



Cite this: *Chem. Commun.*, 2019, 55, 5171

Received 6th March 2019,  
Accepted 8th April 2019

DOI: 10.1039/c9cc01833f

rsc.li/chemcomm

# Organocatalytic enantioselective direct alkylation of phloroglucinol derivatives: asymmetric total synthesis of (+)-aflatoxin B<sub>2</sub>†

Zhonglei Wang and Liansuo Zu \*

**The organocatalytic enantioselective Friedel–Crafts alkylation of phloroglucinol derivatives with enals is reported, providing general access to the benzylic chiral centers shown in a variety of phloroglucinol natural products. The synthetic utility is demonstrated by the very concise asymmetric total synthesis of aflatoxins B<sub>2</sub>.**

The naturally occurring molecules containing phloroglucinol moieties represent an important class of natural products with a vast array of biological activities.<sup>1</sup> About 700 phloroglucinol natural products have been isolated from various natural resources with broad structural diversity. One subset of phloroglucinol molecules that has received significant attention features the presence of benzylic chiral centers (Fig. 1). Representative examples include the 4-aryl-3,4-dihydrocoumarin natural product calomelanol F (1),<sup>2</sup> semisynthetic clinical candidates flavopiridol (2) and riviciclib (3),<sup>3</sup>

bullataketals (4)<sup>4</sup> and the carcinogenic substances aflatoxin B<sub>1</sub> (5) and B<sub>2</sub> (6).<sup>5</sup> Progress in the asymmetric construction of the benzylic chiral centers and total synthesis of related natural products has been elegantly achieved, providing valuable insights and inspiration from different aspects for the chemical synthesis of this subset of phloroglucinol molecules.<sup>6</sup>

The examination of the chemical structures of the molecules in Fig. 1 revealed some common structural patterns, including the benzylic chiral centers, the eastern heterocyclic rings and the western decoration of the phloroglucinol phenyl rings. Based on these shared structural features and lessons learned from the previous synthetic work, we envisioned a general strategy to address the synthesis of this subset of phloroglucinol molecules at three different phases. Specifically, as depicted in Scheme 1, we envisioned that the direct asymmetric *para*-selective alkylation of phloroglucinol derivatives<sup>7</sup> with enals could build up the benzylic chiral center and introduce several functional groups into the key intermediate **9**. Subsequent synthetic manipulations and pairing of the functional groups (R, CHO and OPG) in **9** could furnish the eastern heterocyclic rings. Finally, the late stage decoration could install the required moieties in the western parts. Herein, we report our efforts to explore this concept in the context of developing a total synthesis of aflatoxins B<sub>2</sub>.

One of the key elements in our design was to utilize iminium catalysis<sup>8</sup> to control the benzylic chiral center in **9**. While the LUMO-lowering activation of enals *via* iminium ions has become a general strategy for asymmetric catalysis, the Friedel–Crafts alkylation of phenols with enals represents a significant challenge. Notable progress on the Friedel–Crafts alkylations of naphthols with enals has been realized by the groups of Wang,



Fig. 1 Representative phloroglucinol natural products and drug candidates.

School of Pharmaceutical Sciences, Key Laboratory of Bioorganic Phosphorus, Chemistry & Chemical Biology (Ministry of Education), Beijing Frontier Research Center for biological Structure, Tsinghua University, Beijing 100084, China.  
E-mail: zuliansuo@tsinghua.edu.cn

† Electronic supplementary information (ESI) available. CCDC 1893156 (**9b**). For ESI and crystallographic data in CIF or other electronic format see DOI: 10.1039/c9cc01833f



Scheme 1 Designed strategy to synthesize phloroglucinol natural products.

Table 1 Optimized reaction conditions

<sup>a</sup> Isolated yield (%). <sup>b</sup> Determined by the chiral HPLC analysis.

With these concerns in mind, a model reaction of **7a** and **8a** was carried out first to identify the optimized reaction conditions for the Friedel–Crafts alkylation (Table 1). The diphenylprolinol TMS ether **I** was selected as the initial organocatalyst<sup>10</sup> due to its exceptional ability in activating enals. To our delight, in the presence of benzoic acid as the additive, this catalyst **I** could indeed enable the desired *para*-selective alkylation in various solvents with moderate yields and enantioselectivities (entries 1–6). These results validated the feasibility of the direct alkylation of the phloroglucinol derivatives with enals and identified chloroform as the choice of solvent. Further optimizations of the yield and ee were then carried out. Surprisingly, improvements in both the reaction yield and ee were observed without using benzoic acid as the additive (entry 7). Then, we observed that the reaction temperature had a marked effect on the enantioselectivity of the reaction, affording 96% ee at –20 °C (entries 8 and 9). Finally, by switching to a bulkier organocatalyst **II**, excellent results in terms of both reaction yield and enantioselectivity were achieved (entry 10).

Reaction scheme showing the synthesis of chiral aldehydes **9** from substituted phenols **7** and aldehydes **8** using catalyst **II** (10 mol%) in  $\text{CHCl}_3$  at  $-20^\circ\text{C}$ .

General reaction: **7** + **8**  $\xrightarrow[\text{CHCl}_3, -20^\circ\text{C}]{\text{II (10 mol\%)}}$  **9**

Products **9a-9u** are shown with their respective yields and enantiomeric excesses (ee):

- 9a**: 95% yield, 97% ee
- 9b**: 99% yield, 98% ee
- 9c**: 95% yield, 96% ee
- 9d**: 84% yield, 82% ee
- 9e**: 67% yield, 91% ee
- 9f**: 75% yield, 90% ee
- 9g**: 82% yield, 96% ee
- 9h**: 87% yield, 92% ee
- 9i**: 81% yield, 91% ee
- 9j**: 82% yield, 93% ee
- 9k**: 87% yield, 91% ee
- 9l**: 91% yield, 93% ee
- 9m**: 81% yield, 91% ee
- 9n**: 53% yield, 86% ee
- 9o**: 88% yield, 93% ee
- 9p**: 76% yield, 93% ee
- 9q**: 75% yield, 90% ee
- 9r**: 94% yield, 98% ee
- 9s**: 86% yield, 90% ee
- 9t**: 83% yield, 90% ee
- 9u**: 68% yield, 95% ee

Failed substrates are shown below the main reaction scheme:

- Substrate 1: 4-hydroxyphenyl
- Substrate 2: 2-methoxyphenyl
- Substrate 3: 2,6-dimethoxyphenyl
- Substrate 4: 3,5-dimethoxyphenyl

Scheme 2 Substrate scope of the organocatalytic Friedel–Crafts alkylation.

single-crystal X-ray diffraction.<sup>11</sup> The different *O*-alkylated phloroglucinol derivatives also proved to be efficient substrates (**9j–9m**). Of note, the sterically hindered MOM (methoxymethyl) protecting group could be tolerated, thus generating products amenable to subsequent synthetic transformations (**9k–9m**).

In addition to the phloroglucinol derivatives, several other polyphenolic derivatives could also participate in the alkylation processes, significantly expanding the scope of the phenolic partners (**9n–9q**). When  $R_1 = H$ , hemiacetals **9r–9u** were obtained through subsequent internal interactions between the OH and aldehyde. Several substrates that could not participate in the process are listed in the bottom of Scheme 2. It seemed that the presence of at least one electron-donating oxygen at the *meta* position of phenols was essential for the reaction to occur. Whether such structural requirement also dictated the *para*-selectivity of the Friedel–Crafts alkylation was not clear at this moment.

Finally, we turned to the chemical synthesis of aflatoxin B<sub>2</sub>, which is a representative member of the aflatoxin natural products. While significant progress in the total synthesis of racemic aflatoxins has been achieved since the 1960s,<sup>12</sup> relatively limited success in the catalytic enantioselective total synthesis of this class of natural products has been realized.<sup>6</sup> In 2003, the group of Trost successfully achieved the asymmetric total synthesis of aflatoxin B<sub>1</sub> in 9 steps utilizing the palladium catalyzed transformation of  $\gamma$ -acyloxybutenolides.<sup>6a</sup> Later, in 2005, the group of Corey completed the asymmetric total synthesis of aflatoxin B<sub>2</sub> in 8 steps by the application of an elegant oxazaborolidium catalyzed [3+2] cycloaddition.<sup>6b</sup> Most recently, the group of Hong reported an organocatalytic approach for enantioselective synthesis of the aflatoxin system.<sup>6c</sup> In this work, remarkable efficiency could be achieved by telescoping several synthetic operations into a one-pot reaction, and thus the concise formal total synthesis of aflatoxin B<sub>2</sub> was realized.

Our developed organocatalytic Friedel–Crafts alkylation of the phloroglucinol derivatives with enals offered a direct approach for the efficient generation of the benzylic chiral center shown in aflatoxin B<sub>2</sub>. Furthermore, the method successfully introduced several functional groups into the alkylation product, thus providing synthetic handles for the rapid generation of the furobenzofuran ring system through manipulations and pairing of these functional groups. As depicted in Scheme 3, from the alkylation product **9l**, methylation of the OH produced intermediate **12**. Reduction of the aldehyde and partial reduction of the ester could then generate

hemiacetal **13** and the equilibrated hydroxyl aldehyde **13'** as inseparable mixtures,<sup>13</sup> which were treated with triflic acid (TfOH) to afford **10** via cleavage of the MOM groups and subsequent cyclization to the acetal. At this stage, the remaining task of aflatoxin B<sub>2</sub> was to install the annulated cyclopentano-coumarin ring. The single step transformation of **10** to aflatoxin B<sub>2</sub> reported by Corey<sup>6b</sup> through Buchi's Pechmann type annulation<sup>12d</sup> using the brominated precursor **15** represents by far the most efficient known approach. The bromine served as the activating group for the annulation and later a leaving group for the generation of the aromatic coumarin system. While the annulation was very concise, the process proceeded with low yield (36%).<sup>6b</sup> To increase the overall synthetic efficiency of the late stage annulation, we envisioned to use a simpler precursor **14**. We surmised that a similar Pechmann type annulation followed by spontaneous aerobic oxidation would generate the cyclopentano-coumarin ring. After the systematic screening of a variety of Lewis acids, we could successfully realize the desired transformation in 77% yield using Sc(OTf)<sub>3</sub> as the promoter, thus completing the total synthesis of (+)-aflatoxin B<sub>2</sub> (**6**) in only five steps from the MOM-protected phloroglucinol. The newly developed annulation protocol for the incorporation of the coumarin ring utilizing a simpler precursor and proceeding with better yield represents a marked improvement when compared to previous methods.

In summary, we have developed an organocatalytic enantioselective direct alkylation of the phloroglucinol derivatives with enals for the rapid generation of the benzylic chiral centers existing in a variety of phloroglucinol natural products. The synthetic manipulations and pairing of the functional groups of an alkylation product along with a newly developed late-stage annulation protocol have enabled the very concise asymmetric total synthesis of aflatoxins B<sub>2</sub>, demonstrating the synthetic potential of the developed chemistry in preparing phloroglucinol natural products.

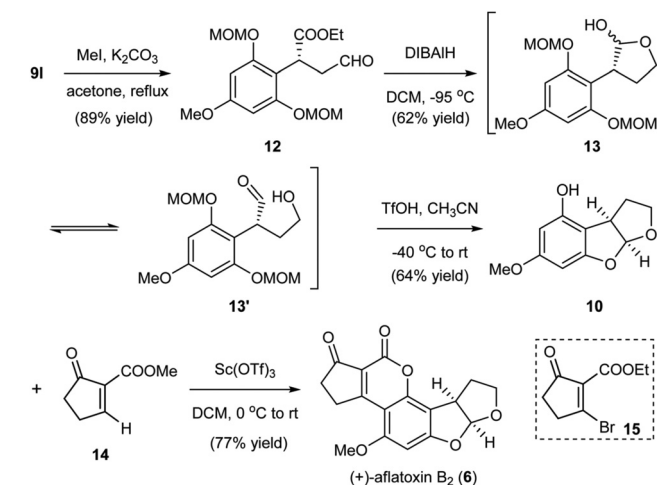
This work is supported by the National Natural Science Foundation of China (Grant No. 21871161) and the Drug Innovation Major Project (Grant No. 2018ZX09711-001).

## Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts to declare.

## Notes and references

- For selected reviews, see: (a) I. P. Singh and S. B. Bharate, *Nat. Prod. Rep.*, 2006, **23**, 558–591; (b) R. Ciochina and R. B. Grossman, *Chem. Rev.*, 2006, **106**, 3963–3986; (c) I. P. Singh, J. Sidana, P. Bansal and W. J. Foley, *Expert Opin. Ther. Pat.*, 2009, **19**, 847–866; (d) I. P. Singh, J. Sidana, S. B. Bharate and W. J. Foley, *Nat. Prod. Rep.*, 2010, **27**, 393–416; (e) S. Quideau, D. Deffieux, C. Douat-Casassus and L. Pouysegu, *Angew. Chem., Int. Ed.*, 2011, **50**, 586–621; (f) J. M. Estrela, S. Mena, E. Obrador, M. Benlloch, G. Castellano, R. Salvador and R. W. Dellinger, *J. Med. Chem.*, 2017, **60**, 9413–9436.
- F. Asai, M. Inuma, T. Tanaka, M. Takenaka and M. Mizuno, *Phytochemistry*, 1992, **31**, 2487–2490.
- (a) B. A. Christian, M. R. Grever, J. C. Byrd and T. S. Lin, *Curr. Opin. Oncol.*, 2007, **19**, 573–578; (b) N. P. Shirsath, S. M. Manohar and K. S. Joshi, *Mol. Cancer*, 2012, **11**, 77–88.
- (a) L. Larsen, M. H. Benn, M. Parvez and N. B. Perry, *Org. Biomol. Chem.*, 2005, **3**, 3236–3241; (b) H. Tan, H. Liu, X. Chen, Y. Yuan, K. Chen and S. Qiu, *Org. Lett.*, 2015, **17**, 4050–4053.



Scheme 3 Asymmetric total synthesis of aflatoxin B<sub>2</sub>.

- 5 For reviews, see: (a) R. E. Minto and C. A. Townsend, *Chem. Rev.*, 1997, **97**, 2537–2556; (b) S. Brase, A. Encinas, J. Keck and C. F. Nising, *Chem. Rev.*, 2009, **109**, 3903–3990.
- 6 For the asymmetric total synthesis of aflatoxins, see: (a) B. M. Trost and F. D. Toste, *J. Am. Chem. Soc.*, 2003, **125**, 3090–3100; (b) G. Zhou and E. J. Corey, *J. Am. Chem. Soc.*, 2005, **127**, 11958–11959; (c) W. Huang, A. Raja, B. Hong and G. Lee, *Org. Lett.*, 2017, **19**, 3494–3497. For the asymmetric formal total synthesis of aflatoxins, see: (d) J. P. Marino, *Pure Appl. Chem.*, 1993, **65**, 667–674; (e) E. R. Civitello and H. Rapoport, *J. Org. Chem.*, 1994, **59**, 3775–3782; (f) T. Bando and K. Shishido, *Synlett*, 1997, 665–666; (g) J. P. Marino, K. A. Kieler and M.-W. Kim, *Tetrahedron*, 2011, **67**, 837–841. For the selected asymmetric total synthesis of other phloroglucinol natural products, see: (h) M. Charpentier, M. Hans and J. Jauch, *Eur. J. Org. Chem.*, 2013, 4078–4084; (i) M. Charpentier and J. Jauch, *Tetrahedron*, 2017, **73**, 6614–6623; (j) M. Cheng, J. Cao, X. Yang, L. Zhong, L. Hu, X. Lu, B. Hou, Y. Hu, Y. Wang, X. You, L. Wang, W. Ye and C. Li, *Chem. Sci.*, 2018, **9**, 1488–1495; (k) Y. Guo, Y. Zhang, M. Xiao and Z. Xie, *Org. Lett.*, 2018, **20**, 2509–2512.
- 7 For recent *ortho*-selective asymmetric transformations of phloroglucinol derivatives, see: (a) L. Albrecht, L. K. Ransborg, V. Lauridsen, M. Overgaard, T. Zweifel and K. A. Jørgensen, *Angew. Chem., Int. Ed.*, 2011, **50**, 12496–12500; (b) Z. Yang, Y. He and F. D. Toste, *J. Am. Chem. Soc.*, 2016, **138**, 9775–9778; (c) G. Li, Z. Li, Q. Gu and S. You, *Org. Lett.*, 2017, **19**, 1318–1321; (d) X. Han, C. Ye, F. Chen, Q. Chen, Y. Wang and X. Zeng, *Org. Biomol. Chem.*, 2017, **15**, 3401–3407.
- 8 For selected reviews on iminium catalysis, see: (a) G. Lelais and D. W. C. MacMillan, *Aldrichimica Acta*, 2006, **39**, 79–87; (b) A. Erkkila, I. Majander and P. M. Pihko, *Chem. Rev.*, 2007, **107**, 5416–5470; (c) A. Moyano and R. Rios, *Chem. Rev.*, 2011, **111**, 4703–4832; (d) P. Melchiorre, *Angew. Chem., Int. Ed.*, 2012, **51**, 9748–9770; (e) S. Meninno and A. Lattanzi, *Chem. Commun.*, 2013, **49**, 3821–3832.
- 9 For *ortho*-selective reactions of naphthols and sesamol with enals, see: (a) L. Hong, L. Wang, W. Sun, K. Wong and R. Wang, *J. Org. Chem.*, 2009, **74**, 6881–6884; (b) P. H. Poulsen, K. S. Feu, B. M. Pza, F. Jensen and K. A. Jørgensen, *Angew. Chem., Int. Ed.*, 2015, **54**, 8203–8207; (c) B. M. Paz, L. Klier, L. Nasborg, V. H. Lauridsen, F. Jensen and K. A. Jørgensen, *Chem. – Eur. J.*, 2016, **22**, 16810–16818; (d) M. Giardinetti, J. Marrot, C. Greck, X. Moreau and V. Coeffard, *J. Org. Chem.*, 2018, **83**, 1019–1025. For the organocatalytic cross-coupling-like reactions of bromo-phenols with enals, see: (e) X. Song, A. Song, F. Zhang, H. Li and W. Wang, *Nat. Commun.*, 2011, **2**, 524; (f) H. Zhang, C. Ma, Z. Zheng, R. Sun, X. Yu and J. Zhao, *Chem. Commun.*, 2018, **54**, 4935–4938.
- 10 For the pioneering works on the diarylprolinol silyl ethers, see: (a) M. Marigo, T. C. Wabnitz, D. Fielenbach and K. A. Jørgensen, *Angew. Chem., Int. Ed.*, 2005, **44**, 794–797; (b) Y. Hayashi, H. Gotoh, T. Hayashi and M. Shoji, *Angew. Chem., Int. Ed.*, 2005, **44**, 4212–4215; (c) H. Gotoh, R. Masui, H. Ogino, M. Shoji and Y. Hayashi, *Angew. Chem., Int. Ed.*, 2006, **45**, 6853–6856.
- 11 CCDC 1893156 (**9b**)†.
- 12 For selected racemic chemical synthesis of aflatoxins, see: (a) G. Büchi, D. M. Foulkes, M. Kurono and G. F. Mitchell, *J. Am. Chem. Soc.*, 1966, **88**, 4534–4536; (b) G. Büchi, D. M. Foulkes, M. Kurono, G. F. Mitchell and R. S. Schneider, *J. Am. Chem. Soc.*, 1967, **89**, 6745–6753; (c) J. C. Roberts, A. H. Sheppard, J. A. Knight and P. Roffey, *J. Chem. Soc. C*, 1968, 22–24; (d) G. Büchi and S. M. Weinreb, *J. Am. Chem. Soc.*, 1971, **93**, 746–752; (e) A. J. Castellino and H. Rapoport, *J. Org. Chem.*, 1986, **51**, 1006–1011; (f) G. Weeratunga, S. Home and R. Rodrigo, *J. Chem. Soc., Chem. Commun.*, 1988, 721–722; (g) S. Home, G. Weeratunga and R. Rodrigo, *J. Chem. Soc., Chem. Commun.*, 1990, 39–41; (h) M. Koreeda, L. A. Dixon and J. D. Hsi, *Synlett*, 1993, 555–556; (i) M. C. Pirrung and Y. R. Lee, *Tetrahedron Lett.*, 1996, **37**, 2391–2394; (j) L. K. Casillas and C. A. Townsend, *J. Org. Chem.*, 1999, **64**, 4050–4059; (k) T. L. Graybill, E. G. Casillas, K. Pal and C. A. Townsend, *J. Am. Chem. Soc.*, 1999, **121**, 7729–7746; (l) W. E. Noland and B. L. Kedrowski, *Org. Lett.*, 2000, **2**, 2109–2111; (m) D. W. Udvary, L. K. Casillas and C. A. Townsend, *J. Am. Chem. Soc.*, 2002, **124**, 5294–5303; (n) S. A. Eastham, S. P. Ingham, M. R. Hallett, J. Herbert, A. Modi, T. Morley, J. E. Painter, P. Patel, P. Quayle, D. C. Ricketts and J. Raftery, *Tetrahedron*, 2008, **64**, 936–948.
- 13 The hemiacetal **13** and the opened hydroxyl aldehyde **13'** should be in equilibrium with each other and could not be separated by chromatography. The yield was reported for the mixtures, and the mixtures were used for the next step.