

Hydrogen Activation by an Intramolecular Boron Lewis Acid/ Zirconocene Pair**

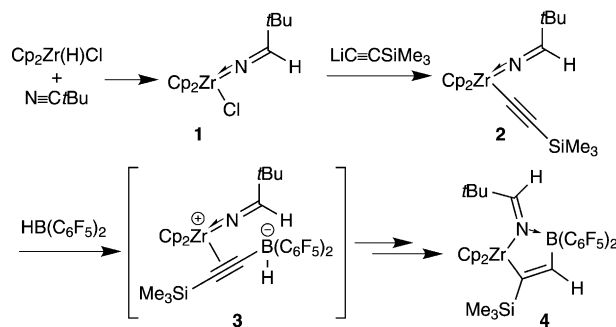
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Small-molecule activation is a very important feature in stoichiometric synthetic chemistry as well as in catalysis. The cleavage and activation of dihydrogen is a typical example.^[1] In many molecular systems hydrogen activation is carried out by oxidative addition of the H₂ molecule to a single transition-metal center, the Wilkinson catalyst being a typical example.^[2] Alternatively transition-metal centers can split dihydrogen heterolytically with the assistance of a proton accepting main-group-element Lewis base, variants of the Noyori catalysts being typical examples.^[3] We have now prepared a system featuring an inverse pair of functionalities, namely a bifunctional Group 4 metallocene/borane system where the main-group-element component may serve as a hydride acceptor. Herein we describe the synthesis of this new zirconocene/RB(C₆F₅)₂ pair and its reaction with dihydrogen under mild conditions.

We first treated the aldimido zirconocene complex **1**^[4] with trimethylsilyl ethynyl lithium. Product **2** (see Scheme 1) was isolated in over 90% yield as a yellow solid. It was characterized by X-ray diffraction (see the Supporting Information) and shown to contain a close to linear “metalla-2-aza allene” type unit.

Subsequent treatment of compound **2** with one molar equivalent of “Piers’ borane” [HB(C₆F₅)₂]^[5] gave complex **4** (isolated in over 80% yield; see Scheme 1 and Figure 1). Apparently, compound **4** is the product of a 1,1-hydroboration reaction^[6,7] of HB(C₆F₅)₂ with the pendant trimethylsilyl acetylide σ -ligand. This reaction is typically initiated by σ -alkynyl ligand transfer from zirconium to the boron Lewis acid.^[7] Hydride shift from boron to carbon followed by coordination of the imino nitrogen atom to the boron Lewis acid then straightforwardly leads to **4**.

We then investigated the formally related, but in some essential aspects decidedly different reaction of the σ -alkenyl/



Scheme 1. Preparation of complexes **2** and **4**; Cp = C₅H₅.

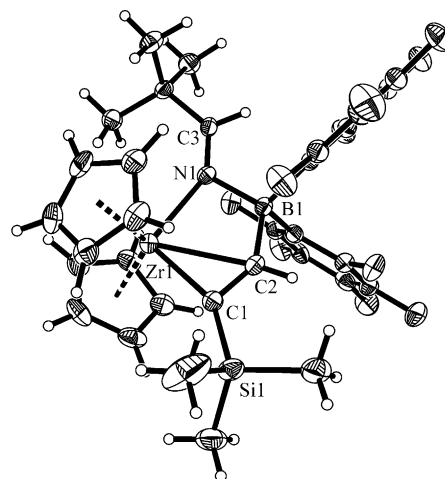


Figure 1. Molecular structure of compound **4**. Selected bond lengths [Å] and angles [°]: Zr1–C1 2.165(4), Zr1–C2 2.513(4), Zr1–N1 2.277(3), C1–C2 1.338(5), B1–C2 1.693(5), Si1–C1 1.872(4), N1–C3 1.269(4), B1–N1 1.578(5); C1–Zr1–N1 101.8(1), B1–N1–Zr1 93.2(2), C1–Zr1–C2 32.1(1), N1–Zr1–C2 69.7(1), C2–C1–Si1 121.5(3), C2–C1–Zr1 88.4(2), B1–C2–Zr1 82.5(2).^[19]

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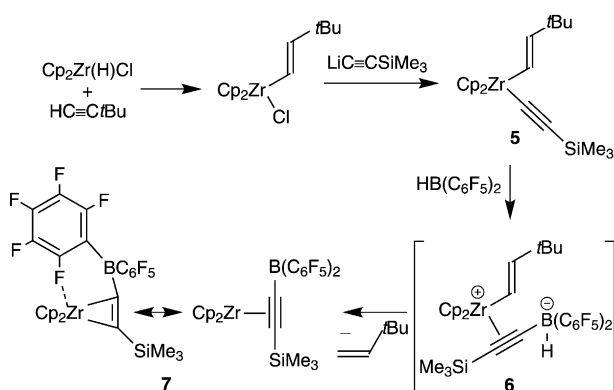
[†] X-ray crystal structure analyses

[††] Computational chemistry

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σ -alkynyl zirconocene complex **5** with HB(C₆F₅)₂.^[8] Complex **5** was prepared by hydrozirconation of *tert*-butylacetylene^[9] followed by treatment with the Li–C≡C–SiMe₃ reagent (see Scheme 2). It was then treated with one molar equivalent of HB(C₆F₅)₂ in benzene at room temperature (12 h). Workup gave the product **7** as a dark red solid in 86% yield. The X-ray crystal structure analysis revealed that one equivalent of *tert*-butylethene had apparently been eliminated during the reaction leaving the substituted 2-boryl-1-silylacetylene zirconocene complex **7** behind (see Figure 2). Both the acetylenic carbon atoms are strongly bonded to zirconium (Zr1–C1: 2.275(2), Zr1–C2: 2.390(2), C1–C2: 1.281(3) Å). The C1–



Scheme 2. Synthesis of compound **7**.

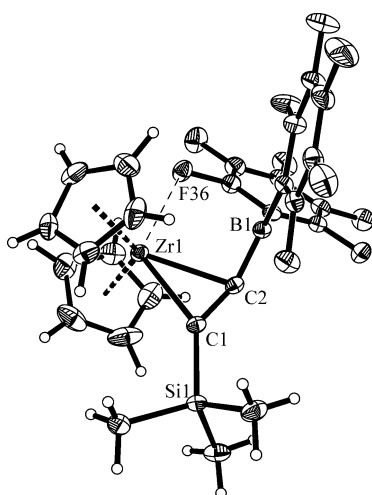


Figure 2. A view of the molecular structure of compound **7** featuring a weak Zr...F contact. Selected bond lengths [Å] and angles [°]: Zr1–C1 2.275(2), Zr1–C2 2.390(2), Si1–C1 1.857(2), Zr1–F36 2.512(1), C1–C2 1.281(3), C2–B1 1.455(3); C1–Zr1–C2 31.7(6), C1–Zr1–F36 121.5(5), B1–C2–Zr1 94.6(1).^[19]

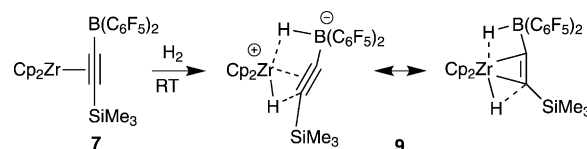
Si1 vector is bent away from the zirconocene unit (angle C2–C1–Si1: 136.3(2)°). Most remarkable is that the C2–B1 vector is slightly leaning toward the zirconocene moiety (angle C1–C2–B1: 162.61(2)°). A close inspection of the coordination sphere of the central zirconium atom revealed a weak interaction with a fluorine atom of one of the C₆F₅ groups at boron Zr1–F36: 2.512(1) Å.^[10] The Zr1...B1 separation is 2.896(2) Å.

In solution complex **7** features ¹H and ¹³C NMR signals of the Cp₂Zr core at δ = 5.42 (s, 10H) ppm and δ = 110.7 ppm, respectively. The acetylene ligand ¹³C NMR resonances occur at δ = 173.9 (≡C[Si]) and δ = 178.6 ppm ([B]C≡). Compound **7** shows a ¹¹B NMR resonance at δ = 15.5 ppm and the ²⁹Si NMR signal of the –SiMe₃ group at δ = –6.0 ppm (with a corresponding ¹H NMR singlet at δ = 0.16 ppm). In [D₈]THF solution the spectrum of compound **7** features three sharp ¹⁹F NMR signals at δ = –130.2 (4F, *ortho*), –160.9 (2F, *para*), –166.3 ppm (4F, *meta*) for the C₆F₅ substituents at boron. In the non-coordinating solvent [D₈]toluene we observed decoalescence of the averaged *o*-C₆F₅ ¹⁹F NMR resonance at δ = –145.2 ppm (4F, 363 K) to a broad “normal” *o*-C₆F₅ signal at δ = –126.7 ppm (2F, 233 K), and a broad *o*-

C₆F₅ signal at δ = –167.1 ppm (2F, 233 K; the spectra are shown in the Supporting Information). The δ = –167.1 ppm resonance is an averaged ¹⁹F NMR signal of the bridging Zr–F–C(Ar) with the remaining non-bridged *o*-F resonance of the one *o*-C₆F₅ ring. Consequently, this signal starts to decoalesce upon further lowering the temperature without reaching a fully resolved ¹⁹F spectrum (temperature limit 193 K). Finally, the pair of *m*-F atoms of the two C₆F₅ rings at boron give rise to a pair of signals at δ = –158.7, –163.2 ppm (each 2F, 193 K).

We can safely assume that the initial step of the reaction of **5** with HB(C₆F₅)₂ is again acetylide transfer from zirconium to boron^[7] (to generate **6**). In contrast to the nitrogen case described above (see Scheme 1) the intermediate **6** apparently disfavors entering into the 1,1-hydroboration route but chooses stabilization by hydride transfer and reductive coupling to eventually yield **7** and *tert*-butylethene (see Scheme 2).

Compound **7** reacted rapidly with dihydrogen at ambient conditions in benzene solution (1.5 bar H₂ pressure, RT, 15 min) to give the H₂ addition product **9** (see Scheme 3). The



Scheme 3. Preparation of the hydrogen-addition product **9**.

hydrido zirconocene/hydrido borate complex **9** was isolated as a pale yellow solid in over 80 % yield. The X-ray crystal structure analysis (Figure 3) shows the presence of a [Cp₂ZrH⁺] cation moiety to which a [HB(C₆F₅)₂][–]–C≡C–SiMe₃ anion is π-coordinated. The resulting structure features a C1–C2 bond length of 1.265(5) Å (there are two chemically equivalent crystallographically independent molecules in the

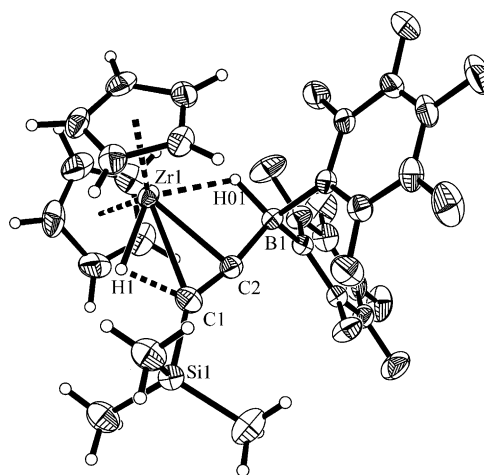


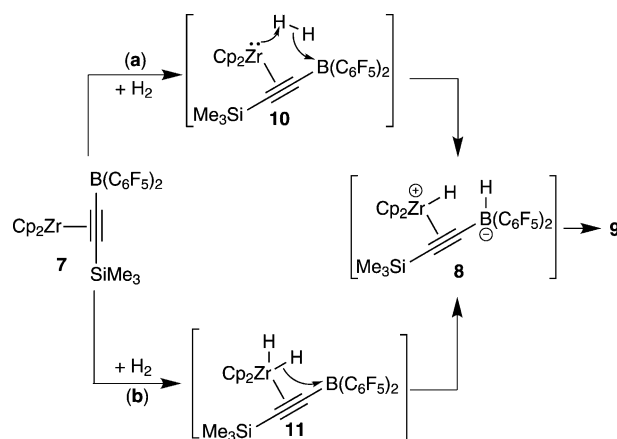
Figure 3. A projection of the molecular structure of the zwitterionic hydrogen-addition product **9**. Selected bond lengths [Å] and angles [°]: Zr1–C1 2.516(4), Zr1–C2 2.327(3), Zr1–H1 1.86(4), Zr1–H01 2.04(3), B1–C2 1.554(5), B1–H01 1.24(3), C1–C2 1.265(5), C1–H1 1.54(4); C1–Zr1–C2 29.9(1), C1–Zr1–H1 37.5(1), C2–Zr1–H01 60.3(8), C2–C1–Si1 143.2(3), C2–C1–Zr1 66.7(2), Si1–C1–Zr1 149.4(2).^[19]

crystal; the values of molecule **A** are given here) which is slightly shorter than found in its precursor **7** (see above). In **9** the C1–Si1 vector is markedly pointing away from the zirconocene unit (angle C2–C1–Si1: 143.2(3)°) and there seems to be a weak interaction of the zirconium-hydride with C1. The C2–B1 vector is slightly oriented toward the metallocene (angle C1–C2–B1: 169.8(3)°) and the hydride at B is oriented toward the Zr atom; it is probably unsymmetrically bridging. Complex **9** shows a pronouncedly unsymmetrical coordination of the substituted acetylene ligand to the [Cp₂ZrH⁺] moiety with a short Zr1–C2 bond (2.327(3) Å) and a markedly longer Zr1–C1 linkage (2.516 (4) Å), as is often observed in related alkene or alkyne units coordinated to alkyl zirconocene cations.^[11]

In solution complex **9** shows a ¹H NMR Cp singlet at δ = 4.94 (¹³C: δ = 104.1 ppm). The B–H–Zr hydrogen atom was detected at δ = –2.29 ppm, the Zr–H–C hydrogen atom at δ = 3.80 ppm (d, ²J_{HH} = 5.5 Hz).^[12,13] We observe the large chemical shift difference of the alkyne ligand carbon NMR signals ([Si]C≡: δ = 79.8 ppm (¹J_{CH} ≈ 44 Hz); ≡C[B]: δ = 151.4 ppm) that is typical for the unsymmetrical bonding situation of an acetylene ligand π-coordinated to a [Cp₂ZrR⁺] cation moiety.^[11] We also detect a single set of three ¹⁹F NMR signals at δ = –129.5 (o), –157.2 (p), and –162.9 ppm (m) with a small δ_{p,m} shift difference [¹¹B NMR: δ = –22.8 ppm (d, ¹J_{BH} ≈ 60 Hz)].

Our study shows that the borane HB(C₆F₅)₂ readily and selectively abstracts a σ-acetylide ligand from a zirconocene complex. The resulting zwitterionic intermediate then has several competing choices for stabilization. In the imido zirconocene case (**3**) the rarely observed 1,1-hydroboration reaction is preferred, whereas in the alkenyl zirconocene analogue (**6**) hydride transfer to zirconium followed by reductive coupling prevails to yield the unique product **7**. Although π-alkene and π-alkyne zirconocenes are known to sometimes exhibit a pronounced metallacyclopentene σ-complex character,^[14] the system **7** formally may be regarded as a Cp₂Zr^{II} derivative. Two pathways for the reaction of **7** with dihydrogen can thus be formulated. Pathway (b) in Scheme 4 describes a “conventional stepwise route” where both the zirconocene and the borane functionalities act separately in two consecutive steps, namely oxidative H–H addition to zirconium (to give **11**) followed by hydride abstraction by the borane to generate **8**.

DFT calculations (TPSS-D3/def2-TZVP)^[15] have been performed on the intermediates and the transition structure of H₂ cleavage in Scheme 4. We have tried to identify a product (**11**) of oxidative H₂ addition to the zirconocene complex **7** (pathway (b)) without success. However, pathway (a) in Scheme 4 has been found to be a facile and exothermic process (Figure 4 and Table 1): Side-on coordination of H₂ at the metal center is enthalpically favored by –6.1 kcal mol^{–1} at 298 K. Coordination of H₂ at the side of the boron atom (**10a**) is preferred over the alternative coordination at the silyl-substituted side (**10b**, –0.8 kcal mol^{–1}). The transition structure of H₂ cleavage (see Figure 4) does not require extensive geometrical changes of **10a** except the elongation of the H–H bond to 1.043 Å, accompanied by an almost vanishing enthalpic barrier (ΔH[‡](298 K) = 0 kcal



Scheme 4. Mechanistic pathways for the formation of zwitterionic compound **9**.

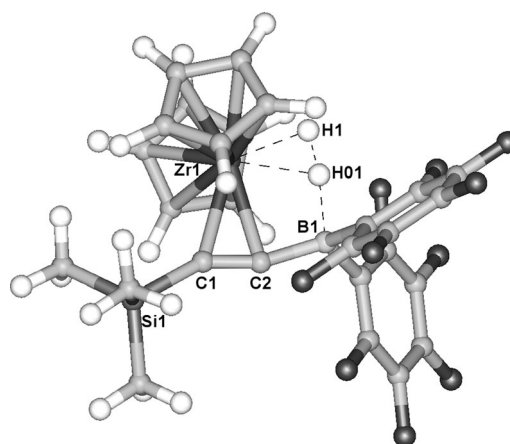


Figure 4. Calculated transition-state structure of the **7** + H₂ → **8** reaction.

mol^{–1}, ΔH[‡](220 K) = 0.1 kcal mol^{–1}) of the activation. Rearrangement of the zwitterionic intermediate **8** to its isomer **9b** is exothermic again by –4.7 kcal mol^{–1} (at 298 K). Interestingly, our DFT optimizations in the gas phase identified two isomers of **9**: Besides the structure found in the solid state (**9b**), a second, slightly more stable isomer exhibits a long H1–Zr1 and a shorter C1–H1 bond (**9a**) [see the Supporting Information].

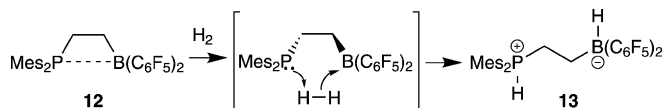
Table 1: DFT calculated (TPSS-D3/def2-TZVP) relative energies (in kcal mol^{–1}) of intermediates and the H₂ cleavage transition structure in the formation of compound **9** from **7**.^[a]

Structure	ΔE	ΔH(298 K) ^[b]	ΔH(220 K) ^[b]
10a	–9.8	–6.1	–5.9
10b	–4.9	–0.8	–0.7
TS(10a-8)	–8.8	–6.1	–5.8
8	–12.3	–8.4	–8.1
9a	–17.6	–13.3	–12.9
9b (= “9”)	–17.0	–13.1	–12.8

[a] Referenced to the sum of energies of complex **7** and H₂. [b] Includes ZPVE, H_{vib}, H_{rot}, H_{trans} at the given temperature and 1 atm.

It seems that the synergistic oxidative addition pathway (a)^[16] involving both the formally low-oxidation state zirconium and the borane Lewis acid in the actual step of heterolytic cleavage of the H–H molecule leading to **8** (and subsequently **9**) is favored over the conventional stepwise mechanism pathway (b).

It is interesting to note that the heterolytic splitting of dihydrogen by a variety of “frustrated Lewis pairs”,^[17] such as the recently reported very reactive hydrogen activating system **12** (see Scheme 5),^[18] resembles the synergistic pathway (a) in Scheme 4 conceptually. It seems that currently



Scheme 5. Formation of zwitterionic compound **13**.

examples are increasingly found where transition-metal complexes and main-group-element-derived frustrated Lewis pairs show some remarkably similar chemical behavior.

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- [19] CCDC 888636 (**1**), 888637 (**2**), 888638 (**4**), 888639 (**7**), and 888640 (**9**) contain the supplementary crystallographic data for this paper. These data can be obtained free of charge from The Cambridge Crystallographic Data Centre via www.ccdc.cam.ac.uk/data_request/cif.