Pergamon

Tetrahedron Letters, Vol. 37, No. 30, pp. 5329-5332, 1996

0040-4039/96 $15.00 + 0.00

PII: S0040-4039(96)01122-7

The Mitsunobu Reaction of *ortho*-Ethers of Secondary Benzylic Alcohols. Concise Enantioselective Synthesis of a Key Intermediate of the Novel β-Adrenergic Receptor Antagonist MY336-a

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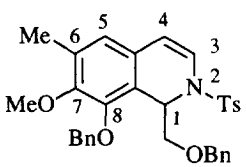
Abstract: Chiral secondary benzylic alcohols bearing an *ortho*-alkoxy substituent suffer ring-assisted racemization during the Mitsunobu reaction; however, their congeners bearing also a 3-substituent undergo virtually complete Mitsunobu inversion. A concise enantioselective synthesis of a key intermediate of the β-adrenergic receptor antagonist MY336-a was achieved exploiting this observation.

One of the most useful attributes of the Mitsunobu reaction[1] is to provide complete configurational inversion at the carbinyl carbon of alcohols under mild conditions. However, certain secondary benzylic alcohols are an exception; it has been reported the obtention of a 1:1 mixture of epimeric products upon Mitsunobu amination of a derivative carrying a *para*-methoxy group[2] and also it has been demonstrated that reactions of *para*-methoxy phenols led to racemization at the benzylic centre while, under the same conditions, *para*-acetoxy and -pivaloxy phenols gave inverted products.[3] In addition, the same ring-assisted racemization process was observed during the Mitsunobu conversion of *exo*-benzonorbornen-2-yl alcohols to amines.[4]

Surprisingly, there are no relevant publications concerning the result of the Mitsunobu reaction of *ortho*-substituted benzylic alcohols, except for the work of Ku[5] and Rao,[6] showing respectively that the thioacetoxylation of 2-methyl benzyl alcohols and the esterification of a vinylogous of a secondary benzyl alcohol bearing a methoxy group proceeded with complete configurational inversion at their carbinyl centers.



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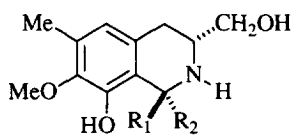
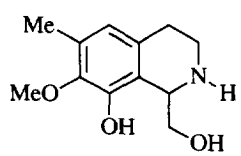


2 R^1= H, R^2= CH_2OH

3 R^1= CH_2OH, R^2= H



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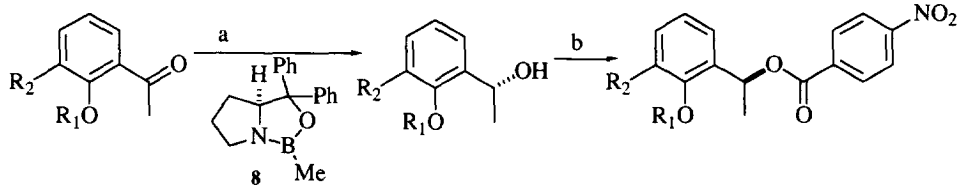
Reported in this letter is a study on the stereochemical outcome of the Mitsunobu reaction of secondary benzylic alcohols carrying phenolic ether groups at the *ortho*-position, which resulted in the elaboration of (+)-**1**, employing our Mitsunobu-based methodology for the enantioselective synthesis of 1-substituted 1,2,3,4-tetrahydroisoquinolines.[7] The 1,2-dihydroiosquinoline derivative **1** has been employed for the total synthesis

of the β-adrenergic receptor antagonist MY336-a (**2**), as well as its epimer (**3**)[8a] and their partial analog **4**.[8b] This accomplishment is important because chiral 1-alkyl tetrahydroisoquinoline derivatives displaying a 7,8-substitution pattern on the isocyclic ring are relatively uncommon and difficult to obtain.

In order to understand the influence of the nature of the *ortho*-ether and the substitution pattern on the degree of racemization, alcohols **6a-d** were enantioselectively synthesized from the related ketones **5a-d**[9] (Scheme 1), employing the CBS reduction process[10] with oxazaborolidine **8** as catalyst, and subsequently reacted with *para*-nitrobenzoic acid under Mitsunobu conditions, modified by Martin,[11] to afford esters **7a-d**.



5a R_1= Me, R_2= H
5b R_1= Bn, R_2= H
5c R_1= Me, R_2= OMe
5d R_1= Bn, R_2= OMe

6a R_1= Me, R_2= H
6b R_1= Bn, R_2= H
6c R_1= Me, R_2= OMe
6d R_1= Bn, R_2= OMe

7a R_1= Me, R_2= H
7b R_1= Bn, R_2= H
7c R_1= Me, R_2= OMe
7d R_1= Bn, R_2= OMe

Scheme 1. *Reagents and conditions:* a) $BH_3.SMe_2$, THF, TEA, **8** (10 mol%), 0°C, 8 h; b) 4-NO_2-C_6H_4-COOH (3 equiv.), PPh_3 (3 equiv.), DEAD (3 equiv.), toluene, RT, 3 h.

The results of these transformations are summarized in the Table. As shown, while the reactions of the 2-substituted benzylic alcohols **6a** and **6b** occurred with partial racemization (less extensive, however, than that observed in the 4-methoxy counterparts), their 2,3-disubstituted congeners **6c** and **6d** underwent essentially complete Mitsunobu inversion.

Table. Chemical yields, optical yields and optical rotation data of alcohols **6a-d** and their inverted *para*-nitrobenzoates **7a-d**.

Compd.	Yield (%)	ee (%)	$[\alpha]_D^{20}$/conc.[c]	Compd.	Yield	ee (%)	$[\alpha]_D^{20}$/conc.[c]
6a	96	94[a,b]	+32.3/2.00	**7a**	88	57[a,b]	+53.7/2.20
6b	94	> 95[a]	+26.1/1.44	**7b**	85	76[a]	+67.3/2.18
6c	92	97[a,b]	+24.5/2.51	**7c**	89	93[a,b]	+95.2/1.05
6d	96	> 95[a]	-11.1 /2.17	**7d**	87	95[a]	+24.9/0.69

a. Determined by ^1H NMR with (+)-Eu(hfc)$_3$ in C_6D_6; b. Determined by HPLC with a Chiralcel OD column; mobil phase: hexane/2-propanol (9:1) at 0.5 mL/min; c. All measurements in $CHCl_3$; concentration in g/dL.

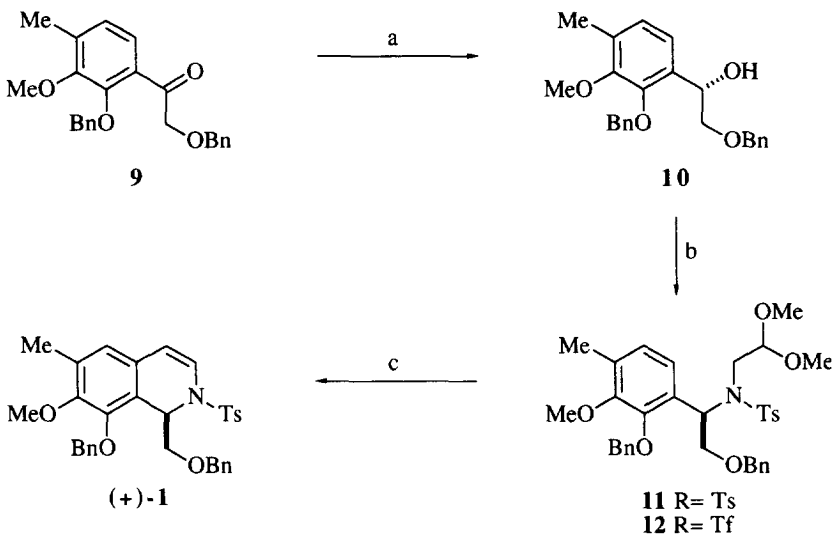
By analogy with related systems,[3] this ring-assisted racemization seems to be a consequence of the strongly electron donating ability of the *ortho*-alkoxy substituent, which causes the Mitsunobu's phosphonium salt intermediate[12] to have significant carbocation character. Thus, the reaction products arise partly from an S_N1 reaction pathway.

The synthetically useful inversion observed in **7c** and **7d** could be a result of a diminished participation of the *ortho*-substituent in the activation of the aromatic moiety, being detrimental for the S_N1 pathway. This

effect is probably originated in the known out of plane preferred conformation of *ortho*-disubstituted phenolic ethers, resulting in steric inhibition of the resonance.[13]

That the 3-substituent *per se* does not affect the reaction course, being crucial in these 1,2,3-trisubstituted compounds only by providing the required steric bulk[14] to produce resonance inhibition of the *ortho*-ether, is further demonstrated by previous observations indicating that 3,4-dimethoxy-α-phenethyl alcohol suffered similar degree of racemization than the related 4-methoxy susbtituted benzylic alcohol, upon submission to Mitsunobu conditions[3,7] and that 3-methoxy -α-phenethyl alcohol undewent this transformation with clean inversion.[15]

In view of these highly promising results, ketone **9**[8b] (Scheme 2) was submitted to the CBS reduction with 10 mol% of oxazaborolidine **8**, yielding alcohol **10**;[16] this, in turn, was reacted with toluene-*p*-sulfonamide **13** under Mitsunobu conditions with the addition of pyridine[17] (to avoid elimination by-products), providing 64% of the completely inverted *N*-benzyl-*N*-tosylaminoacetal **11**. In an attempt to improve yields, use of the TMAD-TBP couple[18] (3 equiv. each, toluene, 100°C, 32 h) was used, providing 69% of partially racemized **11** (ee 85%), probably due to the extensive heating required for the reaction to proceed. In addition, the potentially more efficient Mitsunobu amination of **10** with triflamide **14** was carried out,[19] however it gave a complex mixture and none of the desired product **12** could be isolated. Therefore, tosylamide **11** was cyclized with HCl under the Jackson protocol,[7] furnishing (+)-**1** in 80 % yield and > 95% ee, as expected.



Scheme 2. *Reagents and conditions:* a) $BH_3.SMe_2$, THF, TEA, **8** (10 mol%), RT, 8 h (> 95% ee); b) $TsNHCH_2CH(OMe)_2$ (**13**, 3 equiv.), PPh_3 (3 equiv.), DEAD (3 equiv.), pyridine (1 equiv.), toluene, RT, 3 h (64%, >95% ee) or $TfNHCH_2CH(OMe)_2$ (**14**), PPh_3, DEAD, toluene, RT, 3 h, complex mixture; c) 6 N HCl, dioxane, reflux (82%, > 95% ee).

In conclusion, a short enantioselective synthesis of a key intermediate of MY336-a has been achieved based on the observation that *ortho*-ethers of chiral secondary benzylic alcohols undergo virtually complete Mitsunobu inversion when a 3-substituent is present in their structure. The synthesis of related compounds in optically active form employing the same strategy is currently under study.

Acknowledgements

The author gratefully acknowledges CONICET, UNR, Fundación Antorchas, Fundación Prats and IFS for financial support. Dr. Gabriel Radivoy (UNS) is also acknowledged for optical rotation determinations.

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(*Received in USA* 30 *April* 1996; *revised* 3 *June* 1996; *accepted* 4 *June* 1996)