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Macrosteres: The Deltic Guanidinium Ion**

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Abstract

The “deltic guanidinium” ion is described here as a “macrostere” of the guanidinium ion. The use of the 2,4-dimethoxybenzyl protecting group allows for the synthesis of the fully unsubstituted parent compound and a variety of derivatives bearing multiple N-H functions for the first time. Deltic urea, deltic thiourea, and deltic benzamidine are also synthesized. A comparison of the physical properties of guanidinium and deltic guanidinium ions is provided. The use of a deltic guanidinium dendrimer for cell transport is demonstrated.

Short text

The unsubstituted deltic guanidinium ion, a macrostere of the guanidinium ion, has been prepared for the first time.

Keywords

isostere; guanidinium; cyclopropenium

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An isostere is a functional group that mimics certain characteristics of another functional group, such as the number of valence electrons, steric size, or biological effect.¹ In the realm of medicinal drug discovery, the use of “bioisosteres” to retain the desired biological activity of a drug candidate while optimizing its overall pharmacological profile is a widely employed strategy.^{2,3} However, isosteric replacement can be challenging for certain functional groups in which modification tends to result in major phenomenological changes. A key example in this regard is the guanidinium ion,⁴ where the low acidity, high hydrogen-bond donating capacity, and stable cationic nature make it difficult to replicate (Figure 1a).⁵ Nevertheless, because guanidinium ions occur widely in a variety of important settings, including biomolecules,⁶ complex secondary metabolites,⁷ pharmaceutical drugs,⁸ sweeteners,⁹ and many other useful chemicals,¹⁰ the identification of new isosteres of this important functional group has wide-ranging implications. Herein, we describe the first guanidinium ion “macrostere”, which retains all of the essential features of the guanidinium ion but is simply expanded in size. In this macrostere, the central carbon of the guanidinium ion is replaced with a cyclopropenium ion, and is thus termed the “deltic guanidinium ion”.¹¹

The deltic guanidinium ion is in essence a trisaminocyclopropenium (TAC) ion. Although highly substituted TACs are known,^{12,13} derivatives possessing more than a single N-H moiety are not available by established methods because primary amines or ammonia induce ring-opening of the strained cyclopropenium ring (Figure 1b).¹⁴ Fully substituted deltic guanidinium ions, however, can be easily prepared by the addition of amines to tetrachlorocyclopropene or pentachlorocyclopropane.¹⁵ Thus, in order to develop a viable approach to less-substituted deltic guanidiniums, we needed to identify a suitable nitrogen protecting group that would allow a primary amine or ammonia derivative to be installed and deprotected without destroying the cyclopropenium ring. After some experimentation, we found that the acid-labile 2,4-dimethoxybenzyl (DMB) group offered ready access to the desired compounds, typically without the need for column chromatography.¹⁶ For example, addition of 3 equiv HN(DMB)₂ to tetrachlorocyclopropene (**1**) in the presence of triethylamine resulted in the formation of compound **2** in 93% yield on a preparative scale (Figure 1c). Acidic deprotection of **2** with TFA followed by ion exchange with HCl in dioxane then furnished deltic guanidinium chloride (**3**) in 62% yield. This result represents the first reported synthesis of this macrostere of the guanidinium ion and sets the stage for a detailed comparison of the two (vide infra).

We also found that derivatives of the deltic guanidinium ion could be prepared in straightforward fashion (Table 1). For example, treatment of **1** with 2 equivalents of HN(DMB)₂ in the presence of K₂CO₃ resulted in the production of the stable 2,3-bis(dialkylamino)-1-chlorocyclopropenium salt **4** in 56% yield. This salt reacted efficiently with amines to produce, following deprotection and anion exchange, the corresponding deltic guanidinium derivatives **5**. Using this approach, deltic guanidiniums bearing alkyl **6**, benzyl **7**, or aryl **8** substituents (entries 1–3) were prepared in high yield. Amino acid analogues of arginine **9** (entry 4), homoarginine **10** (entry 5), and creatine **11** (entry 6) were also prepared by these means. We have also prepared macrostereic analogues of the antihypertensive agent debrisoquine¹⁷ (**12**, entry 7), gabexate (**13**, entry 8), which is used as an anti-pancreatitis treatment,¹⁸ synthalin A (**14**, entry 9), a bisguanidinium compound that

has anti-diabetic activity,¹⁹ and agmatine, an endogenous neurotransmitter,²⁰ (**15**, entry 10). Finally, this synthetic strategy was mild enough to allow for the preparation of a deltic guanidinium derivative **16** of glucosamine (entry 11).²¹

We found that this strategy could also be adopted to access other deltic macrosteres as well. For example, hydrolysis of **4** under basic conditions followed by deprotection furnished deltic urea **18** in 88% yield (eq 2). Alternatively, treatment of **4** with Na₂S followed by deprotection yielded deltic thiourea **20** (eq 3). Friedel-Crafts alkylation of benzene with tetrachlorocyclopropene followed by addition of HN(DMB)₂ produced cyclopropenium **21**, and thus allowed access to deltic benzamidine **22** (eq 4). We expect that these procedures should be adaptable to access substituted derivatives of these deltic functionality as well.

(2)

(3)

(4)

To evaluate their isosteric similarity, we compared several of the physical properties of the guanidinium and deltic guanidinium ions (Table 2). In terms of acidity, the high $pK_a(\text{H}_2\text{O})$ of 13.5 is a widely recognized key aspect of the guanidinium ion's behavior, particularly in a biochemical context. We determined the aqueous pK_a of the deltic guanidinium ion to be notably higher at 15.5 (entry 2). Of course practically speaking, these low acidities mean that both guanidinium and deltic guanidinium ions will tend to remain fully protonated under physiological conditions. Notably, all of the deltic analogues were found to be stable in water, and should thus be useful for biological study.

As a cation with six hydrogen-bonding sites, guanidinium chloride is also extremely water soluble, at approximately 230 g/100 mL (entry 3). We found that deltic guanidinium chloride is less than one-third as soluble in water at 90 g/100 mL, which is nevertheless also very high. Interestingly, we found that while guanidinium chloride is also quite soluble in ethanol (22 g/100 mL), the deltic analogue was significantly less so at only 1.3 g/100 mL (entry 4). To compare the relative lipophilicities of the two cations, we measured the distribution coefficient Log D (*n*-octanol/PBS buffer, pH = 7.4) of (1-naphthyl)methyl guanidinium and deltic guanidinium ions, and found their values to be very similar, with the deltic isostere being slightly more lipophilic (entry 5).

As a further characterization of deltic guanidinium chloride, we also obtained its solid state Raman spectrum.²² An overlay of this spectrum (red) and that of guanidinium chloride (blue) is shown in Figure 2. The most notable difference between the two is the deltic guanidinium peak at 1998 cm⁻¹, which corresponds to the symmetric ring stretching vibration of the cyclopropenium ring (inset box).²³ Because this peak occurs in the biologically silent region of the Raman spectrum, we speculate that deltic guanidinium derivatives may be useful for Raman-based biological imaging applications.²⁴

To further the functional comparison of the guanidinium and deltic guanidinium ions, we determined single crystal X-ray structures for several salts of the latter (Figure 3). Deltic guanidinium chloride crystallizes in a rhombohedral structure (R $\bar{3}$ c), forming six equivalent hydrogen bonds to chloride ions (Figure 3a), and with each chloride in turn hydrogen bonding to six C₃N₃H₆ cations (not shown). This highly symmetric structure differs from the lower-symmetry, orthorhombic (Pbca) structure of guanidinium chloride, in which each cation associates with three anions via two-point hydrogen bonding interactions (Figure 3b). On the other hand, deltic guanidinium iodide has a cubic structure (Pa $\bar{3}$), with, the coordination of three iodide ions by cooperative pairs of H-bonds strongly resembling the structure of guanidinium chloride (Figure 3c). Clearly, the deltic guanidinium ion offers an expanded hydrogen-bonding pocket that can accommodate a larger anion such as iodide.

Guanidinium-rich molecules such as polyarginine peptides are known to promote cell membrane transportation,²⁵ and the application of this phenomenon to drug delivery and transfection has been actively researched.²⁶ Thus, we were interested to see whether poly deltic guanidinium ion-containing molecules would also operate as membrane transportation agents. To do so, fluorescein-coupled dendrimers having 3, 6, or 9 deltic guanidinium units (**G3**, **G6**, **G9**) were synthesized in direct analogy to the known²⁷ guanidinium-rich dendrimers (**G3**, **G6**, **G9**) (Figure 4a),⁷ and an imaging experiment of their intracellular translocation was conducted (Figure 4b). The membrane transportation activity of both the deltic guanidinium and guanidinium dendrimers was evaluated in live HeLa cells. Neither the tricationic (**G3** and **G3**) nor the hexacationic (**G6** and **G6**) dendrimers resulted in observable membrane transportation. However, a further increase to the nonacationic dendrimers (**G9** and **G9**) promoted entry into the cells, with strong intracellular fluorescence observed in both cases. We thus conclude that deltic guanidinium ions possess membrane transportation ability qualitatively similar to the guanidinium group, despite their differences in hydrogen-bond organization.

The guanidinium ion is a crucial ingredient in the chemistry of life and in numerous valuable chemicals. As a “macrostere” of this important functional group, the deltic guanidinium represents a unique guanidinium analogue, which mimics certain properties of this functionality in ways other isosteres cannot. Undoubtedly, the increased size of the deltic guanidinium will make it a poor replacement in compounds where binding of the guanidinium ion is a key aspect of the desired bioactivity. On the other hand, this expanded analogue could be useful in circumstances in which the molecular properties engendered by the guanidinium ion are desired, but off-target interactions (e.g. with arginine-binding enzymes) must be eliminated. More broadly, the concept of the macrostere offers a unique strategy for creating “deltic” analogues of any functional group that possesses a central sp²-hybridized carbon atom. A broad investigation of these deltic functional groups can now be undertaken, and such studies are underway in our laboratory.

Supplementary Material

Refer to Web version on PubMed Central for supplementary material.

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Figure 1.

(a). Guanidinium and the deltic guanidinium macrostere. (b) Synthesis of trisaminocyclopropenium (deltic guanidinium) ions. (c) Synthesis of deltic guanidinium chloride. DMB = 2,4-dimethoxybenzyl.

Figure 2. Raman scattering spectrum of guanidinium chloride (blue trace) and deltic guanidinium chloride (red trace).

Figure 3.
Molecular structures of (a) deltic guanidinium chloride, (b) Guanidinium chloride, and (c) deltic guanidinium iodide.

A. Cationic dendrimers

B. Cell transport studies

Figure 4.

a. Fluorescein-coupled dendrimers incorporating guanidinium or deltic guanidinium ions. b. Cell transport studies with cationic dendrimers.

Table 1

Synthesis of deltic guanidinium derivatives.^{a,b} ^aSee supporting information for synthetic details.^bCounterions are chloride, except for entries 7 and 11 which are trifluoroacetate.^cThe activities indicated in parentheses are for the corresponding guanidinium derivatives.^dIsolated as the protonated ammonium salts.

Table 2

Comparison of physical properties of guanidinium and deltic guanidinium ions.

entry	property	R	
1	mol. weight (g/mol)	95.53	119.55
2	p <i>K</i> _a (H ₂ O) ^a	13.5	15.5
3	H ₂ O solubility (g/100 mL) ^b	230	90
4	EtOH solubility (g/100 mL) ^b	22	1.3
5	Log D (pH 7.4) ^{b,c}	0.39	0.56

^a_{27 °C.}^b_{23 °C.}^c_{n-octanol:PBS buffer.}