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Total Synthesis of (+)-Complanadine A Using an Iridium-Catalyzed Pyridine C-H Functionalization

Daniel F. Fischer and Richmond Sarpong^{*}

Department of Chemistry, University of California, Berkeley, California 94720

Abstract

Total synthesis of the *Lycopodium* alkaloid complanadine A, which is an unsymmetrical dimer of lycodine, was achieved by exploiting a common tetracyclic precursor. Key to the success of the synthesis was the development of a late-stage site-selective C-H functionalization of a pyridine moiety to arrive at a key boronic ester intermediate.

The *Lycopodium* alkaloids are among the most skeletally diverse families of natural products that have been isolated to date.¹ In addition to their complex architecture, many of the alkaloids in this family possess potentially useful biological activity, which includes acetylcholinesterase (AChE) inhibition.² The utility of known AChE inhibitors, such as the *Lycopodium* alkaloid huperzine A (**1**; Figure 1),³ to partially address the treatment of Alzheimer's disease is supported by the observation of increased memory and learning in rats upon administration of **1**.⁴ Furthermore, several AChE inhibitors, including galanthamine⁵ and Aricept®,⁶ are commercial pharmaceuticals that are used to treat Alzheimer's disease indications. However, because AChE inhibition appears only to treat the symptoms of neurodegenerative diseases, there continues to be a need to identify other natural products that promote the growth of new neural networks. In this regard, *Lycopodium* alkaloids, such as the lyconadins (e.g., **3**)⁷ and complanadine A (**4**),⁸ are especially interesting since they enhance mRNA expression for nerve growth factor (NGF) and the production of NGF in human glial cells.⁹

As a first step in a program aimed at the biological evaluation of *Lycopodium* alkaloids and their analogs as neurotrophic factors, we have undertaken the synthesis of several of these compounds. We recently reported the total synthesis of lyconadin A (**3**).¹⁰ In this manuscript, we present the details of our total synthesis of complanadine A (**4**), which is a dimer of the well-known phlegmarine-derived alkaloid lycodine (**5**).¹¹ The synthetic challenge posed by **4** stems primarily from the fact that it is an *unsymmetrical* dimer of lycodine (C2-C3' linkage; see **4**) and therefore requires the introduction of position-control elements prior to merging the two halves (see **6** and **7**; Scheme 1). A powerful simplification of the synthesis would entail **6** and **7** arising from the same intermediate (e.g., tricyclic enamide **8**). Enamide **8** was in turn envisioned to arise from an acid-promoted formal cycloaddition of **9** and **10** following the precedent of Schumann for the synthesis of racemic *N*-desmethyl- α -obscurine (**17**; Scheme 2).¹²

The synthesis of complanadine A commenced with the preparation of ketal **12** (Eq. 1), which is available from (+)-pulegone using literature procedures.¹³ Aminoketal **12** was used as a direct precursor to oxygen-sensitive α,β -unsaturated imine **10**.¹⁴

rsarpong@berkeley.edu.

Supporting Information Available. Experimental details and characterization data for all new compounds are available free of charge via the Internet at <http://pubs.acs.org>.

(1)

Enamide **9** was prepared from commercially available 5-ketohexane nitrile¹⁵ via Zn(II)-catalyzed hydrolysis of the cyano group and subsequent dehydrative cyclization upon distillation.¹⁶ Interestingly, our empirical observations suggest that under the conditions identified by Schumann for the formation of **17** (Scheme 2) from **9** and **10** (70% aq. HClO₄, dioxane, 105 °C, 20 h), enamide **9** undergoes hydrolysis to **13**.¹⁷ Ketoamide **13** likely forms reactive enol tautomer **14**, which in turn reacts with protonated **10** to yield *N*-desmethyl α-obscurine **17** following a series of cyclizations (i.e., via **15** and **16**).

The synthetic sequence up to this point is easily amenable to scale-up, which has provided **17** on multi-gram scale. At this stage we proceeded to address the major challenge of the synthesis, which was to advance **17** to triflate **7** as well as boronic ester **6**. To set the stage for these tasks, selective Boc protection of **17** (Scheme 3) afforded **8** (65% yield over two steps).¹⁸ This was followed by oxidation of **8** with lead tetraacetate to provide pyridone **18** in 84% yield. Triflation of the pyridone using triflic anhydride in pyridine proved optimal giving **7** in 72% yield.

With one of the desired coupling partners in hand, we looked to address the synthesis of the other (i.e., boronic ester **6**).¹⁹ The triflate group in **7** was removed under Pd-catalyzed reducing conditions to provide Boc-protected lycodine (**19**).

The conversion of **19** to boronic ester **6** was achieved in a single step as illustrated in Scheme 4. Our approach to the remarkable direct C-H functionalization of **19** rested on the uniquely effective Ir(I)-catalyzed borylation chemistry developed by Hartwig and Miyaura.²⁰ In the event, treatment of **19** with 4 mol% [Ir(OMe)(cod)]₂, 8 mol% di-*tert*-butylbipyridine (dtpy), diboron pinacolato ester (0.75 equiv) in THF at 80 °C, gave **6** in 75% yield after 5.5 h. The observed site selectivity is consistent with that noted by Hartwig for pyridine functionalization and appears to be guided mainly by steric factors. Suzuki cross-coupling of boronic ester **6** and triflate **7**, followed by cleavage of the Boc-protective groups gave complanadine A (**4**) in 42% yield over the two steps.

Synthetic complanadine A gave spectral data (¹H and ¹³C NMR) consistent with that reported by Kobayashi and coworkers during its isolation.²¹

Access to boronic ester **6** should prove highly significant as a starting point for the synthesis of congeners and analogues of complanadine A and lycodine. For example, coupling of boronic ester **6** (Scheme 5) to vinyl bromide **20**,²² followed by dihydroxylation using the UpJohn method,²³ and periodate cleavage yields **21**, which is a direct precursor to lycopladienes G and F.²⁴

In summary, we report the total synthesis of the unsymmetrical lycodine dimer complanadine A. Our synthetic sequence proceeds in eight steps from enamide **9** and acetal **12**. The synthetic strategy also provides potential access to the natural products lycodine, lycoplamine F and lycoplamine G. Highlights of the complanadine synthesis include a Hartwig-Miyaura Ir(I)-catalyzed site-selective borylation and a late-stage Suzuki cross-coupling to form the C2-C3' bipyridine. The application of the strategy to the multigram scale production of **4** and congeners, as well as the synthesis of other *Lycopodium* alkaloids, is underway and will be reported in due course.

Supplementary Material

Refer to Web version on PubMed Central for supplementary material.

Acknowledgments

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Figure 1.
Selected Lycopodium alkaloids

Scheme 1.

Scheme 2.

Scheme 3.

Scheme 4.

Scheme 5.