom on **2g**. When additional $H_2^{18}O$ (98 atom%) ¹⁸O) was added to the reaction system, 56 % yield of **2g** with 42 % ¹⁸O-labeled incorporation was obtained (Figure 4a, Entry 6 and see the Supporting Information, Figure S1 and S2 for details).

Kinetic studies were conducted to further figure out the reaction process. With the increase of the reaction time, the yield of **2g** increased slowly and the trace product **3g** was detected during this period (Figure 4b-I). As shown in Figure 4b-II, the product yields of **1g** and **2g** exhibited a gradual increase when **3g** was consumed, ultimately culminating around 4.5 h. Control experiments have indicated **3a** could be transformed back to butafulvene **1a** under acidic condition (see the Supporting Information, Table S4 for

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Figure 2. Substrate scope for unsymmetric butafulvenes 1. Conditions: 1 (0.20 mmol), Sc(OTf)₃ (0.20 mmol), naphthalene (0.10 mmol), MeCN (2.0 mL), air, rt, 6 h. Water content of MeCN = 0.16 mmol/mL.

details). These results not only indicate alcohol 3 is not a necessary intermediate in the reaction, but also suggest that a potential reversible pathway between starting material 1 and side product 3.

Based on the mechanistic investigations and previous works,^[14] a proposed mechanism is shown in Figure 4c. Initially, butafulvene **1a** coordinates with $Sc(OTf)_3$ to form intermediate **A**. A subsequent electrophilic addition of intermediate **A** and another butafulvene **1a** releases trifluoromethanesulfonic anion and generates the complex **B**. Then, the complex **B** undergoes a ring-closure process through intramolecular electrophilic addition to furnish carbocation **C**. Next, the trifluoromethanesulfonic anion coordinates with the scandium in carbocation **C** to produce the zwitterionic intermediate **D**. Meanwhile, H₂O coordinates the scandium atom in the zwitterionic intermediate **D** to afford the hydration Sc complex **E**. A final protonolysis of the hydration Sc complex **E** delivers the target product **2a**. The diastereoselectivity is probably regulated by steric repulsion of phenyl group and close packing of ion pairs based on density functional theory (DFT) calculations (see the Supporting Information, Figure S3 for details). It is notable that intermediate **A** could also be hydrated to afford side product cyclobutanol **3a**. However, a reversal dehydration of cyclobutanol **3a** will regenerate **1a** to reenter the desired main reaction. Due to potential steric hindrance of phenyl group on exocyclic double bond of **5m**, another molecular **5m** will attack the formed **5m**-Sc complex in an 1,4-conjugated fashion to afford a different regioisomer **6m**.

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Figure 3. Substrate scope for unsymmetric butafulvenes 5. Conditions: 5 (0.20 mmol), Sc(OTf)₃ (0.20 mmol), naphthalene (0.10 mmol), MeCN (2.0 mL), air, rt, 6 h. Water content of MeCN = 0.16 mmol/mL.

To further demonstrate the synthetic utility of this cyclotelomerization process, scale-up experiment and additional transformations were carried out. As shown in Figure 5a, the target product 2a was successfully isolated in 1.05 g with 78% yield under the standard condition. A methyl protection on hydroxyl group of 2a occurred

smoothly to afford a sterically-congested product **7** in 61 % yield.^[15] In the presence of NaN₃, the nucleophilic substitution of **2a** efficiently delivered the azide product **8** in 41 % yield.^[16] On the other hand, the epoxidation reaction of exocyclic double bond also proceeded efficiently with *m*-CPBA to give epoxide **9** in 65 % yield.^[17] In addition, the



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	Sc(OTf) ₃ (1.0 eq.) naphthalene (0.5 eq.) MeCN (0.16 mmol/mL H ₂ O), air, rt, 6 h	P P P	F	C OH
1g (0.1	mmol)	2g	3g	4g
Entry	deviation from standard condition	yield of 2g	yield of 3g	yield of 4g
1	none	83%	<5%	<5%
2	no Sc(OTf) ₃	nd	nd	nd
3	no naphthalene	80%	<5%	<5%
4	with extra H_2O (0.10 mmol)	32%	12%	<5%
			nd	nd
5	4 Å MS (50 mg)	nd	na	nu





Figure 4. Mechanistic studies and proposed mechanism.

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Figure 5. Scale up preparation and synthetic transformations. Conditions: (a) **2a** (0.10 mmol), NaH (0.3 mmol), CH₃I (0.3 mmol), DMF (1.0 mL), rt, N₂. (b) **2a** (0.10 mmol), NaN₃ (0.22 mmol), TFA (0.84 mmol), DCM (1.0 mL), 0°C, N₂, 3 h. (c) **2a** (0.10 mmol), *m*-CPBA (0.11 mmol), NaHCO₃ (0.11 mmol), DCM/H₂O (1.5 mL, 1/1), 0°C, N₂, 16 h. (d) **2a** (0.10 mmol), CH₂I₂ (0.40 mmol), Et₂Zn (0.40 mmol), DCM (1.0 mL), rt, N₂, 6 h. Yield of **10** was determined by ¹H NMR.

Simmons–Smith reaction of 2a furnished dearomative cyclopropanation ring expansion product 10 with 64 % yield. This unexpected site selectivity control of the dearomative cyclopropanation may be attributed to the coordination between the hydroxyl group and the metal. Moreover, product 2a underwent a selective C–O coupling/ring-opening reaction with organic bromide under Pd catalysis (Figure 5b).^[18] When R was Bn or 2-propenyl, C–O coupling products **11a** and **11b** were delivered in 28% and 59% yields, respectively. Additionally, **2a** could selectively give ring-opening

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product **12a** in 75 % yield through β -carbon elimination with phenyl bromide. It probably resulted from the stronger migration ability of phenyl group. Therefore, a plausible mechanism was proposed to interpret this chemoselectivity switch (Figure 5c). First, Pd(OAc)₂ is reduced to Pd⁰ **H** by ligand,^[19] which then undergoes oxidative addition with bromide to afford the Pd^{II} species **I**. A subsequent ligand exchange of Pd^{II} species **I** with **2a** generates the oxypalladium complex **J**. When **R** is an alkyl or alkenyl group, the oxypalladium complex **J** experiences direct reductive elimination, resulting in the formation of C–O coupling product **11**. Bearing phenyl instead of alkyl or alkenyl group, β -carbon elimination of the oxypalladium complex **J** proceeds to produce the intermediate **K**, which gives the ringopening product **12** and regenerates catalyst Pd⁰ **H**.

It is known that $Sc(OTf)_3$ exhibits higher solubility in water than organic solvent. Therefore, it could be recovered with nearly quantitative yield from the aqueous layer after the completion of the reaction under mild conditions (Figure 5d).^[20] With the recovered $Sc(OTf)_3$, we have demonstrated its performance with up to 5 recycles for this hydrated cyclotelomerization. And no significant loss of the reactivity was observed during recyclability trial.

Conclusion

In summary, we have developed a hydrated [3+2] cyclotelomerization strategy for one-pot construction of multiple continuous fully substituted carbon centers. This protocol employed butafulvenes as synthon and Sc(OTf)₃ as recyclable promoter to deliver tricyclic skeleton compounds. Mechanistic studies showed that the hydration product of monobutafulvene was not the intermediate during the reaction process and the hydroxyl group in the product was derived from water. The synthetic utility of the cyclotelomerization products is demonstrated in a scale-up experiment and a series of transformations. The recyclability of Sc(OTf)₃ has also been demonstrated to show its robust performance in this hydrated cyclotelomerization.

Supporting Information

The authors have cited additional references within the Supporting Information^[21–28] and crystallographic data are available in the Supporting Information and listed within reference [13].

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available in the supplementary material of this article.

Keywords: Butafulvene \cdot Cyclotelomerization \cdot Fully Substituted Carbon \cdot Hydration \cdot Spiro Compound

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