

A New Method for the Synthesis of Heptamethine Cyanine Dyes: Synthesis of New Near-Infrared Fluorescent Labels

Narasimhachari Narayanan*,† and Gabor Patonay

Department of Chemistry, Georgia State University,
Atlanta, Georgia 30303

Received January 3, 1995*

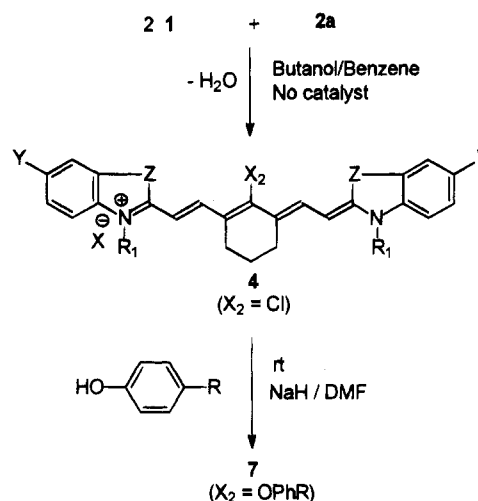
A new uncatalyzed synthesis of heptamethine cyanine dyes is described. The reaction involves heating a mixture of *N*-alkyl-substituted quaternary salts derived from 2,3,3-trimethylindole or 2,3,3-trimethylbenzindole and 2-chloro-1-formyl-3-(hydroxymethylene)cyclohex-1-ene to reflux in a mixture of 1-butanol and benzene (7:3) as solvent. No catalyst is used, and water is removed as an azeotrope. The resulting chloro compounds possess strong absorption and fluorescence properties in the near-infrared region and are converted to dyes bearing reactive functionalities such as hydroxy and isothiocyanate groups useful as fluorescent tags for nucleic acids and proteins. Several symmetric and nonsymmetric dyes have been synthesized in high yields.

Introduction

Near infrared (near-IR) dyes are important as sensitizers in several applications^{1–3} such as silver halide photography, laser dyes, pleochroic dyes for LC displays, xerography, cosmetic ingredients, and dyes for polymers. Polymethine cyanine dyes are increasingly used as fluorescent tags in DNA sequencing,^{4,5} immunoassay,^{6–8} and flow cytometry.^{9–11} The advantages of the near-IR dyes in bioanalytical methods^{12,13} include their strong spectral properties in the longer wavelength region (700–1000 nm) with minimal background from biomolecules and high sensitivity.

Cyanine dyes have traditionally been synthesized by a condensation reaction between a heterocyclic base containing an activated methyl group and an unsaturated bisaldehyde or its equivalent, usually as Schiff base in the presence of a catalyst. Sodium acetate has most frequently^{14–16} been used as a catalyst. In addition to ethanol, solvents such as acetic acid and/or acetic anhydride have also been commonly used as in the synthesis

Scheme 1



of heptamethine pyrylium dyes.¹⁷ Although this procedure is simple and straight forward, it suffers from several disadvantages. The purification of the product is very difficult because of the side products due to aniline; the use of a catalyst interferes with the purity of the product, as often noticed in NMR and IR, and warrants repeated purification; the reaction is generally faster and cannot be employed for the synthesis of nonsymmetric dyes in one pot; scaling up of the reaction products to larger gram quantities leads to several additional problems resulting in poor quality and yield.

Results and Discussion

In this paper, we describe a new and simple method for the uncatalyzed synthesis of heptamethine cyanine dyes which are potential precursors for making functionalized near-infrared labels. This approach involves heating a mixture of a quaternary salt of a heterocyclic base containing an activated methyl group **1** (2 equiv) and 2-chloro-1-formyl-3-(hydroxymethylene)cyclohex-1-ene (**2**), an unsaturated bisaldehyde^{17,18} derived from cyclohexanone (**1** equiv) to reflux in a mixture of 1-butanol and

* Present address: LI-COR, Inc., 4421 Superior Street, Lincoln, NE 68504.

† Abstract published in *Advance ACS Abstracts*, March 20, 1995.

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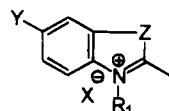
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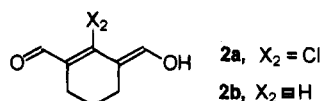
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Quaternary Salts 1

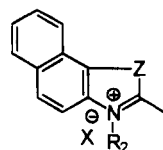
	Y	Z	R ₁ (X)
1a	H	CMe ₂	(CH ₂) ₄ SO ₃
1b	H	CMe ₂	CH ₂ CH ₃ (I)
1c	H	CMe ₂	(CH ₂) ₃ NH ₂ ·HBr(Br)
1d	OCH ₃	CMe ₂	(CH ₂) ₄ SO ₃
1e	OCH ₃	CMe ₂	CH ₂ CH ₃ (I)
1f	H	O	CH ₂ CH ₃ (I)
1g	H	S	CH ₂ CH ₃ (I)



Bisaldehydes 2

2a, X₂ = Cl
2b, X₂ = H

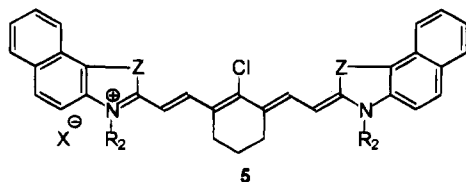
benzene (7:3) as solvent, without using any catalyst (Scheme 1). The water formed during the reaction is removed as an azeotrope by a Dean–Stark condenser. The reactions generally require 3–12 h for completion. The resulting product is generally pure after simple filtration of the dye from the crude reaction mixture followed by washings with diethyl ether. In some cases further purification was not necessary, as revealed by proton NMR, while in other cases a flash chromatographic filtration would be sufficient for better purity. A wide range of 2-methyl-1-alkyl quaternary salts of various indole 1 and benzindole derivatives 3 undergo this reaction in a facile manner to form the corresponding symmetric dyes (Tables 1 and 2) in high yields. It seemed



Quaternary Salts 3

	Z	R ₂ (X)
3a	CMe ₂	(CH ₂) ₄ SO ₃
3b	CMe ₂	CH ₂ CH ₃ (I)
3c	CMe ₂	(CH ₂) ₃ NH ₂ ·HBr(Br)
3d	CMe ₂	Phthalimidobutyl(Br)
3e	O	CH ₂ CH ₃ (I)
3f	S	CH ₂ CH ₃ (I)

initially that the chlorine in the bisaldehyde 2a was important for making the aldehydic protons acidic and reactive in the absence of a catalyst. However, the smooth reaction of the bisaldehyde 2b¹⁹ (which lacks the Cl) with quaternary salt 3b to form the dye 5f (Table 2)



5

proved that the Cl was not needed for the bisaldehyde

Table 1. Synthesis of Symmetric Chloro Dyes 4 from Quaternary Salts 1

product	Z	Y	R ₁ (X)	t (h)	yield (%)	abs max (nm) ^a
4a	CMe ₂	H	(CH ₂) ₄ SO ₃ (H)	3	93	782
4b	CMe ₂	H	C ₂ H ₅ (I)	4	92	778
4c	CMe ₂	H	(CH ₂) ₃ NH ₂ ·HBr(Br)	9	93 ^b	782
4d	CMe ₂	OCH ₃	(CH ₂) ₄ SO ₃ (H)	16	72	809
4e	CMe ₂	OCH ₃	C ₂ H ₅ (I)	12	80	804
4f	CMe ₂	H	(CH ₂) ₃ NCS(Br)	3	80	787
4g	O	H	C ₂ H ₅ (I)	6	87	718
4h	S	H	C ₂ H ₅ (I)	6	92	798

^a Measured in MeOH. ^b Represents crude yield and converted to 4f.

Table 2. Synthesis of Symmetric Chloro Dyes 5 from Quaternary Salts 3

product	R ₂ (X) ^c	t (h)	yield (%)	abs max (nm) ^b
5a	(CH ₂) ₄ SO ₃ (H)	8	82	822
5b	C ₂ H ₅ (I)	6	95	816
5c	(CH ₂) ₃ NH ₂ ·HBr(Br)	7	95 ^c	820
5d	C ₂ H ₅ (I)	8	92	821
5e	(CH ₂) ₃ NCS(Br)	6	86	822
5f	C ₂ H ₅ (I) ^d	8	88	783
5g	C ₂ H ₅ (I)	2	75	748
5h	C ₂ H ₅ (I)	8	85	830

^a Z = CMe₂ except 5g where Z = O and 5h where Z = S. ^b Measured in MeOH. ^c Represents crude yield and converted to 5e. ^d Cl = H.

to be reactive to undergo this reaction, especially without a catalyst. In contrast to the Schiff base method, the reaction of 1a and 2a in refluxing ethanol with sodium acetate as catalyst did not form any product over three days, suggesting that the reaction involves an equilibrium step.

An important feature of the current method is that the slower rate of the reaction allows one to prepare nonsymmetric dyes derived from two different heterocycles in a single pot in a fairly good yield. The syntheses of these nonsymmetric dyes become important when changes in the spectral and physical properties of the dyes are desired for specific application and compatibility with instrumentation. These changes can be incorporated by appropriately modifying the structural design of the dyes. Reports in the literature concerning the syntheses of nonsymmetric dyes reveal that they always involve two steps.^{20–22} However, they do not limit the synthesis to the formation of pure nonsymmetric dye alone. Symmetric dyes have always been the byproducts. The new method provides an easy procedure for the synthesis of nonsymmetric dyes. For instance, the chloro dye 6a is obtained by first heating a mixture of 3c and 2a (1:1) to reflux in butanol–benzene (7:3) with removal of water for 2 h (Scheme 2). The second quaternary salt of 1a is then added and refluxing resumed for 12 h (Table 3). The nonsymmetric dye 6a is the major product, although the symmetric dyes 4a and 5c have also been isolated which are easily separable by chromatography on silica gel.

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cyanine dye intermediates (dye series 4, 5, and 6) which could be easily derivatized for applications in fluorescent labeling of biologically important molecules. The salient features associated with the new method are summarized below. A fewer number of steps are involved in the synthetic sequences. No catalyst is used which results in enhanced purity and high yields. Easy purification is accomplished by simple chromatographic techniques. The procedure is excellent for the synthesis of nonsymmetric dyes in one pot. Protection and deprotection steps are not involved. The synthetic procedure is reproducible and easy to scale up for larger amounts for both symmetric and non-symmetric dyes. Scaling up of the reaction has been carried out on 5 g quantities for the functional dyes 7a and 8a without any difficulty.

A limitation to this method, however, was observed in the reaction of quaternary salts of quinoline with 2a. 1-Ethyl-2-methylquinolinium iodide gave only about 15% of the symmetric dye over a prolonged reaction time while, the 1-ethyl-4-methylquinolinium iodide did not undergo this reaction at all.

Experimental Section

General. All starting materials for the dye synthesis were obtained from Aldrich Chemical Co. except those for 1,1,2-trimethyl-1*H*-benzindole and 2-methylnaphtho[2,1-*d*]thiazole which were obtained from Kodak. UV-vis-near-IR spectra were measured in methanol. IR spectra were run as CHCl₃ film on a KBr plate or as a KBr pellet. The IR absorption frequencies are reported in reciprocal centimeters. Proton NMR spectra were run at 400 MHz with TMS as an internal standard. The chemical shifts are reported in ppm on δ scale. Elemental analyses were performed at Atlantic Microlabs, Norcross, GA. Mass spectral measurements were made at Georgia Institute of Technology. The reported yields are for pure and isolated compounds. On heating these compounds undergo partial decomposition around 150 °C and then melting is observed above 200 °C.

Preparation of Quaternary Salts (1 and 3). Three different methods were used depending upon the heterocyclic base and the alkyl halides. Reactions were generally carried out in 10 mmol scale.

Method 1, Used for 1a, 1d, and 3a. 1,4-Butanesultone⁷ was mixed with the heterocyclic base in 3:1 molar ratio in anhydrous 1,2-dichlorobenzene and heated for 12 h at 120 °C. The pure salt was obtained by repeated crystallization from acetone and methanol.

Method 2, Used for 1b, 1e-g, 3b, and 3e. Ethyl iodide was mixed with the base in a 5:1 ratio in dry acetonitrile and heated at reflux for 15 h under N₂. The salt was obtained as a solid which was filtered and crystallized from ether and acetone.

Method 3, Used for 1c, 3c, and 3d. Representative Procedure for 3c. A mixture of 2.10 g (10 mmol) of 2,3,3-trimethylbenzoinidole and 2.30 g (10 mmol) of 3-bromopropylamine hydrobromide was heated in a pressure tube at 140 °C, in an oil bath with stirring for 10 h. On cooling the melt, the product was a hard solid cake which was scraped off the tube and washed with a mixture of ether and CHCl₃. The resulting slurry was filtered and dried and was used in the subsequent reactions without further purification. Yield: 4.20 g (93%). ¹H NMR(DMSO-*d*₆): δ 1.79 (s, 6H); 2.97 (s, 3H); 2.25 (quintet, 2H); 3.17 (m, 2H); 4.71 (t, 2H, *J* = 7.2 Hz); 7.74 (t, 1H, *J* = 8.0 Hz); 7.88 (t, 1H, *J* = 8.0 Hz); 7.99 (d, 1H, *J* = 8.0 Hz); 8.24 (d, 1H, *J* = 8.0 Hz); 8.31 (d, 1H, *J* = 8.0 Hz); 8.37 (d, 1H, *J* = 8.0 Hz).

Preparation of Bisaldehydes. The bisaldehyde 2a was synthesized by the reported procedure.¹⁷ ¹H NMR (DMSO-*d*₆): δ 1.58 (quintet, 2H, *J* = 6.0 Hz); 2.37 (t, 4H, *J* = 6.0 Hz); 10.85 (s, 1H). The bisaldehyde 2b was synthesized by a method analogous to that reported.¹⁹

Preparation of Symmetric Chloro Dyes 4 and 5. Representative Procedure for 4a: Quaternary salt 1a (1.18 g, 4 mmol) and 0.345 g (2 mmol) of bisaldehyde 2a were dissolved in 150 mL of a mixture of 1-butanol and benzene (7:3) in a flask equipped with a Dean-Stark trap. The mixture was heated at reflux with constant stirring and the water formed was collected in the trap. The progress of the reaction was monitored by the Vis-near-IR spectrometry. The product had a sharp peak at 782 nm. After 3 h, the reaction was cooled to rt, and the solvents were removed in vacuo. The residue was washed with ether to give the product 99%. The purity of the crude product was satisfactory by proton NMR. However, the crude was purified by column chromatography on silica gel, using CHCl₃-methanol gradient, from 90% through 50%. The fractions with absorption maxima at 782 nm were collected. Removal of solvent and drying under vacuum afforded pure crystalline material (1.35 g, 93%). ¹H NMR (DMSO-*d*₆): δ 1.67 (s, 12H); 1.74-1.83 (m, 14H); 2.73 (t, 4H, *J* = 5.6 Hz); 4.24 (t, 4H, *J* = 6.8 Hz); 6.40 (d, 2H, *J* = 14.0 Hz); 7.28 (t, 2H, *J* = 7.6 Hz); 7.43 (t, 2H, *J* = 7.2 Hz); 7.5 (d, 2H, *J* = 7.6 Hz); 7.63 (d, 2H, *J* = 7.2 Hz); 8.28 (d, 2H, *J* = 14.0 Hz). MS: 727(100). HRFAB: calcd 727.2642341; obsd, 727.262207; (Δm = 0.00202 mu). Elem. Anal. Calculated for C₃₈H₄₇ClN₂O₆S₂. (Found): C, 59.10(59.34); H, 6.73(6.56); N, 3.63(3.61); Cl, 4.60(4.60); S, 8.30(8.01).

Conversion of Symmetric and Nonsymmetric Chloro Dyes to the Phenoxy Derivative. Representative Procedure for 7a from 4a. Preparation of 4-isothiocyanato phenol. To 4-aminophenol (5 mmol) in a mixture of CHCl₃ (30 mL) and aqueous Na₂CO₃ (1 g in 40 mL of water) was added thiophosgene (1.15 g, 0.76 mL, 10 mmol) with stirring at rt. After 3 h, the organic layer was washed and the solvent was removed. Purification of the crude residue on a silica gel column (CH₂Cl₂ and petroleum ether 3:1) furnished the pure product in 65% yield. ¹H NMR(DMSO-*d*₆): δ 6.80 (d, 2H, *J* = 8.8 Hz); 7.28 (d, 2H, *J* = 8.8 Hz); 10.00 (s, 1H). IR: 2100.

To a slurry of 65 mg of NaH (80% in mineral oil, washed with hexane, 2.10 mmol) and 5 mL of anhydrous DMF, under N₂, was added a solution of 320 mg (2.15 mmol) of 4-isothiocyanatophenol dissolved in 10 mL of DMF at 0 °C with stirring. After 30 min the reaction was allowed to warm to rt. The solution was added to the dye 4a (1.35 g, 1.86 mmol) in 50 mL of DMF at rt with stirring under N₂. The reaction was complete in 15 min. After 30 min the reaction was quenched with dry ice. DMF was removed in vacuo keeping the water bath temperature below 40 °C. The residue was washed with ether and dried. Chromatographic separation on a silica gel column eluting with 10-50% methanol-CHCl₃ gradient furnished the pure product. After solvent removal and vacuum drying 1.44 g (90%) of pure dye was obtained. ¹H NMR (DMSO-*d*₆): δ 1.32 (s, 12H, CMe₂); 1.76 (m, 8H); 1.96 (quintet, 2H); 2.78 (t, 4H, *J* = 7.2 Hz); 4.17 (t, 4H, *J* = 7.2 Hz); 6.27 (d, 2H, *J* = 14 Hz); 7.21 (t, 4H, *J* = 7.2 Hz); 7.28 (d, 2H, *J* = 8.8 Hz); 7.37 (d, 2H, *J* = 8.0 Hz); 7.42 (t, 2H, *J* = 8.0 Hz); 7.52 (d, 2H, *J* = 8.0 Hz); 7.75 (d, 2H, *J* = 14.4 Hz). IR: 2096. MS: 841(M⁺ - Na). Elem. Anal. Calculated for C₄₅H₅₀N₃O₇S₃Na·2.5H₂O (MW 908) (Found): C, 59.47 (59.56); H, 6.06 (6.13); N, 4.63 (4.63); S, 10.57 (10.47); Na, 2.53 (2.55).

Preparation of Nonsymmetric Chloro Dyes 6. Representative Procedure for 6a. To 0.428 g (1 mmol) of quaternary salt 3c and 0.173 g (1 mmol) of bisaldehyde 2a was added 75 mL of 1-butanol and benzene (7:3). The contents were heated at reflux with stirring for 2 h after which the heating was discontinued and allowed to cool to rt. A 0.295 g (1 mmol) portion of the quaternary salt 1a, dissolved as a slurry in 10 mL of the above solvent mixture, was added to the reaction mixture. The heating was resumed at reflux for 10 h with the removal of water. Solvents were distilled off in vacuo and the resulting residue was washed with 20 mL of ether. The crude material was filtered and dried to afford 850 mg (99%).

Conversion of Primary Amine Salt to Isothiocyanate. Representative procedure for 6e from 6a. A 640 mg portion of the crude dye 6a was dissolved in 40 mL of CHCl₃. A solution of 600 mg of Na₂CO₃ in 20 mL of water was added to the dye, and the heterogeneous mixture was stirred at rt.

After 10 min, 0.2 mL of thiophosgene was added with stirring. The reaction was allowed to proceed for 2 h after which it was worked up by extraction into CHCl_3 . Removal of solvent furnished a crude mixture of dyes, which had λ_{max} at 796 nm. The crude was separated by column chromatography on silica gel eluting with methanol- CHCl_3 gradient from 1:9 to 2:3. The fractions having the same λ_{max} were collected together and solvent evaporated. On drying under vacuum, 0.294 mg of the pure product was obtained (λ_{max} 802 nm, 50%). ^1H NMR ($\text{DMSO}-d_6$): δ 1.69 (s, 6H); 1.76 (m, 4H, $J = 6.8$ Hz); 1.98 (s, 6H); 1.85–1.89 (m, 4H); 2.15 (quintet, 2H); 2.77 (t, 4H, $J = 7.2$ Hz); 3.89 (t, 2H, $J = 7.2$ Hz); 4.25 (t, 2H, $J = 6.8$ Hz); 4.40 (t, 2H, $J = 6.8$ Hz); 6.31 (d, 1H, $J = 14.0$ Hz); 6.50 (d, 1H, $J = 14.4$ Hz); 8.09 (d, 1H, $J = 14.0$ Hz); 8.11 (d, 1H, $J = 14.4$ Hz); 7.33 (t, 1H, $J = 7.6$ Hz); 7.46–7.57 (m, 3H); 7.63–7.67 (m, 2H); 7.75 (d, 1H, $J = 8.8$ Hz); 8.28–8.36 (m, 3H). IR: 2109. Elem.

Anal. Calculated for $\text{C}_{42}\text{H}_{47}\text{BrClN}_3\text{O}_3\text{S}_2$ (Found): C, 61.43 (61.41); H, 5.73 (5.76); N, 5.12 (5.05); S, 7.80 (7.72); halogen as Cl, 8.60 (8.70).

Acknowledgment. The financial support for this work from National Institute of Health (RO1 Al28903) is gratefully acknowledged.

Supplementary Material Available: Complete characterization data for all additional new compounds reported (10 pages). This material is contained in libraries on microfiche, immediately follows this article in the microfilm version of the journal, and can be ordered from the ACS; see any current masthead page for ordering information.

JO9500040