

Hydrazyl-nitrones, novel hybrid molecules in free radical research

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Abstract

This work describes the synthesis and characterisation of some novel hybrid molecules which contains in the same molecule a free radical moiety of hydrazyl type and a spin-trap moiety of nitrone type. The new compounds synthesized have multiple and easy to follow spectroscopic properties, making them useful as sensors or probes in radical chemistry. The new class of hydrazyl-nitronone molecules can act, in a single step process, as both generator and spin-trap of short-lived radicals. The hybrid molecules can be also involved in acid–base or redox processes, and the chemical processes can be easily monitored by visible or electron paramagnetic resonance spectroscopy. The excellent generator and trap properties recommend them as valuable sensors and probes in radical chemistry.

Keywords: *Nitronone, spin-trap, radical, hydrazyl, EPR*

Introduction

Four decades ago the technique of spin-trapping emerged in free radical chemistry. The pioneering work of Jansen [1], Blackburn [2], Lagercrantz [3] and Perkin [4] has been developed such that accurate identification of short-lived radicals from different chemical processes can now be made, and this technique has also been used extensively *in vivo* [5,6]. There are mainly two types of compounds used in EPR spin-trapping, namely nitroso-compounds and nitrones. Interestingly, while nitroso-compounds show considerable toxicity in living systems, nitrones do not, and have been shown to be valuable medicines in many diseases caused or induced by radicals, prolonging the life span of subject [6].

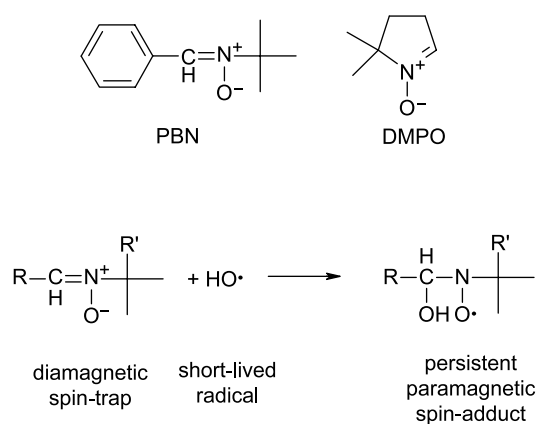
It is well known that reactive oxygen species (ROS) are implicated in a large number of diseases arising from oxidative damage in cells [7]. Consequently, the use of nitrones in conjunction with EPR spectroscopy plays an important role in understanding biological reactions in complex systems [8].

The most widely known nitronone is *t*-butyl-phenyl-nitronone (PBN, Scheme 1) synthesized in 1957 [9]. This was used for first time to trap radicals in chemical systems in 1969 [2], and in biological systems in 1975 [10]. Since 1985, there have been an increasing number of reports regarding its protective biological activity [11–14], and in the last decade PBN has been extensively evaluated as a therapeutic probe in ageing processes [14,15].

There is a considerable contemporary interest [11,16,17] in the preparation and properties of novel nitrones. For *in vivo* use, nitrones require a fast rate of addition of the transient radical, as well as rapid uptake and long lifetimes at a high concentration in biological fluids. A study of the tissue distribution of radio-labeled PBN has demonstrated its rapid absorbance [18]. The excretion and metabolism is rather slow, with 30% of the initial dose remaining in animals after 3 days [18].

Besides nitrones, other free radical scavenging agents like mono- or poly-nitroxide radicals have been proposed as potential candidates for stroke therapy, because of the hypothesised role of free

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Scheme 1. Chemical structure of PBN and DMPO spin-traps (top); trapping of hydroxyl radical by a nitron spin-trap (bottom).

radicals in the progression of strokes and ischemia induced neurodegeneration [19].

Hydrazyl radicals (Figure 1) have also been used as scavengers of short-lived radical species [20–22]. The stable hydrazyl free radical 2,2-diphenyl-1-picrylhydrazyl (DPPH) has been used as an indicator for measuring antioxidant capacity in many systems, including human plasma [23]. Although DPPH has been known since 1922 [24], it is still widely used as an EPR standard and as colorimetric reagent for redox processes. Because DPPH can be kept indefinitely with no decomposition and because it neither dimerizes nor reacts with oxygen, it has proved to be useful in a variety of scenarios, such as polymerization inhibition or radical chemistry, the determination of antioxidant properties of amines, phenols or natural compounds (vitamins, plant extracts, medicinal drugs) and for inhibiting hemolytic reactions [25–27]. DPPH is also well known as a good hydrogen abstractor yielding DPPH-H as byproduct. This is a redox type process and was first mentioned by Goldschmidt and Renn in DPPH oxidation of hydroquinone to benzoquinone [24]. More generally, the process was proved to be a homolytic cleavage by the DPPH of a H–X bond (X=C, O, N, S, Cl, Br) present in hydrocarbons, alcohols, phenols, thiols, amines, enols, hydroxylamines, *N*-alkoxynitroanilines, hydrazids [28–32].

Some of our previous work has shown that hydrazyl radicals can act as one-electron oxidants [32–34],

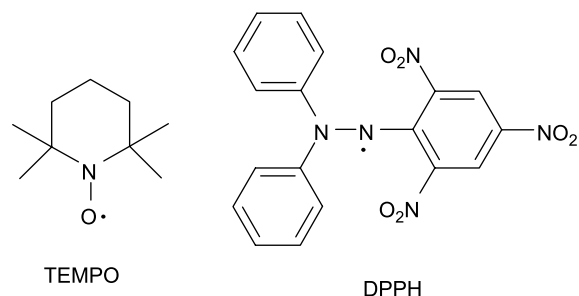


Figure 1. TEMPO (nitroxide) and DPPH (hydrazyl) stable free radicals.

leading to the formation of short-lived radicals, which can be subsequently trapped by spin-traps such as PBN or DMPO (Scheme 1). In order to follow these processes, the reaction mixture should contain both the free stable radical and the spin-trap. It was also observed *in vivo* that, under specific conditions, DPPH can sensitise or protect against ionisation radiation [35]. Spin-traps have also been developed which can target cell membranes [36].

In this paper, we describe the development of new compounds that contain in the same molecule a stable free radical moiety of the hydrazyl type, and a spin-trap moiety of the nitron type. These hybrid molecules may find direct applications as sensors or probes in EPR spectroscopy, as well as in chemical or biological systems.

Materials and methods

Solvents and starting materials were purchased from Lancaster or Aldrich. The UV–VIS spectra were recorded at ambient temperature in dichloromethane (DCM) using a Hitachi U-3000 spectrophotometer. EPR spectra were normally recorded at room temperature (293 K) in deoxygenated DCM using both JEOL-RE1X (typical settings: microwave frequency 9.45 GHz, power 1 mW, sweep time 60 s, time constant 0.1 s, modulation frequency 100 kHz, gain 200, modulation width 0.1 mT), and Bruker (typical settings: microwave frequency 9.49 GHz, power 1 mW, modulation frequency 100 kHz, modulation amplitude 0.1 mT, receiver gain 5×10^4 , conversion time 80 ms, time constant 160 ms) ESP 300 spectrometers. Comparing with DPPH standard, *g* values were determined ($g = 2.0037$). TLC was performed on silica gel plates (Merck). Synthesis of **1** is described elsewhere [32]. Compounds **2** and **3** were obtained from **1** by nitration with nitrous acid in a biphasic system [31–33], and were separated by column chromatography (silica gel/DCM). **2**: ESI-MS (M^+) 422; **3**: ESI-MS (M^+) 467. The purity of all new compounds was checked by analytical TLC (single spot).

General procedure for synthesis of 4–6

To a solution of aldehydes **1–3** (500 mg) in 250 ml DCM was added 250 mg *t*-butyl-hydroxylamine hydrochloride in 50 ml pyridine and the reaction mixture left for few days at room temperature. The mixture was then washed with saturated aqueous solution of sodium hydrogencarbonate and the separated organic layer was dried and removed under vacuum. The resulting crude product was chromatographed on a silica gel column, with DCM as eluent. **4**: ESI-MS: 449 (M^+). λ_{\max} (DCM) = 324 nm (yellow color); in a presence of a base $\lambda_{\max} = 655$ nm (green color). $^1\text{H-NMR}$ (chloroform-*d*, δ ppm): 1.58 (s, 9H, methyl), 7.10–7.13 (m, 4H, phenyl), 7.26–7.31 (m, 5H, phenyl), 7.52 (s, 1H, CH=N), 9.03 (s, 2H, CH-*meta*), 9.72 (s, 1H, NH).

TLC (silica gel/DCM) $R_f = 0.2$. **5**: ESI-MS 493 (M^+). λ_{max} (DCM) = 330 nm (yellow color); in a presence of a base $\lambda_{max} = 495$ nm (red–purple color). 1H -NMR (chloroform- d , δ ppm): 1.49 (s, 9H, methyl), 7.10–7.21 (m, 4H, phenyl), 7.28–7.42 (m, 6H, phenyl), 7.58 (s, 1H, CH=N), 9.07 (s, 2H, CH-*meta*), 9.79 (s, 1H, NH). TLC (silica gel/DCM) $R_f = 0.18$. **6**: ESI-MS 538 (M^+). λ_{max} (DCM) = 332 nm (yellow color); in a presence of a base $\lambda_{max} = 492$ nm (red color). 1H -NMR (chloroform- d , δ ppm): 1.56 (s, 9H, methyl), 7.10–7.13 (m, 4H, phenyl), 7.26–7.34 (m, 6H, phenyl), 7.58 (s, 1H, CH=N), 9.05 (s, 2H, CH-*meta*), 10.01 (s, 1H, NH). TLC (silica gel/DCM) $R_f = 0.15$.

General procedure for synthesis of 7–9

Oxidation of **4–6** with excess lead dioxide or potassium permanganate in DCM, for about 3 h, in the presence of anhydrous sodium sulfate, afforded almost quantitatively the hydrazyl-nitrones **7–9**. No further purification is necessary; for good elemental analysis an overnight drying *in vacuo* at 40°C is requested. **7**: λ_{max} (DCM) = 524 nm (violet color). Nitrogen elemental analysis: requested 15.62%, found 15.12%. $a_{N1} = 0.95$ mT, $a_{N2} = 0.7$ mT, $g = 2.0031$. TLC (silica gel/DCM) $R_f = 0.24$. **8**: λ_{max} (DCM) = 517 nm (violet color). Nitrogen elemental analysis: requested 17.03%, found 16.62%. $a_{N1} = 1.03$ mT, $a_{N2} = 0.58$ mT, $g = 2.0034$. TLC (silica gel/DCM) $R_f = 0.29$. **9**: λ_{max} (DCM) = 508 nm (violet color). Nitrogen elemental analysis: requested 18.21%, found 15.77%. $a_{N1} = 1.05$ mT, $a_{N2} = 0.58$ mT, $g = 2.0037$. TLC (silica gel/DCM) $R_f = 0.26$.

General procedure for spin-trapping experiments involving nitrones 4–6

A solution of **4–6** (5 ml, 10^{-3} M) in DCM was stirred with an aqueous solution of ferrous sulphate (5 ml, 10^{-3} M), to which a small amount (~50 mg) of hydrogen peroxide (30%) was added. After few seconds the separated organic phase was then investigated by EPR (after drying on anhydrous sodium sulphate).

General procedure for experiments involving hydrazyl-nitrones 7–9

To a solution of **7–9** (10^{-3} M) in DCM was added diphenylphosphine (10^{-2} M) and the mixture directly investigated by EPR.

Results and discussion

Synthetic strategy

In order to obtain a hybrid hydrazyl-nitronone molecule, our starting point was the known compound **1**, synthesised as described previously [32]. By nitration with sodium nitrite and hydrochloric acid in a biphasic system, compounds **2** and **3** were obtained in good yields and isolated by preparative chromatography.

Compounds **1–3** react with *N*-*t*-butyl-hydroxylamine at room temperature, resulting in good yields of the nitrones **4–6**. Oxidation with lead dioxide or potassium permanganate affords almost quantitatively the final hybrid hydrazyl-nitronone products **7–9** (Figure 2).

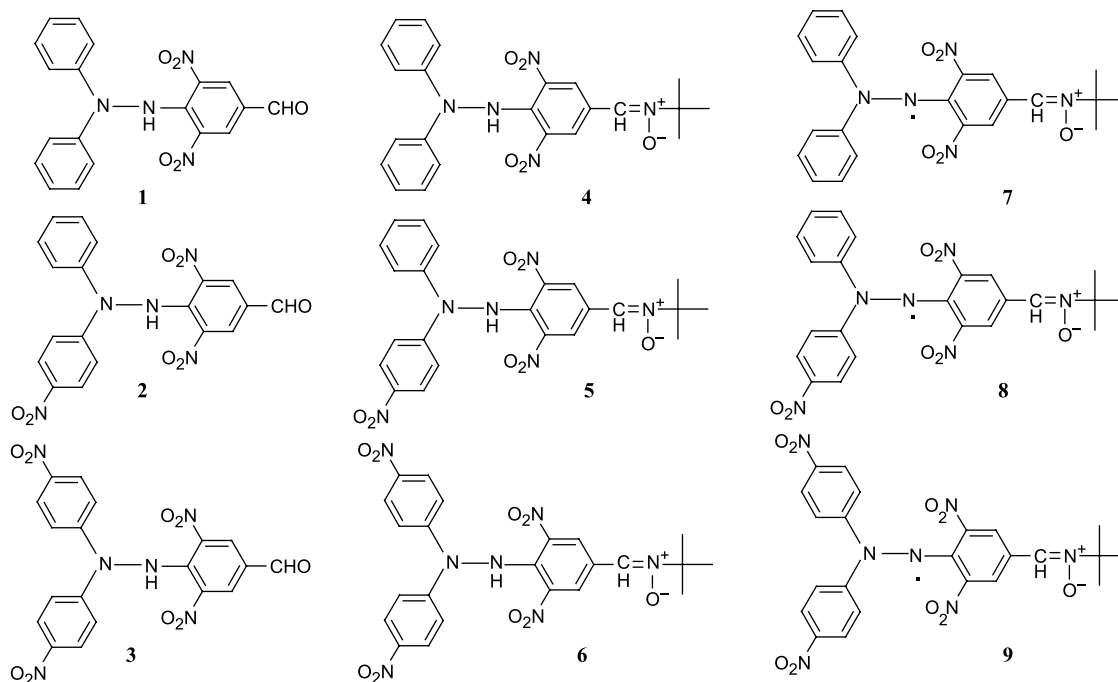
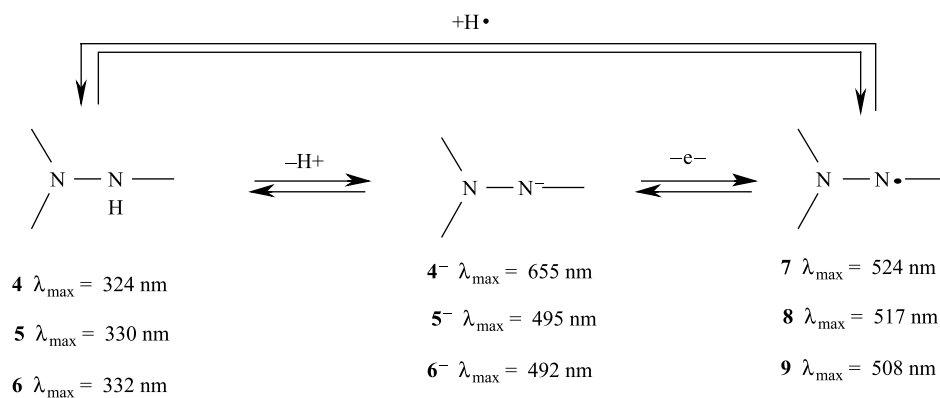


Figure 2. Chemical structure of compounds 1–9.



Scheme 2. Acid–base and redox interconversion of compounds 4–9: nitrones 4–6 are yellow in solution, and by oxidation become violet hydrazyls 7–9 (in basic media nitrones 4–6 are green or red, as anions 4⁻–6⁻).

Characteristic visible absorption spectra and interconversion

Like other hydrazines of similar type, nitrones 4–6 show acid–basic and redox properties [32]. The hybrid nitrone–radicals 7–9 are very stable in solution, as well as in the solid state, without evidence of decomposition at room temperature for months. In basic media the N–H group of the compounds 4–6 deprotonated, giving the corresponding anions; these processes are accompanied by color change from yellow to green or red (Scheme 1). Addition of an acid converts the anions back into the parent hydrazines (Scheme 1). On oxidation, the yellow hydrazine–nitrone precursors 4–6 are converted into the corresponding hydrazyl–nitrones 7–9 with a characteristic purple–violet color. These radical–nitrones 7–9 can be easily reduced by ascorbic acid, hydrazine or hydroxylamine to the parent nitrones 4–6. All these acid–base and redox processes are reversible and are accompanied by color changes, as summarised in Scheme 2.

EPR spectra

Spectra of hydrazyl–nitrones 7–9. Oxidation of 4–6 by solid potassium permanganate or lead dioxide in DCM gave the corresponding persistent radicals 7–9 (color changes from yellow to violet, Scheme 2), with EPR spectra as shown in Figure 3 (EPR hyperfine coupling constants values for 7 $a_{\text{N1}} = 0.95 \text{ mT}$, and

$a_{\text{N2}} = 0.7 \text{ mT}$, $g = 2.0031$; for 8 $a_{\text{N1}} = 1.03 \text{ mT}$ and $a_{\text{N2}} = 0.58 \text{ mT}$, $g = 2.0034$; for 9 $a_{\text{N1}} = 1.05 \text{ mT}$, and $a_{\text{N2}} = 0.58 \text{ mT}$, $g = 2.0037$). As expected, the EPR spectra changes from 7 to 8 with the addition of a supplementary nitro–group (as shown by hyperfine coupling constants and g values), as happens with other congener hydrazyl radicals [31–33]; interestingly on going from 8 to 9 there is not a big change in the EPR spectra; probably the second nitro–group is not able to induce as marked a perturbation in spin–densities as the first one, so the a_{N} values do not change by much, though the g value shifts.

Nitrones 4–6 as classical spin–traps (trapping of hydroxyl radical). Active oxygen species such as hydrogen peroxide, hydroxyl radical and superoxide anion radical, are readily generated in cells by metabolic processes such as respiration, ischemia/reperfusion, and oxidation of fatty acids, and they are highly toxic to cells by damaging components such as DNA, lipids and enzymes [13,17,19]. Cells can be reversibly injured, or irreversibly damaged when the concentration of active oxygen species exceeds the cellular antioxidant capacity. In this study we chose hydroxyl radicals as a representative damaging agent for spin–trapping studies. The new nitrones 4–6 can be used instead of classical PBN, in any spin–trapping processes in which a nitrone is required. For example, hydroxyl radicals generated *via* a Fenton reaction

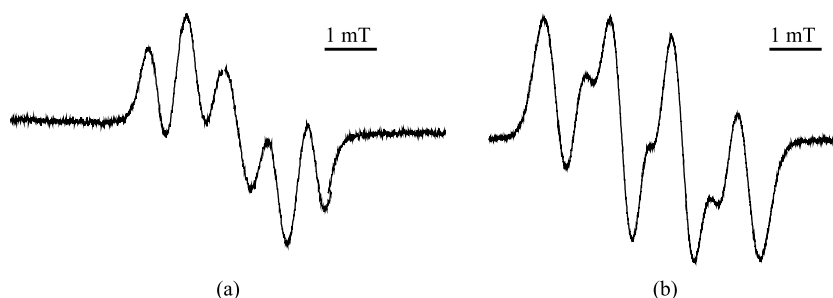


Figure 3. EPR spectra of compound 7 (a) and 8 (b); compound 9 has almost an identical spectra with 8 (not shown).

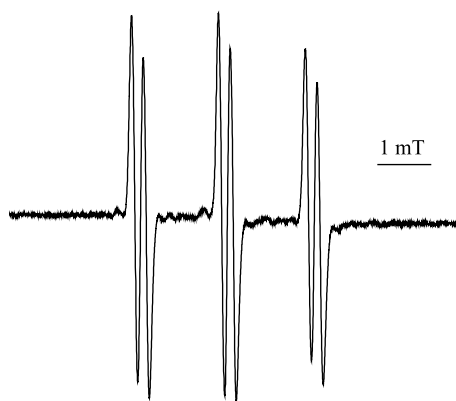


Figure 4. EPR spectra of hydroxyl radical spin adduct of **4** ($a_N = 1.35$ mT, $a_H = 0.18$ mT, $g = 2.0059$).

(hydrogen peroxide/iron sulphate) were detected in a straightforward manner (Figure 4). A standard test was performed to confirm the identity of the spin-adduct: PBN was used in a typical iron sulphate/hydrogen peroxide system (in water), and the PBN-OH spin-adduct extracted into DCM and compared with nitrones **4–6** spin-adducts; the a_N and g values were identical: $a_N = 1.35$ mT, $a_H = 0.18$ mT, $g = 2.0059$.

Hybrid hydrazyl-nitrones 7–9 as simultaneous generators and traps for short-lived radicals. As was previously demonstrated, hydrazyl radicals can generate, via one-electron oxidation, short-lived radicals, starting from several anions or compounds which can lose one electron or a hydrogen atom [34]. Adding diphenylphosphine to any of the hybrid molecules **7–9**, the initial EPR spectra of hydrazyl radicals (shown in Figure 3) turned to a very different ones, shown in Figure 5. Diphenylphosphine is oxidized by the hydrazyl moiety to the corresponding short-lived radical $\text{Ph}_2\text{P}^\bullet$, which is subsequently trapped by the nitron moiety. This process is identical to that described in systems which used DPPH as oxidant

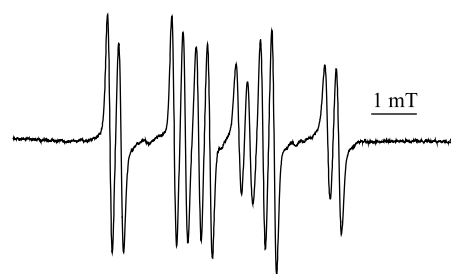


Figure 5. EPR spectra of $\text{Ph}_2\text{P-9}$ spin adduct ($a_N = 1.44$ mT, $a_H = 0.25$ mT, $a_P = 1.98$ mT, $g = 2.0058$).

and PBN, DMPO and DEPMPO as spin-traps [34]. The EPR spectra recorded using this new hydrazyl-nitron is shown in Figure 5. The overall reaction is detailed in Scheme 3.

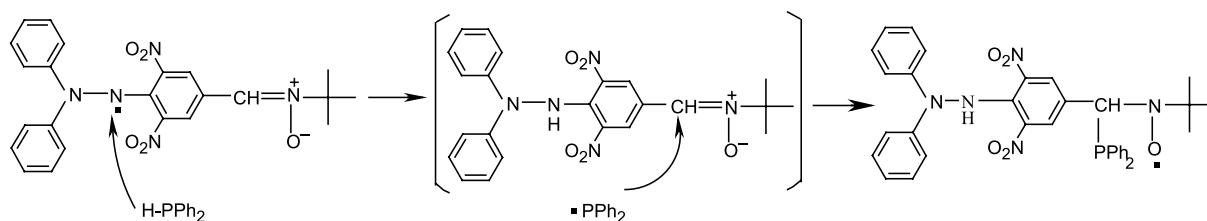
Thus, the hybrid compounds **7–9** could find application in EPR studies of the generation and identification of some species (self-generated by hydrazyl oxidation), the short-lived radicals obtained in this way being trapped by the nitron moiety. Besides this, not only EPR spectra are changing dramatically, but also the UV-Vis spectra (from violet to green or red, see also Scheme 2). EPR characteristics of the new radicals involved in this study are summarized in Table I.

Distribution of generated radicals between two STs. Another interesting finding in the spin-trapping properties of our hybrid molecules **7–9** arises from the very short distance between the hydrazyl center (which generates the short-lived radical) and the nitron moiety (which traps the generated radical). We believe that the radical generated at hydrazyl center does not leave the solvation shell of the hybrid molecule, so it is expected that there will be a high yield of trapping, as well as the possibility to trap species with low life time. In order to demonstrate this, we set up an experiment in which we used an equimolecular mixture of our hybrid molecule **9** and

Table I. EPR characteristics of the new radicals detected in this study (solvent: dichloromethane).

Radical	Type	Obtained from	Hyperfine coupling constants (± 0.005) (mT)	g value (± 0.00005)	Line-width (± 0.005) (mT)
7	Hydrazyl	Oxidation of 4	$a_{N1} = 0.95$ $a_{N2} = 0.7$	2.0031	0.3
8	Hydrazyl	Oxidation of 5	$a_{N1} = 1.03$ $a_{N2} = 0.58$	2.0034	0.35
9	Hydrazyl	Oxidation of 6	$a_{N1} = 1.05$ $a_{N2} = 0.58$	2.0037	0.35
9-OH*	Spin-adduct	9 and HO^\bullet ($\text{H}_2\text{O}_2/\text{Fe}^{2+}$)	$a_N = 1.35$ $a_H = 0.18$	2.0059	0.05
9-PPh₂*	Spin-adduct	9 and H-PPh_2	$a_N = 1.44$ $a_H = 0.25$ $a_P = 1.98$	2.0058	0.05

* **7** or **8** spin-adducts of HO^\bullet or PPh_2 radicals have the same EPR characteristics as in the case of **9**.



Scheme 3. Detailed spin-trapping process of PPh_2 : the first step consists of a hydrogen atom abstraction induced by the hydrazyl moiety, and the second step consists of the spin-trapping of the short-lived radical generated in the first step by the nitronium moiety.

another nitronium, DMPO (Scheme 1). Although both spin-traps contain the same nitronium moiety, DMPO spin-adducts have different EPR hyperfine coupling constants [34,37], thereby allowing differentiation between the two spin-adducts formed. Thus, $\text{Ph}_2\text{P}^\bullet$ radicals generated by hydrazyl moiety might be captured both by DMPO and the nitronium part of the hybrid molecule. Experimental data showed that 94% of the generated $\text{Ph}_2\text{P}^\bullet$ was captured by the nitronium moiety contained in compound **9**, and only 6% by DMPO (see Figure 6). This unexpected result can be explained by the very close spatial vicinity of the spin-trap moiety next to the point in which the $\text{Ph}_2\text{P}^\bullet$ radical is generated (hydrazyl group). A test experiment was also performed, using an equimolar mixture of standard PBN and

DMPO, to which Ph_2PH and DPPH was added. DPPH oxidized Ph_2PH to $\text{Ph}_2\text{P}^\bullet$, and this is trapped by PBN and DMPO. Simulation of the spectra as a mixture of these spin-adducts has shown a ratio of about 35% (PBN-PPh_2) and 65% (DMPO-PPh_2). Comparing this ratio (35/65) with the previous one (94/6, in which **9** and DMPO were used), it is clear that these hybrid hydrazyl-nitroniums might be advantageous over the use of the two separate compounds.

Conclusions

In this study, we have demonstrated that the new nitroniums **4–6** and the novel hybrid hydrazyl-nitronium **7–9** have a high potential for direct applications in radical chemistry. Thus, nitroniums **4–6** act as classical spin-traps for hydroxyl radical (generated by Fenton reaction), while the hybrid molecules **7–9** act simultaneously as generators and traps for phosphine radicals.

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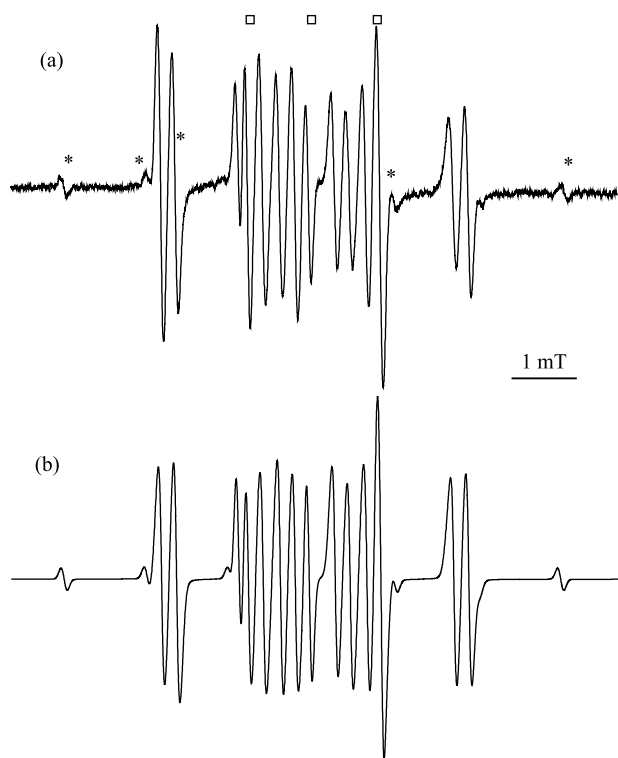


Figure 6. EPR spectra (a) and simulation (b) of a mixture of **9**- PPh_2 spin adduct (94%) and DMPO- PPh_2 spin-adduct (6%); the peaks marked * are due to the DMPO- PPh_2 spin-adduct ($a_N = 1.44$ mT, $a_H = 2.05$ mT, $a_P = 3.41$ mT, $g = 2.0058$); the peaks marked \square are due to a DMPO impurity, with $a_N = 1.12$ mT and $g = 2.0059$.

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