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Ab initio analysis of the Cope rearrangement of germacrane sesquiterpenoids

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Abstract The energetics of the Cope rearrangement of 17 germacrane sesquiterpenoids to their respective elemane forms have been calculated using both density functional theory (B3LYP/6-31G*) and post Hartee-Fock (MP2/6-31G**) *ab initio* methods. The calculations are in qualitative agreement with experimentally observed Cope rearrangements, but the two methods give slightly different results. MP2 calculations generally show more favorable elemene energies compared to the respective germacrenes (by around 3–4 kcal mol⁻¹) and smaller activation energies (by 2–3 kcal mol⁻¹). Additionally, neither method is accurate enough to consistently reproduce the germacrene/ elemene equilibrium. Apparently, the generally small energy differences between the two forms in these sesquiterpenoids cannot be adequately reproduced at these levels of calculation.

Keywords Density functional theory $\cdot Ab$ *initio* molecular orbital theory \cdot Germacrane sesquiterpenoids \cdot Elemane sesquiterpenoids \cdot Cope rearrangement

Introduction

A number of germacrane sesquiterpenoids have been reported to undergo facile Cope rearrangement to their corresponding elemane derivatives [1, 2]. Thus, for example, germacrene A leads to β -elemene [3], germacrene B to γ -elemene [4], and germacrene C to δ -elemene [5]. Gas

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Department of Chemistry, University of Alabama in Huntsville, Huntsville AL 35899, USA e-mail: wsetzer@chemistry.uah.edu chromatographic analyses of essential oils generally show that germacrane sesquiterpenoids are often accompanied by their corresponding elemane Cope rearrangement products, and there has been some concern about whether one or the other may be an artifact due to the high temperatures encountered during hydrodistillation or gas chromatographic analysis [6]. Although the Cope rearrangement has been investigated at many different levels of theory [7-17], a comprehensive investigation of the Cope rearrangement of germacrene derivatives has not been previously undertaken. The different isomeric germacrane and elemane sesquiterpenes, as well as their different substitution patterns, may profoundly affect the equilibrium distribution of these Cope rearrangement products. This report presents the ab initio activation barriers and reaction energetics of conversion of 17 different germacrane sesquiterpenoids to their corresponding elemanes using density functional theory (DFT) and post Hartree-Fock (MP2) theory. Houk and co-workers [18, 19] have found that the B3LYP/6-31G* DFT method generally performs better than other DFT or post Hartree-Fock methods for pericyclic reactions. These workers have pointed out that HF and CASSCF methods overestimate activation enthalpies in pericyclic reactions due to neglect of correlation energy in the case of HF [20] and incomplete correlation energy in CASSCF [10, 18]. For model systems of the Cope rearrangement, the B3LYP/6-31G* method performs very well [18, 21] and compares well with computationally more demanding CASPT2 and CBS-QB3 methods [10, 16, 18]. However, the B3LYP functional has been found to give increased errors with increasing molecular size [22, 23], and Schreiner and co-workers [22] have recommended using higher level (e.g., MP2 with a 6-31G** basis set) single-point energy calculations on DFT structures as a confirmation. It has been pointed out, however, that the MP2 method often overcorrects for the lack of correlation in HF calculations, and tends to predict activation energies that are lower than experimental values for pericyclic reactions [18, 24, 25].

Computational studies

All calculations were carried out using SPARTAN '06 for Windows [26]. The hybrid B3LYP functional [27, 28] and the 6-31G* basis set [29] were used for the optimization of all stationary points in the gas phase. Single-point Hartree-Fock *ab initio* energies were calculated using the DFT geometries (above) at the 6-31G** [29] level, followed by a correlation energy calculation using the second-order Møller-Plesset model (MP2) [29]. Frequency calculations were used to characterize stationary points as minima or first-order saddle points. All reactions and activation enthalpies reported are zero-point (ZPE) corrected with unscaled frequencies, but with no thermal corrections; they are, therefore, $\Delta H_{(0K)}$. Entropies were calculated using the linear harmonic oscillator approximation.

Results

DFT (B3LYP/6-31G*) and post-HF (MP2/6-31G**) enthalpies ($\Delta H_{(0K)}$) and free energies (ΔG , based on HF 6-31G** calculated entropies and 220 °C) for the Cope rearrangement of germacrane sesquiterpenoids to their respective elemanes are summarized in Table 1. Calculations were performed on germacrene A, germacrene B, germacrene C, hedycaryol, germacrone, helminthogermacrene, isogermacrene A, bicyclogermacrene, isolepidozene, bacchascandon, furanodiene, furanodienone, linderalactone, neolinderalactone, costunolide, dihydrocostunolide, and guayulin A (Fig. 1). The calculations show that different substitution patterns affect the relative energetics of the germacreneelemene Cope rearrangement. The transition state energies for these reactions are comparable to those found experimentally [30] and calculated previously for 1,5-hexadiene and substituted 1,5-hexadienes [10, 13, 15, 20, 31].

Discussion

Germacrene A and β -elemene have been detected together, by GC and GC-MS, in a number of essential oils. The concentration of β -elemene is generally higher [32–43], with an average of 9.4:1 (β -elemene : germacrene A). The DFT-calculated enthalpy difference of 2.28 kcal mol⁻¹ between germacrene A and β -elemene accounts for the observed greater abundance of β -elemene over germacrene
 Table 1
 Calculated energies for the Cope rearrangement of germacrane sesquiterpenoids to the respective elemanes^a

			Germacrene	Transition state
Germacrene A – β-elemene	DFT	ΔH	2.28	31.31
		ΔG	3.01	33.27
	MP2	ΔH	5.97	28.23
		ΔG	6.15	29.53
Germacrene B – γ-elemene	DFT	ΔH	0.99	31.35
		ΔG	2.43	33.70
	MP2	ΔH	3.40	28.58
		ΔG	3.81	29.89
Germacrene C – δ-elemene	DFT	ΔH	7.02	31.72
		ΔG	6.36	32.64
	MP2	ΔH	9.95	28.90
		ΔG	10.38	30.13
Hedycaryol – elemol	DFT	ΔH	2.89	31.14
		ΔG	4.15	32.79
	MP2	ΔH	6.62	28.52
		ΔG	6.86	29.85
Germacrone – <i>trans</i> - β-elemenone	DFT	ΔH	-0.87	32.12
		ΔG	-0.36	34.07
	MP2	ΔH	3.19	28.34
		ΔG	4.00	29.68
Helminthogermacrene -	DFT	ΔH	4.62	36.08
<i>cis</i> -β-elemene		ΔG	5.23	37.85
	MP2	ΔH	9.66	32.59
		ΔG	9.88	34.08
Isogermacrene A – Iso-β-elemene	DFT	ΔH	-0.44	29.80
		ΔG	-0.33	32.12
	MP2	ΔH	5.23	27.99
		ΔG	5.01	28.93
Bicyclogermacrene – bicycloelemene	DFT	ΔH	-6.14	27.53
		ΔG	-5.65	28.07
	MP2	ΔH	-2.22	26.96
		ΔG	-1.80	27.86
Isolepidozene	DFT	ΔH	-24.36	19.65
		ΔG	-24.18	20.59
	MP2	ΔH	-21.40	20.75
		ΔG	-20.84	21.45
Bacchascandon/	DFT	ΔH	-3.62	24.31
Acoragermacrone – shyobunone		ΔG	-2.83	26.58
	MP2	ΔH	0.21	24.84
		ΔG	0.87	25.94
Furanodiene – curzerene	DFT	ΔH	-0.56	28.66
		ΔG	0.12	30.76
	MP2	ΔH	3.07	26.34
		ΔG	3.23	27.55
Furanodienone –	DFT	ΔH	-2.35	26.44
curzerenone		ΔG	0.07	29.66
	MP2	ΔH	-4.45	22.25
		ΔG	-3.38	23.86
Linderalactone – isolinderalactone	DFT	ΔH	-2.19	27.72
		ΔG	-1.83	30.45
	MP2	ΔH	0.74	24.15
		ΔG	1.15	25.76
Neolinderalactone –	DFT	ΔH	-8.20	27.87
isolinderalactone		ΔG	-7.63	29.74

Table 1 (continued)

			Germacrene	Transition state
	MP2	ΔH	-4.38	25.54
		ΔG	-4.02	26.73
Costunolide – dehydrosaussurea lactone	DFT	ΔH	-4.35	27.17
		ΔG	-4.19	29.56
	MP2	ΔH	0.48	25.77
		ΔG	0.68	26.85
Dihydrocostunolide – saussurea lactone	DFT	ΔH	-3.69	27.83
		ΔG	-3.99	30.18
	MP2	ΔH	1.10	26.04
		ΔG	1.19	27.12
Guayulin A	DFT	ΔH	-7.15	27.18
		ΔG	-5.70	28.18
	HF^{b}	ΔH	-3.07	48.81
		ΔG	-2.68	49.55

^a Calculated energies, in kcal mol⁻¹, are relative to the elemenes. Free energies were calculated using calculated standard entropies (B3LYP/ 6-31G* or HF/6-31G**, respectively) and 493K (220 °C, typical GC injection temperature)

^b For guayulin A, HF/6-31G** calculations were carried out; there was not enough memory available to perform MP2 calculations

A. The MP2 enthalpy is too large (5.97 kcal mol⁻¹), however, and would predict complete conversion to β -elemene at typical GC temperatures (220–280 °C).

GC-MS analyses of most essential oils containing both germacrene B and γ -elemene show a preponderance of germacrene B over γ -elemene [32, 44–54], with an overall ratio of 3.22:1. The DFT calculations, however, indicate germacrene B to be 0.99 kcal mol⁻¹ higher in energy than γ -elemene; inconsistent with the observed compound distribution. The MP2 ΔH_r of -3.40 kcal mol⁻¹ is even worse. It may be that equilibration via Cope rearrangement does not occur during GC analysis and that the experimental ratios do in fact represent the relative concentrations of the materials in the plants. Li and co-workers have found that GC analysis of microwave-distilled plant material gave greater concentrations of γ -elemene over germacrene B [55]. Recent GC-MS analyses on Piper leaf essential oils carried out in our laboratories (unpublished data) show γ elemene predominating over germacrene B in a 2.35 to 1 ratio.

Generally, essential oils obtained by hydrodistillation and analyzed by GC do not show germacrene C, but may have δ -elemene [36, 54, 56, 57]. The calculated energy difference between germacrene C and δ -elemene of 7.08 (DFT) or 9.95 (MP2) kcal mol⁻¹ suggests that germacrene C, if present in the essential oil, was converted to δ elemene either during the hydrodistillation (100 °C) or the GC analysis (GC injector temperatures typically 220–280 °C). Germacrene C was first isolated by Morikawa and Hirose, who found that it readily underwent Cope rearrangement to δ -elemene at 100 °C [58], and other workers have verified the thermal lability of germacrene C [59–62]. Germacrene C can be isolated by solvent extraction at room temperature and analyzed by GC using low injector temperatures (< 100 °C) [63].

Helminthogermacrene was isolated from the liverwort Scapania undulata by Adio and co-workers [64], who also found trace amounts of its Cope rearrangement product, cisβ-elemene. These workers were able to convert helminthogermacrene to cis- β -elemene by preparative GC with an injector temperature of 390 °C, consistent with the DFTcalculated energy difference of 4.62 kcal mol⁻¹. Another liverwort, Saccogyna viticulosa, has yielded isogermacrene A as well as its Cope rearrangement product, iso- β -elemene [65]. Isogermacrene A was found to readily undergo Cope rearrangement to give iso- β -elemene, but the product ratio was not reported. DFT calculations show isogermacrene A to be 0.44 kcal mol⁻¹ more stable than iso- β -elemene, and would not be consistent with complete conversion of isogermacrene A to iso-\beta-elemene. However, the MP2 energy difference (isogermacrene A is 5.23 kcal mol⁻¹ higher in energy than iso- β -elemene) is in agreement with complete conversion of isogermacrene A to iso- β -elemene.

Bicyclogermacrene has been found to undergo Cope rearrangement to give bicycloelemene at temperatures above 200 °C [66-69]. Interestingly, however, bicyclogermacrene is abundant in many essential oils, especially the Lauraceae, but its Cope rearrangement product, bicycloelemene, is not generally observed [42, 70-72]. Hackl and coworkers [73] and Tesso and co-workers [74], on the other hand, were able to detect trace amounts of bicycloelemene, along with bicyclogermacrene, in Saccogyna viticulosa and Chloranthus spicatus, respectively. The DFT-calculated energies for bicyclogermacrene and bicycloelemene are inconsistent with a favorable Cope rearrangement; bicyclogermacrene is 6.14 kcal mol⁻¹ lower in energy than bicycloelemene. Post-HF calculations show a smaller, but still endothermic, enthalpy of reaction for bicyclogermacrene to bicycloelemene (2.22 kcal mol^{-1}), which is consistent with experimental observations. Isolepidozene, a diastereomer of bicyclogermacrene, has been found in a number of liverworts [64, 75], but its corresponding Cope rearrangement product has apparently never been detected. Both DFT and MP2 calculations show isolepidozene to be much more stable (24.4 and 21.4 kcal mol^{-1} , respectively) than the corresponding elemene, so it is not surprising that the elemene has not been found.

Germacrone has been reported to be thermally labile with respect to Cope rearrangement to *trans*- β -elemenone [6, 76], and the two compounds are often found together in essential oils [32, 47, 77–79], generally with germacrone predominating. The overall germacrone to β -elemenone

Fig. 1 Sesquiterpenoids discussed in this work



Guayulin A

ratio from published essential oil compositions is 14.5:1 [32, 47, 77–84]. DFT calculations are in qualitative agreement; germacrone is lower in energy by 0.87 kcal mol⁻¹. MP2 calculations, on the other hand, are contradictory and show germacrone to be 3.19 kcal mol⁻¹ higher in energy than β -elemenone.

Bacchascandon (= acoragermacrone) has been isolated by solvent extraction of *Baccharis scandens* [85], *Baccharis latifolia* [86], and *Acorus calamus* [87, 88], and this compound has been found to undergo Cope rearrangement to its elemane derivative, shyobunone [88, 89]. GC-MS analyses of essential oils generally shows evidence of shyobunone without evidence of bacchascandon [90–93]. DFT calculations are not in agreement with these observations, showing bacchascandon to be 3.62 kcal mol⁻¹ more stable than shyobunone. MP2 calculations, however, have bacchascandon slightly higher in energy than shyobunone by 0.21 kcal mol⁻¹.

When collected at cooler temperature (e.g., solvent extraction at room temperature), essential oils containing both hedycaryol and elemol generally show higher concentrations of hedycaryol [94-97]. Conversely, essential oils obtained by steam distillation show little if any hedycaryol, but generally only elemol [96-98]. Indeed, hedycaryol has been observed to undergo ready conversion to elemol [99-101], and DFT calculations support this observation. Elemol is 2.89 kcal mol^{-1} more stable than hedycaryol, comparable to values calculated for germacrene A and βelemene. Interestingly, Adams [102] reports hedycaryol and elemol to have virtually identical retention indices on the non-polar DB-5 GC column (1548 and 1549, respectively) and the two compounds have virtually identical mass spectral fragmentation patterns. It seems likely that hedycaryol, injected under typical GC-MS conditions, rearranges completely to elemol.

DFT calculations show furanodiene to be $0.56 \text{ kcal mol}^{-1}$ lower in energy than curzerene (= furanoelemene), and most essential oils containing furanodiene show higher concentrations of that sesquiterpenoid over its Cope rearrangement product curzerene [80, 103–106]. Curzerene has, however, been preparedby Cope rearrangement of furanodiene [6, 107-109], and hydrodistillation and hot (250 °C) GC injection temperatures, result in increasing concentrations of curzerene [6, 47, 81, 110]. DFT total electronic energies of furanodiene and curzerene do not account for this behavior, but post-HF MP2 calculations show curzerene to be $3.07 \text{ kcal } \text{mol}^{-1}$ more stable than furanodiene. Furanodienone generally predominates over curzerenone in essential oil compositions [80, 105, 106]. The energetics of the furanodienone to curzerenone conversion (DFT, $\Delta H_r = 2.35$ kcal mol⁻¹; MP2, $\Delta H_r =$ 4.45 kcal mol⁻¹) are consistent with these experimental results.

The sesquiterpenoid linderalactone, isolated from the roots of Lindera strychnifolia [111] has been found to undergo Cope rearrangement at 160 °C to give isolinderalactone [111-113]. The isomeric neolinderalactone has also been shown to undergo Cope rearrangement to isolinderalactone [114, 115]. The DFT calculations indicate that linderalactone is $2.19 \text{ kcal mol}^{-1}$ more stable than isolinderalactone, and are therefore inconsistent with a Cope rearrangement to give a 2:3 ratio of linderalactone/ isolinderalactone as reported by Takeda et al. [112]. The MP2/6-31G** calculations are in better agreement with the experimental observations, and indicate linderalactone to be $0.74 \text{ kcal mol}^{-1}$ less stable than isolinderalactone, consistent with the observed equilibrium ratio. Gopalan and Magnus [115] found that Cope rearrangement of neolinderalactone at 300°C gave isolinderalactone in a 19:1 ratio (i.e., 5% conversion). Again, DFT calculations predict a negligible conversion of neolinderalactone to isolinderalactone ($\Delta H_r = 8.20$ kcal mol⁻¹). MP2/6-31G** calculations, on the other hand, show neolinderalactone to be 4.38 kcal mol^{-1} more stable than isolinderalactone, again consistent with the small amount of Cope rearrangement at 300°C that was observed experimentally.

MP2 calculations show the sesquiterpene lactone costunolide to be slightly higher in energy (0.48 kcal mol⁻¹) than its Cope rearrangement product dehydrosaussurea lactone, whereas DFT calculations show it to be 4.35 kcal mol⁻¹ lower in energy. Costunolide and dihydrocostunolide are abundant components of Costus Resinoid (*Saussurea lappa* root oil) [116, 117], while dehydrosaussurea lactone and saussurea lactone have been found in the liverwort *Frullania rostrata* [118]. Dehydrosaussurea lactone and saussurea lactone have been shown to readily undergo reversible Cope rearrangement to costunolide and dihydrocostulolide, respectively, with the elemenes slightly predominating over the germacrenes [119–121], in agreement with MP2 results.

Guayulin A, a cinnamic acid ester derivative of bicyclogermacrene, is a major component of guayule (*Parthenium argentatum*) [122–124]. Although the compound adopts a conformation suitable for Cope rearrangement [125], the corresponding elemene has not been reported. B3LYP/6-31G* and HF 6-31G** calculations are consistent with this; the energy difference between guayulin A and the corresponding elemene are 7.14 and 3.07 kcal mol⁻¹ in favor of the germacrene.

Conclusions

Ab initio calculations, at the B3LYP/6-31G* or MP2/6-31G** levels are in qualitative agreement with experimentally observed Cope rearrangements of germacrane sesquiterpenoids to their respective elemanes, but the two methods do give slightly different results. Post Hartree-Fock MP2 calculations generally show more favorable elemene energies compared to the respective germacrenes by around 3–4 kcal mol⁻¹, and smaller activation energies by 2-3 kcal mol⁻¹. The overall lower activation energies obtained with the MP2 method are consistent with what has been observed previously for the Cope rearrangement and has been attributed to overcorrection of the correlation energy [18]. In addition, neither method is accurate enough to consistently predict the germacrene/elemene equilibrium. Apparently, the generally small energy differences between the germacrene form and the elemene form in these sesquiterpenoids cannot be adequately reproduced at these levels of calculation. Very high levels of ab initio theory with multireference perturbation theory (e.g., CASPT2N or CBS-QB3) could, in principal, give more accurate results, but such calculations are not practical for molecules such as sesquiterpenoids [16]. Density functional methods are the only practical computational tools because they implicitly include electron correlation but are computationally less demanding [126]. Development of new functionals [127– 131] could vastly improve the computational accuracy of density functional theory for chemical reactions such as the Cope rearrangement.

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