Gold(I)-Catalyzed Synthesis of Highly Substituted 1,4-Dicarbonyl Derivatives *via* Sulfonium [3,3]-Sigmatropic Rearrangement

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ABSTRACT: An efficient and straightforward gold-catalyzed protocol for the synthesis of 2-substituted-4-oxo-4-arylbutanal derivatives has been developed from commercially available or easily accessible alkynes and vinylsulfoxide substrates. Extension of the methodology to the use of 1-cycloalkenyl sulfoxides allowed the facile synthesis of five, six and seven-membered ring cycloalkyl-1-one backbone. Subsequently, the tetrahydrocycloalkyl[b]pyrrole derivatives, found in many active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs), were isolated in good yields. Mechanistic investigation highlighted in this process a [3,3]-sigmatropic rearrangement of a sulfonium intermediate.

1,4-Dicarbonyl derivatives are widely present as structural motifs in natural products and bioactive molecules.¹ These compounds are also useful building blocks and starting materials for different reactions such as the Paal-Knorr synthesis, to easily prepare heterocycles (furan, thiophene, pyrrole,...) from the same key intermediate.² Many different strategies have been described for the synthesis of these valuable scaffolds, such as oxidative couplings³ or umpolung processes,^{4a-c} including enolate^{4f-i} and radical-based transformations,^{4j-o} and others.⁵ However, each of these approaches are necessarily limited to specific substrates, and several methods failed to construct quaternary centers or to use easy-to-handle reagents. In the framework of this study, we proposed to develop a gold(I)-catalyzed sulfonium [3,3]-sigmatropic rearrangement, for the synthesis of highly functionalized 1,4-dicarbonyls.

Indeed, in the recent years, cascade reactions including [3,3]-sigmatropic rearrangement of sulfur-containing substrates has emerged as powerful strategies for the synthesis of molecules of interest.⁶ In 2007, Toste and Zhang independently described the intramolecular gold-catalyzed alkynyl arylsulfoxide transformation, to furnish the seven-membered thiepinone ring (Scheme 1a).^{7a-b} Initially, it was proposed that the reaction intermediate was an α -oxo gold carbene, but it was demonstrated later that the reaction most certainly proceeded through a [3,3]-sigmatropic rearrangement, *via* intermediate (I).^{7c} The intermolecular version of this reaction was then exemplified with aryl sulfoxide substrates (Scheme 1b).^{7d} In addition to these processes catalyzed by organometallic Lewis acids, other strategies have emerged with the development of

interrupted Pummerer reaction/sigmatropic rearrangements, using charge-accelerated [3,3]-rearrangement.^{6,8,9} In this context, Maulide developed in 2018 a powerful methodology for the synthesis of functionalized 1,4-dicarbonyl compounds (Scheme 1c).^{9e} In the presence of triflimide, the ynamide derivatives are protonated to form a highly electrophilic keteniminium intermediate, which can undergo the addition of sulfoxides. The resulting key intermediate (III) could then perform a rearrangement to deliver after hydrolysis the corresponding γ -ketoamides. Furthermore, starting with enantiopure sulfoxides led to enantioenriched products, with a good chirality transfer. While ingenious, this methodology has some perfectible features, namely: (1) the use of ynamides as starting material, whose syntheses can sometimes be challenging or are commercially very expensive; (2) the use of a strong Brønsted acid, which must be handled carefully; (3) the use of mainly vinyl sulfoxides, without aryl groups (R³, R⁴ $\neq$ Ar). To overcome these limitations, we hypothesized that cationic gold(I) complexes could activate simple alkynes **1** *via* formation of π -complexes and allow the regioselective addition of the oxygen atom of the sulfoxide partner **2**th (Scheme 1d). Subsequently, the sulfonium intermediate (IV) should perform a [3,3]-sigmatropic rearrangement, to deliver a thionium ion (V). After hydrolysis, the corresponding 1,4-keto-aldehydes **3** should be isolated.

Scheme 1. Sigmatropic rearrangement of sulfonium intermediates for the synthesis of carbonyl-containing compounds

In this paper, we report our efforts in this direction and the extension of this methodology to the use of 1-cycloalkenyl sulfoxides **5** as starting materials, whose potential has so far been underexploited. The corresponding highly functionalized cycloalkyl ketones **6** have also been used as key building blocks for the rapid synthesis of five APIs.

Our study was initiated by reacting 1-ethynyl-4-methoxybenzene **1a** and sulfoxide **2a**, in the presence of 10 mol % of different gold(I) precatalysts, in dichloroethane at room temperature (Table 1). After activation with silver *bis*(trifluoromethanesulfonyl)imide, the corresponding cationic gold catalysts without ligand (entry 1) or coordinated with structurally diverse ligands such as an *N*-heterocyclic carbene (entry 2), triphenyl phosphite (entry 3) or phosphine ligands (entries 4-6) furnished the desired 2-(2-aryl-2-oxoethyl)pentanal **3a** in moderate yields. The formation of the *bis*(arylsulfane) by-product **3'a** was also observed. A slight difference both in conversion and product selectivity **3a/3'a** was ascertained, depending on the catalyst used. We decided to continue our study with the commercially available Ph₃PAuCl catalyst (entry 6). After verifying that it was necessary to form the cationic gold catalyst (entry 7), we added some water in the reaction mixture to facilitate the hydrolysis of the thionium ion and to favor the formation of **3a** (entry 8). The expected effect was verified, since the yield of **3a** increased from 48 to 72%.

Table 1. Optimization of the Reaction Conditions

entry	[Au]	Additive	Conv. (%) (3a/3'a ratio) ^a	3a yield (%) ^a
1	AuCl	-	90 (1/1.1)	37
2	IPrAuCl	-	90 (1/1)	43
3	(PhO) ₃ PAuCl	-	>98 (1/1)	50
4	L ₁ AuCl	-	90 (1.1/1)	47
5	L ₂ AuCl	-	83 (1.8/1)	53
6	Ph ₃ PAuCl	-	>98 (1/1)	48
7 ^b	Ph ₃ PAuCl	-	<5	nd
8	Ph ₃ PAuCl	H ₂ O ^c	>98 (7/1)	72
9 ^d	-	H ₂ O ^c	50 (1/1)	25
10	Ph ₃ PAuNTf ₂	H ₂ O ^c	>98 (10/1)	76 (74) ^e

^aConversion, **3a/3'a** ratio and yield of **3a** were determined by ¹H NMR analysis of the crude reaction mixture, with an internal standard. ^bNo silver salt was added. ^c3.0 equiv of H₂O was added. ^dOnly the silver salt AgNTf₂ was used. ^eIsolated yield. L₁ = di(1-adamantyl)-2-morpholinophenylphosphine; L₂ = tris(4-methoxyphenyl)phosphine.

Silver salt alone does not efficiently catalyze the reaction (entry 9). It is noteworthy that the use of HNTf₂ as catalyst gave the same disappointing results (38% yield). Among all the different solvents and counteranion tested, AgNTf₂ proved to be the best silver salt and DCE the best solvent (see Table S1). *In fine*, the optimal result was obtained with the use of Ph₃PAuNTf₂ preformed complex (10 mol %), in the presence of water at room temperature for 14 h (entry 10). The desired compound **3a** was isolated in pure form in 74% yield. Under the optimized reaction conditions, we next examined the substrate scope, and the results are summarized in Scheme 2.

We started our study with the use of various substrates **2a-e** (R¹ = alkyl, R² = H; Scheme 2a). The products **3a,e** were isolated in 44-74% yield. Product **3f**, with a cyclohexyl-group was isolated in 64% yield. Interestingly, the methodology could be efficiently extended to the 2-aryl-vinylsulfoxide substrates **2g-i** (R¹ = aryl, R² = H). The 4-(4-methoxyphenyl)-4-oxo-2-phenylbutanal **3g** was synthesized in 77% yield on 1 mmol scale. Regardless of the electron-donating *para*-methoxy- and electronegative *p*-fluoro-substituents, the corresponding products **3h-3i** were obtained in 67-70% yields. A heteroaryl substituent such as a thiophene group is also well tolerated (compound **3j**, 65% yield). The second step was then to expand the substrate scope to various aryl alkynes **1b-h** (Scheme 2b). Seven different aryl-substituted alkynes reacted with vinyl sulfoxide **1a**. Indeed, 1,2-dimethoxybenzene, 6-methoxynaphthalen and ferrocene-alkynes reacted smoothly to give the compounds **3k-m** in up to 73% yield. Substrates possessing hydroxyl groups exhibited moderate yields in this transformation, because of the instability of both the alkyne substrates and the compounds **3n,p** under air atmosphere.

Scheme 2. Reaction Scope of the catalytic transformation for the formation of 1,4-dicarbonyl derivatives 3

Isolated yield after purification by column chromatography on silica gel. NMR yields in parentheses. ^aThe presence of water was not required to improve yields. ^bAfter 14 h reaction time, addition of chloreal, AgNO₃ and CdCO₃. (Johnphos)AuCl/AgNTf₂ catalyst, 60 h at rt. ^c(*Z*)-1-((5-Ethyl-octa-1,4-dien-4-yl)sulfinyl)-4-methylbenzene was used as the sulfoxide substrate; mixture of two isomers of **3w**, in a 1/0.8 ratio.

The use of TBS-protecting group increased the isolated yield to 60% (compound **3o**). For the alkyne partner, electron-rich alkyne would appear to be necessary, since the use of ethynylbenzene provides the corresponding product **3q** in only 20% yield. It is noteworthy that with this substrate, the use of HNTf₂ did not furnish any conversion in the desired product. In a general way, with substrates having various substituents and/or electronic effects, the *bis*(arylthio)methyl derivatives **3'** were rarely obtained in more than 10% yield and were easily separated from the target product with a simple purification step. Finally, six compounds possessing quaternary stereogenic centers were isolated in 50–70% yields (compounds **3r–w**, Scheme 2c). These last examples highlight the versatility of our methodology to access complex molecules in a single step. This 1,4-dicarbonyl derivative was next transformed into various useful disubstituted heterocycles such as pyrrole **4a**, furan **4b** and thiophene **4c** derivatives through Paal-Knorr reactions (Scheme S2).²

In the following of this work, we have considered 1-cycloalkenyl sulfoxides **5a–d**¹⁰ as potential substrates for this transformation (Scheme 3). These substrates have been scarcely used in [3,3]-sigmatropic rearrangements. Reaction of **5a–c** with **1a**, in the presence of Ph₃PAuNTf₂ (10 mol %) led to compounds **6a–c** in 67–85% yields, possessing respectively a five, six and seven-membered cyclo-alkyl-1-one backbone. These skeletons have already been synthesized, but using less direct synthetic pathways and/or more complex procedures.¹¹ 3,6-Dihydro-2*H*-thiopyran sulfoxide **5d** was also engaged in the same transformation and product **6d** was isolated in 55% yield.

Finally, the substrate scope was extended to the use of the (4-ethynylphenyl)(methyl)sulfane, to produce compounds **6e–f** in 52% yield. We next envisioned the application of our methodology to the synthesis of API's (Scheme 4). The tetrahydrocyclopenta-[*b*]pyrrole backbone is present in many bioactive molecules, as demonstrated by the known anti-inflammatory activity^{12a–b} of compound **7** or the inhibiting properties of compound **8** on the cyclooxygenase 2 (COX-2).^{12b}

Scheme 3. Au-catalyzed rearrangement of 1-cycloalkenyl sulfoxides 5a–d.

Scheme 4. Application of the methodology to the synthesis of API's

Using our methodology, we prepared easily **7** in 40% yield from diketone **6a** ($R = \text{OMe}$) and **8** from diketone **6e** ($R = \text{SMe}$, 66% yield), which was first oxidized to the corresponding sulfone. Starting from cyclohexanone **6b** ($X = \text{CH}_2$), the Paal-Knorr reaction with benzylamine gave access to a potent anti-hepatitis C virus agent **9** in 75% yield.¹³ Finally, compounds **10** and **11** possess interesting properties as phosphodiesterase (PDE7) inhibitors, involved in inflammatory processes.^{13d} They were synthesized in 56–65% yield using dimethylpropane-1,3-diamine and substrates **6d** and **6c**.

Concerning the mechanism of this transformation, the cationic Au(I)-complex activates the alkyne **1** toward the addition of the vinylsulfoxide **2**, to form the intermediate (IV) (Scheme 5a). Then, the sulfonium (IV) could perform a [3,3]-sigmatropic rearrangement, to deliver the thionium ion (V) (*path a*). After hydrolysis and protodemetalation step, the corresponding 1,4-dicarbonyls **3** are formed, in the presence of 4-methylbenzenethiol (TolSH). If the hydrolysis of (V) is not fast enough, the latter can do an addition on (V) to form the dithioacetal **3'**. Different reaction conditions were screened to *in situ* convert the small amounts of **3'** into **3**. The addition after 14 h reaction time of chloreal, AgNO_3 and CdCO_3 allowed in some cases to increase the yield of **3** (see for instance compound **3l** in Scheme 2). In a next step, we excluded a mechanism involving the *in situ* formation of α -oxo gold carbenes (VI)¹⁴ and *in situ* generation of *p*-tolyl(vinyl)sulfane (VII) as potential nucleophile (*path b*, in red and Scheme S3). Finally, enantiopure sulfoxide (*R*)-**2a** was engaged in the reaction with **1a** under the optimized reaction conditions, leading to product **3a** in 73% yield and 95% ee (Scheme 5b). Starting from (*R*)-**2c**, **3c** was isolated with 90% ee. Interestingly, this asymmetric transformation can be extended to the synthesis of enantioenriched products possessing quaternary stereogenic centers (product **3r**, 96% ee). This excellent chirality transfer from sulfur to carbon attests that the reaction mechanism evolves most probably *via* a [3,3]-sigmatropic rearrangement.^{9e}

Scheme 5. Mechanistic proposal and control experiments

In summary, we have developed an efficient synthesis of 1,4-dicarbonyl derivatives using simple alkyne substrates and vinylsulfoxides. Furthermore, this gold-catalyzed sulfonium [3,3]-sigmatropic rearrangement furnished an easy two-steps access to tetrahydrocycloalkyl[*b*]pyrroles, which is a pattern present in many bioactive molecules. Efforts are ongoing to expand the synthetic potential of this transformation, particularly in total synthesis of natural products.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We thank the CSC (China Scholarship Council) for PhD grant to W. Z. and CNRS for financial support.

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