Published in final edited form as:

Org Lett. 2012 August 17; 14(16): 4086–4089. doi:10.1021/ol301713j.

Palladium-Catalyzed Nitromethylation of Aryl Halides: An Orthogonal Formylation Equivalent

Ryan R. Walvoord, Simon Berritt, and Marisa C. Kozlowski*

Penn Merck High Throughput Experimentation Laboratory, Department of Chemistry, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19104-6323, United States

Abstract

An efficient cross-coupling reaction of aryl halides and nitromethane was developed with the use of parallel microscale experimentation. The aryl nitromethane products are precursors for numerous useful synthetic products. An efficient method for their direct conversion to the corresponding oximes and aldehydes in a one-pot operation has been discovered. The process exploits inexpensive nitromethane as a carbonyl equivalent, providing a mild and convenient formylation method that is compatible with many functional groups.

Nitroalkanes are compounds of unique and versatile reactivity.¹ Their ability to undergo powerful stereoselective carbon-carbon bond formation² in addition to numerous functional group transformations³ makes them highly desirable synthetic intermediates. Despite this utility, access to nitroalkanes remains synthetically challenging.^{1a,4} The coupling of aryl halides with nitromethane, an inexpensive and readily available solvent, would represent an ideal method to prepare a wide variety of aryl nitromethanes, precursors to an array of valuable compounds (Scheme 1). In particular, we envisaged that by exploiting the conversion of the nitro to carbonyl group, the Nef reaction, this method would represent a novel, mild formylation orthogonal to Friedel Crafts and lithiation/formylation transforms.⁵ Furthermore, nitromethane is more easily deployed as a formyl equivalent on a small scale compared to carbon monoxide, a toxic gas that requires tanks and often high temperatures and pressures.⁶ Herein, we describe the Pd-catalyzed coupling of aryl halides with nitromethane to afford aryl nitromethanes and subsequent Sn(II)-mediated Nef reaction to provide aryl oximes or aryl aldehydes.

Our primary challenge lay in developing a facile, robust method to access aryl nitromethanes. As observed in recent studies utilizing these compounds,^{4,7} current methods to generate aryl nitromethanes (nitrite displacement of benzylic bromides,⁸

*marisa@sas.upenn.edu.

Supporting Information Available. Experimental procedures, full spectroscopic data for all new compounds, and additional parallel microscale experimentation data.

oxidation of benzyl amines⁹ and oximes¹⁰) are unsatisfactory,¹¹ owing to poor efficiency, generality, and availability of the corresponding substrates. We sought to develop a less expensive¹² and more reliable method using nitromethane as a soft nucleophile in a palladium-catalyzed cross coupling.¹³ With the knowledge that this cross-coupling had been described as problematic due to low yields and multiple products,¹⁴ parallel microscale experimentation¹⁵ was implemented to rapidly screen a large number of conditions and draw out trends. Using para-bromoanisole as a test substrate, 19 ligands, 4 solvents, and 4 bases were initially assessed using 2 equivalents of nitromethane with Pd₂dba₃ at 80 °C.¹⁶ Unlike nitroethane and higher congeners for which tBuMePhos¹⁷ or tBuXPhos^{15b} are effective, bis-*tert*-butyl ligands performed poorly here with the exception of cataCXium POMetBu, which was less consistent overall (see below). Rather, the biscyclohexyl ligands XPhos and BrettPhos were superior. These results are surprising since nitromethane is smaller, and it was expected that larger ligands would be needed to force formation of the less favorable C-bound vs O-bound palladium adduct.¹⁸

A detailed analysis of the HPLC data was crucial to further optimization, revealing the formation of multiple byproducts including debrominated substrate, aldehyde, and decomposition products. Table 1 collects the conversions to the product and all the impurities relative to an internal standard. While cataCXium POMetB gave the highest conversion, there were also large amounts of impurities. Using the difference of the product and impurity conversion (last column Table 1) as a measure of selectivity to the desired product, further optimization was conducted with XPhos, which is also less costly than the other two candidates.

Postulating that increasing the effective concentration of nucleophile might improve rate and minimize decomposition pathways, neat nitromethane was employed to good effect, providing shorter reaction times and cleaner reaction profiles. To further suppress aldehyde formation, which requires water, molecular sieves were added. As a result, the optimal conditions of Pd₂dba₃ with the XPhos ligand, Cs₂CO₃, powdered 3 Å molecular sieves, and 0.1 M nitromethane as solvent were discovered (Table 2, entry 1).

These optimized conditions were effective with substrates possessing electron donating and withdrawing groups (Table 2, entries 1–9), *ortho*-substituents (entries 7–9), and even highly sterically encumbered substrates (entry 10). Ketones bearing acidic protons were well tolerated and did not exhibit competitive coupling or reaction with nitromethane under the basic reaction conditions (entry 8). As formation of *ortho*-substituted or electron-rich aryl nitromethanes via S_N2 displacement of the corresponding benzyl bromides has been shown to be a poor process,¹⁹ this report allows greatly improved access to a range of novel aryl nitromethanes. Heteroaryls were also well tolerated, although higher reaction temperatures (70–80 °C) were needed (entries 11–14). In addition to bromides, aryl iodides and triflates could be coupled effectively (entries 15–16). On the other hand, chlorides undergo reaction more slowly and require higher temperatures (80 °C, entry 17). Since the rate with aryl bromides was much faster relative to that of aryl chlorides, chloro-substituted aryl bromides could be selectively coupled (entries 18–19).

With a robust method for accessing aryl nitromethanes in hand,²⁰ we next elected to examine the Nef disproportionation²¹ to produce the aryl aldehydes. Conventional Nef conditions,²² which proceed by hydrolysis of the requisite primary aryl nitronic acid, are problematic for the formation of aryl aldehydes.²³ Indeed, exhaustive attempts at utilizing hydrolytic Nef conditions failed on these substrates, providing only recovered substrate. Use of commonly employed KMnO₄ yielded significant amounts of oxidatively coupled dimers,²⁴ even when conducted under extremely dilute conditions. We discovered that a modified procedure using tin(II) chloride²⁵ was most effective and permitted a far wider range of functional

groups to be employed (Table 3). In this one-pot reaction, aryl aldehydes with electron-donating (entries 1–2) and electron-withdrawing groups (entries 3–7) were readily produced. Notably, yields are high for the ketone and ester (entries 5–6), which cannot be generated directly via Friedel-Crafts or lithiation/formylation chemistry. Synthesis of heteroarylaldehydes was also demonstrated (entry 8), although incomplete conversion of the oxime intermediate was observed in this unoptimized reaction.

The overall process, aryl halide to aryl aldehyde, represents a process complimentary to Friedel Crafts reactions,²⁶ which is restricted to arenes with electron-donating substituents at the *ortho*- or *para*-positions, and lithiation/formylation,²⁷ which is not compatible with many functional groups. In addition, nitromethane is easier to employ as a formylation equivalent relative to carbon monoxide.

Reasoning that the nitromethane coupling and the Nef reaction could be combined into a convenient, one-pot process, *para*-bromoanisole was subjected to the coupling conditions. Upon consumption of the starting material, the solvent was removed, and the aryl nitromethane was directly subjected to the Nef conditions, generating the aryl aldehyde (eq 1) in good yield in a one-pot process. Similarly, the one-pot process could be halted at the oxime stage with the hindered substrate *ortho*-bromotoluene in good yield (eq 2). Notably, this latter transformation provides a different synthetic disconnection for generating oximes.

In conclusion, a highly selective monocoupling of nitromethane to aryl halides has been developed. The key to developing this useful transformation was the recognition of the unique reactivity of both nitromethane and the reaction product under basic conditions. This study illustrates that selection of a system for further optimization by relying on a singular outcome (e.g., product conversion) is not the most advantageous. Rather, to optimize the formation of product and simultaneously suppress the formation of multiple byproducts, parallel microscale experimentation proved useful to examining many variables in concert. The resultant mild method allows for facile synthesis of a range of aryl nitromethanes, a class of useful materials that is difficult to obtain efficiently through reported methods. A subsequent highly selective Nef procedure provides easy access to the corresponding oximes or aldehydes. A one-pot protocol telescoping the cross-coupling and Nef reactions provides a mild, useful alternative to formylation with carbon monoxide as well as an expeditious entry to oximes. Additional efforts to explore these processes and understand the key role of the ligand are currently underway.

Supplementary Material

Refer to Web version on PubMed Central for supplementary material.

Acknowledgments

We are grateful to the NSF for funding of the High Throughput Laboratory (GOALI CHE-0848460) and NIH (RO1GM087605) for financial support. We thank Accelrys and Virscidian for providing software for the high throughput screening and analysis. Partial instrumentation support was provided by the NIH for MS (1S10RR023444) and NMR (1S10RR022442). We thank Dr. Spencer Dreher (Merck Research Laboratories) for helpful discussions and Ms. Alison Metz (University of Pennsylvania) for initial studies.

References

- (1). (a) Ono, N. Wiley-VCH; New York: 2001. The Nitro Group in Organic Synthesis. (b) Feuer, H.; Nielsen, AT., editors. Nitro Compounds: Recent Advances in Synthesis and Chemistry. Vol. Chapters 1–2. VCH Publishers; New York: 1990. (c) Rosini G, Ballini R. Synthesis. 1988:833–847.

- (2). (a) Marques-Lopez E, Merino P, Tejero T, Herrera RP. Eur. J. Org. Chem. 2009;2401–2420.(b) Ballini R, Bosica G, Fiorini D, Palmieri A, Petrini M. Chem. Rev. 2005; 105:933–971. [PubMed: 15755081] (c) Luzzio FA. Tetrahedron. 2001; 57:915–945. For recent reviews on C–C bond formation with nitroalkanes see:
- (3). (a) Seebach D, Colvin EW, Lehr F, Weller T. Chimia. 1979; 33:1–18.(b) Ballini R, Palmieri A, Righi P. Tetrahedron. 2007; 63:12099–12121.
- (4). Greger JG, Yoon-Miller SJP, Bechtold NR, Flewelling SA, MacDonald JP, Downey CR, Cohen EA, Pelkey ET. J. Org. Chem. 2011; 76:8203–8214. [PubMed: 21913662]
- (5). (a) Olah GA, Ohannesian L, Arvanaghi M. Chem. Rev. 1987; 87:671–686.(b) Kantlehner W. Eur. J. Org. Chem. 2003;2530–2546. references therein. (c) Wakefield, BJ. Organolithium Methods. Academic Press; San Diego, CA: 1988. For reviews on aromatic formylation see:
- (6). (a) Shoenberg A, Heck RFJ. Am. Chem. Soc. 1974; 96:7761–7764.(b) Klaus S, Neumann H, Zapf A, Strübing D, Hübner S, Almena J, Riermeier T, Gross P, Sarich M, Krahner W-R, Rossen K, Beller M. Ang. Chem. Int. Ed. 2006; 45:154–158.(c) Sergeev AG, Spannenberg A, Beller M. J. Am. Chem. Soc. 2008; 130:15549–15563. [PubMed: 18956867]
- (7). Davis T,A, Johnston JN. Chem. Sci. 2011; 2:1076–1077. [PubMed: 22708054]
- (8). (a) Kornblum N, Taub B, Ungnade HE. J. Am. Chem. Soc. 1954; 76:3209–2111.(b) Kornblum N, Larson HO, Blackwood RK, Mooberry DD, Oliveto EP, Graham GE. J. Am. Chem. Soc. 1956; 78:1497–1501.(c) Ballini R, Barboni L, Giarlo G. J. Org. Chem. 2004; 69:6907–6908. [PubMed: 15387622]
- (9). (a) Emmons WD. J. Am. Chem. Soc. 1957; 79:5528–5530.(b) Rozen S, Kol M. J. Org. Chem. 1992; 57:7342–7344.
- (10). (a) Emmons WD, Pagano AS. J. Am. Chem. Soc. 1955; 77:4557–4559.(b) Bose DS, Vanajatha G. Synth. Commun. 1998; 28:4531–4535.
- (11). Independent work in our lab also showed that the AgNO₂ or NaNO₂ methods provided the aryl nitromethanes in low to moderate yields (30–50%) for typical cases [BnBr, *p*-ClC₆H₄CH₂Br, *p*-(*t*-Bu)C₆H₄CH₂Br, *m*-CF₃C₆H₄CH₂Br] and purification was difficult due to multiple byproducts. Activated or hindered systems (*p*-MeOBnBr, 1-NapCH₂Br, 2-NapCH₂Br) gave little (<20%) or no product. We found that oxidation of the corresponding aryl oximes was also low yielding (<20%).
- (12). Superstoichiometric AgNO₂ (\$48/10g via Sigma-Aldrich) is typically employed.
- (13). Prim D, Campagne J-M, Joseph D, Andrioletti B. Tetrahedron 2002. 58:2041–2075.
- (14). Vogl EM, Buchwald SL. J. Org. Chem. 2002; 67:106–111. [PubMed: 11777446]
- (15). (a) Dreher SD, Dormer PG, Sandrock DL, Molander GA. J. Am. Chem. Soc. 2008; 130:9257–9259. [PubMed: 18582050] (b) Metz AE, Berritt S, Dreher SD, Kozlowski MC. Org. Lett. 2012; 14:760–763. [PubMed: 22263870]
- (16). See the Supporting Information for additional details regarding the high-throughput experimentation.
- (17). Fox JM, Huang X, Chieffi A, Buchwald SL. J. Am. Chem. Soc. 2000; 122:1360–1370.
- (18). Liao X, Weng Z, Hartwig JF. J. Am. Chem. Soc. 2008; 130:195–200. [PubMed: 18076166]
- (19). (a) Kornblum N, Smiley RA, Blackwood RK, Iffland DCJ. Am. Chem. Soc. 1955; 77:6269–6280.(b) Kupchan SM, Wormser HC. J. Org. Chem. 1965; 30:3792–3800. [PubMed: 5846158] (c) Cameron DW, Crosby IT, Feutrill GE, Pietersz GA. Aust. J. Chem. 1992; 45:2003–2024.
- (20). Burkhard JA, Tchitchanov BH, Carreira EM. Ang. Chem. Int. Ed. 2011; 50:5379–5382. After completion of this work, we discovered a related reaction (only in the Supporting Information of: The conditions described therein [10 equiv MeNO₂, 1.5 mol % Pd₂dba₃, 6 mol % *t*BuMePhos, 1.1 equiv Cs₂CO₃, DME, 50 °C, 16.5 h] provided lower yields over longer reaction times (16.5 vs 5 h) with *p*-bromoanisole (74% vs 93% from Table 2, entry 2) and much lower yields with 2-bromomesitylene (<17% vs 97% Table 2, entry 9).
- (21). Ballini R, Petrini M. Tetrahedron. 2004; 60:1017–1047. For a review of recent Nef reactions see:
- (22). Nef JU. Liebigs Ann. Chem. 1894; 280:263–291.
- (23). (a) Kornblum N, Brown RA. J. Am. Chem. Soc. 1965; 87:1742–1747.(b) Kornblum N, Graham GE. J. Am. Chem. Soc. 1951; 73:4041–4043.(c) Semmelhack MF, Keller L, Sato T, Speiss EJ, Wulff W. J. Org. Chem. 1985; 50:5566–5574.

- (24). (a) Shechter H, Williams FT Jr. J. Org. Chem. 1962; 27:3699–3701.(b) Zhang Z, Yu A, Zhou W. Bioorg. Med. Chem. 2007; 15:7274–7280. [PubMed: 17826097]
- (25). (a) Urpi F, Vilarrasa J. Tetrahedron Lett. 1990; 31:7499–7500.(b) Bartra M, Romea P, Urpi F, Vilarrasa V. Tetrahedron. 1990; 46:587–594.
- (26). Martinez AG, Alvarez RM, Barcina JO, Cerero SM, Vilar ET, Fraile AG, Hanack M, Subramanian LR. J. Chem. Soc., Chem. Commun. 1990:1571–1572.
- (27). Sicé J. J. Am. Chem. Soc. 1953; 75:3697–3700.

Scheme 1.

Utility of the Products from the Coupling of Nitromethane with Aryl Halides.

Scheme 2.
One-Pot Formylation and Oxime Formation

Table 1

Top results from the initial screen^a

ligand	solvent	base	prod/IS	impurities/IS	impurities/IS – prod/IS
XPhos	THF	K ₃ PO ₄	1.96	2.48	0.52
BrettPhos	DME	K ₃ PO ₄	1.75	2.30	0.54
cataXCium POMetB	1,4-Dioxane	NaOt-Bu	2.40	2.96	0.57
XPhos	1,4-Dioxane	K ₃ PO ₄	1.93	2.86	0.93
cataXCium POMetB	1,4-Dioxane	K ₃ PO ₄	1.93	3.21	1.28
BrettPhos	THF	Cs ₂ CO ₃	1.66	3.08	1.42
BrettPhos	1,4-Dioxane	K ₃ PO ₄	1.82	3.33	1.51
JohnPhos	1,4-Dioxane	K ₃ PO ₄	1.87	4.22	2.34

^aIS = Internal standard.

Table 2

Scope of palladium-catalyzed nitromethane coupling

entry	substrate	time (h)	yield (%) ^a	entry	substrate	time (h)	yield (%) ^a
1		3.5	77	11 ^b		2	76
2		5	93	12 ^c		1.5	83
3		5	87	13 ^b		2	48
4		6	77	14 ^c		2.5	77
5		6	61	15		6	70
6		5	93				

entry	substrate	time (h)	yield (%) ^a	entry	substrate	time (h)	yield (%) ^a
7		3.5	93	16		4	78
8		4	91	17 ^c		1	44
9		4	89	18		7	69
10		4.5	97	19 ^d		12	58

^a Isolated yield after column chromatography.

^b Unoptimized. Conducted at 70 °C.

^c Conducted at 80 °C with 5 mol % Pd₂dba₃ and 12 mol % XPhos.

^d Conducted at 50 °C with 5 mol % Pd₂dba₃ and 12 mol % XPhos.

Table 3

entry	Ar	yield (%) ^a	entry	Ar	yield (%) ^a
1		69	5		87
2		67	6		79
3		68	7		41
4		70	8 ^b		58

^a Isolated yield after column chromatography.

^b Incomplete conversion of the intermediate oxime was observed.