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Facile, Novel Methodology for the Synthesis of Spiro[pyrrolidin-3,3'-oxindoles]: Catalyzed Ring Expansion Reactions of Cyclopropanes by Aldimines**

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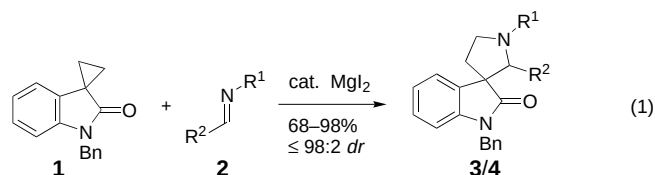
The spiro[pyrrolidin-3,3'-indole] ring system is a recurring structural motif in a number of natural products such as vinblastine and vincristine that function as cytostatics and are of prime importance in cancer chemotherapy.^[1] The related spiro[pyrrolidin-3,3'-oxindole] ring system has been identified in a number of other cytostatic alkaloids, exemplified by spirotryprostatin A and strychnophylline.^[2] Moreover, these structures embody stereochemical and structural complexities that continue to challenge the synthetic chemist.^[3,4] In combination, these factors have driven the development of novel, versatile, and efficient methods aimed at the synthesis of the spiro[pyrrolidin-3,3'-oxindole] moiety and related structures, as exemplified recently in the elegant total synthesis of spirotryprostatin by Danishefsky et al. and of aspidophytine by Corey et al.^[5] We have been interested in the development of a variety of methods for the stereocontrolled synthesis of alkaloids.^[6] Herein we report a novel

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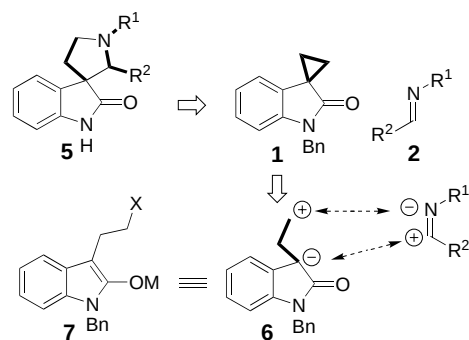
Supporting information for this article is available on the WWW under <http://www.wiley-vch.de/home/angewandte/> or from the author.

approach to the construction of the spiro[pyrrolidin-3,3'-oxindole] ring system from the reaction of spiro[cyclopropan-1,3'-oxindole] **1** and *N*-alkyl as well as *N*-arylsulfonyl aldimines **2** [Eq. (1)]. The successful implementation of the



unprecedented ring-expansion we report is made possible by careful selection of a catalyst (MgI_2) in which the Lewis acidity of the metal center (Mg^{II}) and nucleophilicity of the counterion (I^-) appear to operate in synergy.

The most common approaches to spiro[pyrrolidin-3,3'-oxindoles] commence with tryptamine derivatives and assemble a dihydro- or tetrahydro- carboline by Bischler–Napieralski or Pictet–Spengler annulation reactions.^[7, 8] Oxidative rearrangements of the resulting carbolines then furnish spirocyclic pyrrolidine-3,3'-oxindoles.^[4, 8] We envisioned a more direct, alternate bond-construction strategy to these ring systems. In our retrosynthetic analysis, **5** is disconnected to cyclopropane **1** and aldimine **2** (Scheme 1). As depicted for

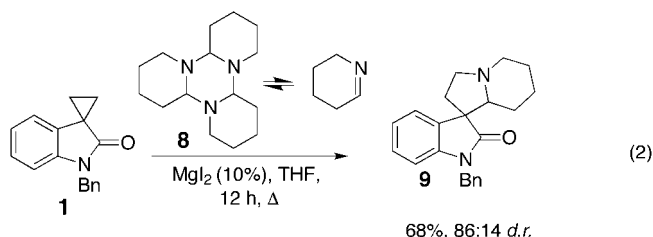


Scheme 1. Retrosynthetic and charge affinity analysis of the spiro[pyrrolidin-3,3'-oxindoles] ring system.

synthon **6**, the charge-affinity pattern of the cyclopropane complements that of an aldimine.^[9] The dissonant charge-affinity pattern of cyclopropanes is manifest in their well-known reactivity, when substituted with electron-withdrawing groups, to serve as homo-Michael acceptors.^[10] Pioneering work by Danishefsky et al. had established the participation of doubly activated cyclopropanes in tandem reactions resulting in ring formation.^[11] By contrast, the strategy depicted in Scheme 1 necessitates nucleophilic ring opening of a singly activated ring system by a weakly nucleophilic aldimine. We speculated that the use of a catalyst exhibiting dual electrophilic and nucleophilic activation would enable the desired reaction. In this regard the selection of a Lewis acidic metal possessing nucleophilic counterions could efficiently lead to ring-opened products **7** possessing the same reactivity pattern of synthon **6**.^[12] As a caveat, the application of dual nucleophilic/electrophilic catalysts to the reaction of imines

and spiro-fused cyclopropanes would lead to the desired spiro[pyrrolidin-3,3'-oxindoles] provided competitive intramolecular cyclization (by O-alkylation) is precluded.

The implementation of the plan depicted in Scheme 1 as a practical alternative to existing strategies to the title ring systems, in part, rests on the accessibility of the starting material (**1**). This oxindole was easily prepared on multigram scale from the known *N*-benzyloxindole and 1,2-dibromoethane (NaH , DMF, 23°C , 73 % yield).^[13] In our initial study, **1** and **8**^[14] were allowed to react in the presence of a number of metal catalysts (e.g. MgBr_2 , $\text{Mg}(\text{OTf})_2$, ZnI_2 , $\text{Zn}(\text{OTf})_2$, LiI (Tf = trifluoromethanesulfonate)), whereupon the use of MgI_2 was identified as optimal [Eq. (2)].^[15] Thus, treatment of **1** and **8** in THF at 125°C in the presence of 5 % MgI_2 gave tetracyclic adduct **9** in 68 % yield as an 86:14 mixture of diastereomers.



The scope of this reaction was explored subsequently by examining aliphatic and aromatic *N*-allyl aldimines along with *N*-*p*-arylsulfonyl aldimines [Eq. (3), (Table 1)]. Treatment of **1** with catalytic amounts of MgI_2 (10 mol %) in THF at 60 – 80°C afforded spiro[pyrrolidin-3,3'-oxindoles] in good yields

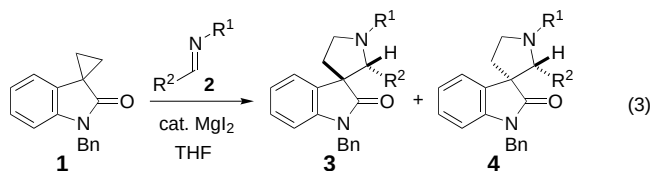


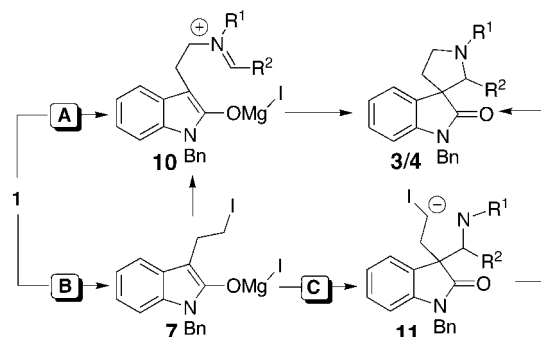
Table 1. Reaction of spiro[cyclopropan-1,3'-oxindole] **1** with aldimines.^[a]

Entry	R ¹	R ²	Yield [%]	3:4
1	–CH ₂ CH ₂ CH ₂ CH ₂ –		68	86:14
2	Allyl	Et	55	91:1
3	Allyl	Me ₂ CH	83	80:20
4	Allyl	Ph	99	79:21
5	Bu	Ph	97	81:19
6	<i>p</i> -TolSO ₂	Ph	97	91:9
7	<i>p</i> -TolSO ₂	2-Me-C ₆ H ₄	89	98:2
8	<i>p</i> -TolSO ₂	4-Me-C ₆ H ₄	96	64:36
9	<i>p</i> -TolSO ₂	2-Br-C ₆ H ₄	82	98:2
10	<i>p</i> -TolSO ₂	4-Br-C ₆ H ₄	92	82:18
11	<i>p</i> -TolSO ₂	4-CF ₃ -C ₆ H ₄	97	84:16
12	<i>p</i> -TolSO ₂	4-OMe-C ₆ H ₄	75	67:33
13	<i>p</i> -TolSO ₂	Furyl	97	85:15
14	<i>p</i> -TolSO ₂	PhCH=CH	62	74:16
15	<i>p</i> -TolSO ₂	PhCH=C(Me)	55	52:48
16	<i>p</i> -TolSO ₂	<i>i</i> Pr ₃ SiC≡C	77	98:2

[a] The assignment of the configuration of the products was established by ¹H NMR spectroscopy and correlation to the major product of entry 5, for which an X-ray structure was obtained (see Supporting Information). The diastereomeric ratios for entries 1–5 were determined from the mass of the separated, purified products. The diastereomeric ratios reported for entries 6–16 were obtained by HPLC analysis.

and useful diastereoselectivities for both classes of electron-rich and electron-deficient aldimines. The *N*-arylsulfonyl imines reacted smoothly at 60 °C, while the more electron-rich *N*-allyl imines required reaction temperatures of 80 °C for product formation. We have observed that the stereoselectivity could be improved by appropriate selection of the *N*-alkyl protecting group on the oxindole or the *N*-arylsulfonyl group of the aldimine. In this regard, the diastereoselectivity of the reaction of the *N*-tosyl imine of *p*-tolualdehyde and **1** (entry 8, 64:36 *dr*) could be improved to 71:29 by utilizing the *N*-benzhydryl rather than a *N*-benzyl protected oxindole. Moreover, the use of the *N*- β -naphthylsulfonyl aldimine derivative of *p*-tolualdehyde with **1** affords adduct in 89:11 *dr*.

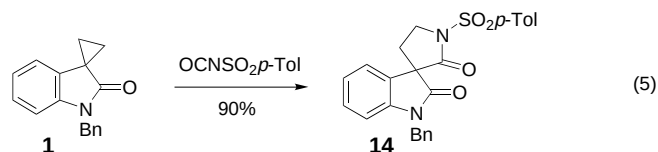
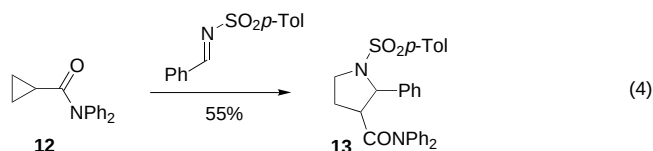
For the process we have delineated, three mechanistic pathways may be postulated that differ in the sequence of C–N and C–C bond-formation and in the nucleophilic ring-opening step (Scheme 2). In the first pathway (A, Scheme 2), the imine nitrogen participates directly in the nucleophilic



Scheme 2. Potential mechanistic pathways leading to the formation of the pyrrolidine ring.

cleavage of the cyclopropyl ring, generating iminium ion **10** which can undergo ring closure (**1** $\rightarrow$ **10** $\rightarrow$ **3/4**). In the second pathway (B, Scheme 2), iodide effects ring opening of the cyclopropane furnishing enolate **7**. The reactivity of this ambiphilic species may be manifest in two distinct ways. *N*-Alkylation of the aldimine furnishes **10** in a route that subsequently converges with A (**1** $\rightarrow$ **7** $\rightarrow$ **10** $\rightarrow$ **3/4**). Alternatively, reaction of enolate **7** with the starting imine furnishes **11** which can in turn undergo alkylative cyclization C (**1** $\rightarrow$ **7** $\rightarrow$ **11** $\rightarrow$ **3/4**). Although a mechanistic study of the process is ongoing, a number of observations lead us to prefer B and C for *N*-allyl and *N*-arylsulfonyl imines. In this regard, the fact that both *N*-alkyl and *N*-arylsulfonyl aldimines are substrates in the reaction argues against the nitrogen moiety functioning directly as a nucleophile as depicted for A. Moreover, when Mg(OTf)₂ was employed the starting materials were recovered unchanged and no product formation could be observed. These results strongly implicate a critical role for the halide in the course of the reaction (cf. **7** and **11**).

Preliminary observations suggest that the catalyzed ring expansion may be general, extending in scope beyond the substrates described above. Carboxamide **12** undergoes ring expansion in the presence of MgI₂ to give **13** [Eq. (4)]. Additionally, the reaction of **1** and *N*-*p*-tolylsulfonyl isocyanate furnishes **14** [Eq. (5)].^[16]



We have described novel methodology which provides direct access to spiro[pyrrolidin-3,3'-oxindoles], a ring system found in many natural products with intriguing biological activity. The reaction process employs readily available spiro[cyclopropan-1,3'-oxindoles] and *N*-alkyl or *N*-arylsulfonyl imines. The successful implementation of the ring expansion strategy involving moderately activated cyclopropanes and aldimines is enabled by selection of MgI₂ as a catalyst possessing dual nucleophilic and electrophilic activity. The observation that simple, singly activated cyclopropanes also participate suggests that the process may be considerably generalized. Further extensions to other reacting partners as well as the use of optically active Mg complexes for the asymmetric synthesis of chiral spiro[pyrrolidin-3,3'-oxindoles] are topics of current investigation and will be reported in due course.

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Specific RNA Dinucleotide Cleavage by a Synthetic Calix[4]arene-Based Trinuclear Metallo(III)-phosphodiesterase**

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Dedicated to Professor H. C. Beyerman on the occasion of his 80th birthday

Phosphodiesterase enzymes such as nuclease P1 use three divalent metal ions (e.g. Zn^{II}) in the active site to catalyze the hydrolytic cleavage of phosphate diester bonds in nucleotides like RNA and DNA.^[1] Synthetic catalysts that cleave RNA at

specific sites are of interest, for example, for future application in gene technology.^[2, 3] There are several mononuclear complexes of trivalent metal ions^[3, 4] (e.g. lanthanide(III) and Co^{III}) that efficiently cleave RNA because they are strong Lewis acids. According to previous studies, mononuclear and even dinuclear Zn^{II} complexes^[2, 5, 6] generally exhibit only a moderate catalytic activity in RNA cleavage. Recently, we have shown that synthetic dinuclear and trinuclear^[7] metallo-phosphodiesterases based on calix[4]arenes^[8] exhibit a very high catalytic activity in the transesterification of the RNA model substrate 2-hydroxypropyl-*p*-nitrophenyl phosphate (HPNP).^[6, 9, 10]

Here we report that **1**- Zn_3 efficiently catalyzes the cleavage of RNA dinucleotides (3',5'-NpN) by the cooperative action of the Zn^{II} centers, with high rate enhancement and significant nucleobase specificity. The heterotrinuclear complex **1**- Zn_2Cu is even more active; it mimics phosphodiesterases with a heterotrinuclear metal cluster including a Zn^{II} center in the active site.^[1]

Catalytic cleavage of the RNA dinucleotides 3',5'-NpN (0.09 mM) by the complexes **1**- M_3 (0.9 mM) was carried out in 35% EtOH/20 mM aqueous HEPES buffer^[11] at $50^\circ C$ and monitored by HPLC. The formation of cyclic ribonucleoside monophosphates (2',3'-cNMP) and the corresponding nucleosides show that the RNA dinucleotides are cleaved by intramolecular transesterification of the hydroxyl group at the 2'-position.^[12] The catalytic activity of **1**- Zn_3 was measured for a series of RNA dinucleotides, namely, GpG, UpU, CpC, GpA, ApG, and ApA (Table 1). The trinuclear complex **1**- Zn_3

Table 1. Observed pseudo-first-order rate constants ($k_{obs}/10^5 s^{-1}$) for the cleavage of RNA dinucleotides.^[a]

Substrate	1 - Zn_3	1 - Zn_2Cu	1 - Cu_3	2 - Zn_2	3 - Zn
GpG	72	88	28	0.45	— ^[b]
UpU ^[c]	8.5	13	1.2	0.45	0.56
CpC	6.1	7.1	1.9	0.58	— ^[b]
GpA	4.6	5.9	— ^[b]	— ^[b]	— ^[b]
ApG	2.7	2.4	— ^[b]	— ^[b]	— ^[b]
ApA ^[d]	0.44	0.46	0.47	0.28	0.31

[a] In 35% EtOH/20 mM HEPES (pH 8.0) at $50^\circ C$; [substrate] = 0.09 mM; **1**- Zn_3 = **1**- Cu_3 = **2**- Zn_2 = 0.9 mM; **1**- Zn_2Cu is a statistical mixture of **1** = 0.9 mM, **2** = 1.8 mM, and **3** = 2.7 mM; [Cu] = 0.9 mM; ^[15] **3**- Zn = 2.7 mM. [b] Not determined. [c] $k_{uncat} \approx 9.8 \times 10^{-9} s^{-1}$.^[5b] [d] $k_{uncat} \approx 1.7 \times 10^{-9} s^{-1}$.^[13]

exhibits a very high catalytic activity; rate accelerations over the uncatalyzed reactions are on the order of 10^4 – 10^5 .^[5b, 13] Moreover, **1**- Zn_3 is a genuine catalyst that exhibits turnover. A threefold excess of UpU is completely converted, while a reference solution of UpU without catalyst is unaffected. Surprisingly, for different nucleobases in the dinucleotides large differences in rate were observed: GpG $\gg$ UpU $\gg$ ApA (see below).

The dependence of rate on the pH value for the **1**- Zn_3 -catalyzed cleavage of UpU shows a bell-shaped curve with an optimum at pH 8. The apparent pK_a of a Zn^{II} -bound water molecule in **3**- Zn is 7.9;^[9] the value is lower for **1**- Zn_3 due to hydrophobic and cooperative effects.^[9, 10] Therefore, it is likely that at pH 8 one or two Zn^{II} centers in **1**- Zn_3 are coordinated by a hydroxide ion. Furthermore, the activity reaches a

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