

## Epimerization and Kinetic Protonation as Factors Determining the Stereochemistry of the Michael Reaction

Tzveta S. Gospodova and Yuri N. Stefanovsky\*

Institute of Organic Chemistry with Center of Phytochemistry, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences,  
Sofia 1040, Bulgaria

**Summary.** Model compounds in which the only possibility for isomerization is epimerization were synthesized. They undergo isomerization under the conditions widely used in the Michael addition. Conclusions are drawn as to the possibilities for epimerization or kinetic protonation in the actual Michael adducts.

**Keywords.** Michael reaction; Stereochemistry; Epimerization; Kinetic protonation.

### Epimerisierung und kinetische Protonierung als Faktoren der Stereochemie der Michael-Reaktion

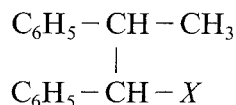
**Zusammenfassung.** Modellverbindungen, bei denen nur eine C-2 Epimerisierung möglich ist, wurden synthetisiert und einer Isomerisierung bei verschiedenen Reaktionsbedingungen unterworfen. Die Epimerisierung und kinetische Protonierung der Michaeladdukte wird diskutiert.

### Introduction

The stereochemical equilibrium is a general question of interest to investigators of the stereochemistry of the classical (one stage) Michael reaction resulting in an adduct with two vicinal asymmetric carbon atoms. This result can be brought about either by retroaldolization of the adduct or by direct isomerization (epimerization) at the C-2 acid center or in both. Different approaches have been used in solving the problem in different cases, but no definite answer has been given yet [1–5].

### Results and Discussion

The object of this work is a new approach for solving the problem. We have investigated the isomerization of model compounds of the type:



**Table 1.** Syntheses of **1** and **3**

Compound	Solvent	T°C	Time, min	Yield, %	Erythro/Threo
<b>1</b>	<i>HMPT</i>	22	3	79	45/55
	<i>THF</i>	22	3	84	60/40
	Ether	22	5	68	63/37
	Benzene	22	5	72	70/30
<b>3</b>	<i>THF</i>	64	15	86	62/38

**Table 2.** CH<sub>3</sub> signals of the diastereomeric compounds **1**–**4**

Compound	Configuration	Chemical shifts (δ, ppm)			
		CH <sub>3</sub>		CON(CH <sub>3</sub> ) <sub>2</sub>	
<b>1</b>	erythro	0.83	0.96		2.60 2.90
	threo	1.30	1.40		2.93 2.96
<b>2</b>	erythro	0.85	1.03	3.32	
	threo	1.32	1.40	2.92 2.97	
<b>3</b>	erythro	0.96	1.07		
	threo	1.30	1.40		
<b>4</b>	erythro	1.26	1.37		
	threo*	1.40	1.50		

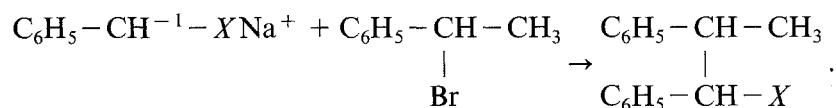
\* Not isolated

where  $X = \text{CON}(\text{CH}_3)_2$  **1**,  $\text{COOCH}_3$  **2**,  $\text{COC}_6\text{H}_5$  **3**,  $\text{CN}$  **4**, where the only possibility for changing the configuration is the isomerization at C-2.

The isomerization conditions used correspond to conditions already employed previously [2–4].

#### Syntheses and Relative Configuration of **1**–**4**

**1** and **3** were obtained by alkylation of the sodium N,N-dimethylphenylacetamide and deoxybenzoine enolates with 1-phenylethylbromide:



Where  $X = \text{CON}(\text{CH}_3)_2$  or  $\text{COC}_6\text{H}_5$

Table 1 shows the decrease of the diastereoselectivity of the alkylation with increasing polarity of the medium.

The isomers of **2** were obtained from the corresponding 2,3-diphenylbutyric acid [6] with diazomethane.

**Table 3.** Isomerization of erythro 1-4

Compound	Solvent	Isomerizing agent	T°C	Time, min	Erythro/Threo
1	THF	NaNH <sub>2</sub>	64	300	90/10
		ANa	22	60	100/0
	HMPT	NaNH <sub>2</sub>	22	60	100/0
2	THF	NaNH <sub>2</sub>	64	150	67/33
		ANa	22	60	62/38
3	THF	NaNH <sub>2</sub>	22	60	100/0
			64	60	40/60
		ANa	22	60	52/48
	HMPT	NaNH <sub>2</sub>	22	60	60/40
	CH <sub>3</sub> OH	KOH	22	3 000	100/0
	CHCl <sub>3</sub>	HCl	22	3 000	100/0
	4	THF	NaNH <sub>2</sub>	22	15
C <sub>2</sub> H <sub>5</sub> OH		C <sub>2</sub> H <sub>5</sub> ONa	0	60	100/0
			22	30	60/40

The preparation of erythro-4 has been described in Ref [7].

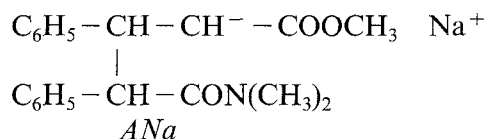
The configurations of 1 and 2 were correlated with the corresponding erythro-acid [6].

The signals of the CH<sub>3</sub> protons in the erythro-isomers appear at higher fields (Table 2), which was used determining the configurations of 3.

The differences in the position of the COOCH<sub>3</sub> and CON(CH<sub>3</sub>)<sub>2</sub> signals can also be used for the configurational assignments [8].

### Isomerization

The isomerization conditions and isomerizing agents are shown in Table 3. In all cases erythro isomers have been used because of their accessibility. Erythro/threo ratios were determined using the above mentioned NMR differences. A very suitable isomerizing agent (because of its solubility) is the sodium derivative of the adduct of the reaction between sodium N,N-dimethylphenylacetamide enolate and methyl cinnamate [9] (ANa in Table 3).



The isomerization of 1 does not occur under a wide range of conditions. 2 undergoes isomerization in boiling THF or when ANa is used. The isomerization of 3 is easier and in the case of 4 isomerization does not occur only at low temperature.

Obviously the isomerization is parallel to the CH-activity. The  $pK_A$  values for

the corresponding phenylacetic acid derivatives [10] and for deoxybenzoine [11] indicate the following sequence of decreasing CH-activity:



On the other hand the isomerization is related to the rate of metalation; the degree of the latter was monitored by the shifting of the CO or CN absorption bands in the IR spectrum. In all cases, shown in Table 3, where isomerization is recorded, metalation is complete. Thus, the stereochemistry is determined by the protonation of the prochiral carbanion but not by the epimerization itself.

The ratio erythro/threo = 67/33 for **2** with catalytic amounts of  $\text{NaNH}_2$  seems to be a result of metal exchange (epimerization). As expected, one can observe the epimerization only when catalytic amounts of metal are used. It is worth noting that both asymmetric protonation and epimerization lead to the same stereochemical result.

With actual Michael adducts having two CH-acid centres (at C-2 and C-4), the possibilities of direct isomerization (epimerization) with insufficient amounts of catalysts will additionally depend on the difference in the acidity of these two centres—a necessary condition for C-2 carbanion formation. This more or less trivial conclusion allows one to predict that when dialkylamides or esters are used as donors in the Michael addition, most probably the erythro/threo ratio at equilibrium is a result of the “retroaldol” decomposition (metal at C-4). In the case of nitriles one may expect a direct isomerization (epimerization at C-2) with a wide range of acceptors and experimental conditions. When donors like deoxybenzoine are used, the stereochemistry will depend more strongly on the second component of the reaction, and conclusions concerning the origin of the equilibrium stereochemistry should be drawn with caution. Thus Baradel [2] considers the equilibrium stereochemistry of the reaction between deoxybenzoine and chalcone to be a result of epimerization. An argument for that is the isomerization of the adduct by KOH in methanol and HCl in  $\text{CHCl}_3$ : Table 3 shows that under these conditions **3** does not undergo isomerization. We think that in the case described only “retroaldol” decomposition is responsible for the isomerization.

The results obtained suggest a low diastereoselectivity for those cases where epimerization or protonation take place.

## Experimental

### *Dimethyl Amides of the Diastereomeric 2,3-Diphenylbutyric Acids (1)*

0.185 g (1 mmol) of 1-phenylethylbromide in 2 ml of *THF* were added under stirring at room temperature to 1 mmol of sodium N,N-dimethylphenylacetamidoenolate obtained in 2 ml of *THF* [9]. After separation of sodium bromide (2 min) 1 ml of water was added, the solvent evaporated under vacuum and the residue extracted with chloroform. The mixture of the diastereomeric **1** was separated by TLC (Kieselgel 60 PF<sub>254</sub> “Merck”, ether/petroleum ether). Two recrystallizations from benzene/hexane lead to 0.07 g (26%) of erythro-**1** with m.p. 144–145°,  $R_f = 0.5$ . IR ( $c = 1$ ,  $\text{CHCl}_3$ ): 1636  $\text{cm}^{-1}$ .  $^1\text{H NMR}$  ( $\text{CDCl}_3$ ):  $\delta = 0.83$  and  $0.96$  (d, 3H,  $\text{CH}_3$ ), 2.60 and 2.90 [d, 6H,  $\text{N}(\text{CH}_3)_2$ ], 3.30–3.76 (m, 1H, H-3), 3.80 and 4.00 (d, 1H, H-2,  $J = 11$  Hz), 7.00–7.56 (m, 10H,  $2\text{C}_6\text{H}_5$ ) ppm.  $\text{C}_{18}\text{H}_{21}\text{NO}$  (267.4). Calc. N 5.24; found N 5.40.

Threo-**1** was isolated from the mother liquor after recrystallization from hexane. Yield 0.03 g (11%), m.p. 139–141°,  $R_f = 0.47$ . IR ( $c = 1$ ,  $\text{CHCl}_3$ ): 1636  $\text{cm}^{-1}$ .  $^1\text{H NMR}$  ( $\text{CDCl}_3$ ):  $\delta = 1.30$  and

1.40 (d, 3H, CH<sub>3</sub>), 2.93 and 2.97 [d, 6H, N(CH<sub>3</sub>)<sub>2</sub>], 3.16–3.66 (m, 1H, H-3), 3.66 and 3.83 (d, 1H, H-2, *J* = 9 Hz), 6.76–7.26 (m, 10H, 2C<sub>6</sub>H<sub>5</sub>) ppm. C<sub>18</sub>H<sub>21</sub>NO (267.4). Calc. N 5.24; found N 5.17.

#### *Methyl Esters of the Diastereomeric 2,3-Diphenylbutyric Acids (2)*

Ether solution of diazomethane was added to a solution of 0.240 g (1 mmol) of the corresponding acid [6] until the reading permanent yellow color of the mixture was reached.

Erythro-2. M.p. 114–115° (ethanol), *R<sub>f</sub>* = 0.82 (ether/petroleum ether 2:1). IR (*c* = 1, CHCl<sub>3</sub>): 1726 cm<sup>-1</sup>. <sup>1</sup>H NMR (CDCl<sub>3</sub>): δ = 0.95 and 1.03 (d, 3H, CH<sub>3</sub>), 3.32 (s, 3H, COOCH<sub>3</sub>), 3.37–3.67 (m, 1H, H-3), 3.67 and 3.80 (d, 1H, H-2, *J* = 11 Hz), 7.12–7.62 (m, 10H, 2C<sub>6</sub>H<sub>5</sub>) ppm. C<sub>17</sub>H<sub>18</sub>O<sub>2</sub> (254.3). Calc. C 79.07, H 7.03; found C 79.09, H 6.82.

Threo-2. M.p. 55–58° (ethanol/water), *R<sub>f</sub>* = 0.82. IR (*c* = 1, CHCl<sub>3</sub>): 1726 cm<sup>-1</sup>. <sup>1</sup>H NMR (CDCl<sub>3</sub>): δ = 1.32 and 1.40 (d, 3H, CH<sub>3</sub>), 2.92 and 2.97 (d, 3H, COOCH<sub>3</sub>), 3.30–3.70 (m, 1H, H-3), 3.75 and 3.97 (d, 1H, H-2, *J* = 10 Hz), 6.87–7.12 (m, 10H, 2C<sub>6</sub>H<sub>5</sub>) ppm. C<sub>17</sub>H<sub>18</sub>O<sub>2</sub> (254.3). Calc. C 79.07, H 7.03; found C 79.09, H 6.92.

#### *Diastereometric 3-Benzoyl-2,3-diphenylpropane 3*

After addition of 1 mmol of 1-phenylethylbromide in 2 ml of *THF* to 1 mmol of the sodium reagent of deoxybenzoin obtained with NaNH<sub>2</sub> in 2 ml of *THF* and stirring 15 min under reflux, 1 ml of water was added and worked up as described for 1. The mixture of the diastereomeric products was separated by TLC (ether/petroleum ether 1:1).

Recrystallization from ethanol leads to pure erythro-3. Yield 0.055 g (18.3%), m.p. 189–190°, *R<sub>f</sub>* = 0.67. IR (*c* = 1, CHCl<sub>3</sub>): 1678 cm<sup>-1</sup>. <sup>1</sup>H NMR (CDCl<sub>3</sub>): δ = 0.96 and 1.07 (d, 3H, CH<sub>3</sub>), 3.30–4.00 (m, 1H, H-3), 4.70 and 4.86 (d, 1H, H-2, *J* = 11 Hz), 7.00–8.00 (m, 15H, 3C<sub>6</sub>H<sub>5</sub>) ppm. C<sub>22</sub>H<sub>20</sub>O (300.4). Calc. C 88.00, H 6.67; found C 87.93, H 6.67.

Threo-3 was not isolated.

<sup>1</sup>H NMR (CDCl<sub>3</sub>, data are taken from the spectrum of the mixture): δ = 1.30 and 1.40 (d, 3H, CH<sub>3</sub>), 3.50–3.95 (m, 1H, H-3), 4.60 and 4.77 (d, 1H, H-2, *J* = 11 Hz) ppm.

#### *Isomerization of 1–4*

*General procedure.* To 1 mmol of the corresponding erythro isomer dissolved in the solvent, 1 mmol of the isomerizing reagent was added and the mixture stirred under the conditions shown in Table 3. After addition of 1 ml of water, the mixture was worked up and the crude product isolated was analysed by <sup>1</sup>H NMR spectroscopy.

When *ANa* was used, 0.5 mmol of the erythro isomer was added to the reaction mixture obtained from 1 mmol of sodium *N,N*-dimethylphenylacetamidoenolate and methyl cinnamate in 2 ml of *THF* at room temperature. After stirring at the temperature indicated, the mixture was hydrolyzed by HCl (1:1). The solvent was evaporated and the CHCl<sub>3</sub> extract separated by TLC (ether/petroleum ether).

The isomerization with HCl was conducted in CHCl<sub>3</sub> (0.6 mmol erythro-2 in 3 ml) with addition of several drops of HCl. After washing with water the solution was analyzed (NMR).

When KOH was used 0.6 mmol of erythro-2 in 12 ml of dried methanol was treated with 1 ml of 2*N* KOH. After acidification with HCl, the mixture was worked up as described before.

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