Bis(σ-B–H) complexes of copper(I): precursors to a heterogeneous amine–borane dehydrogenation catalyst†

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A series of bis(σ-B–H) complexes of copper(I) have been prepared by displacement of arene solvent from a β-diketiminate copper(I) complex by four-coordinate boranes, H3B–L (L = NMe3, lutidine). In the presence of the same copper arene complex, the secondary amine–borane H3B–NMe3H undergoes dehydrogenation. We provide evidence for formation of a heterogenous catalyst from decomposition of the solution species.

Since Hartwig and co-workers reported the isolation and characterisation of [Cp2Ti(η3–HBcat)] (HBcat = catecholborane),† our understanding of the coordination chemistry of boranes has flourished. Contrasting studies have investigated the interaction of 3- and 4-coordinate boranes with transition metal centres. Regardless of the environment at boron and the mode of coordination to the metal, σ-borane complexes have become synonymous with B–H bond activation. These species are invoked as intermediates in the catalytic borylation of C–H bonds,† the hydroboration of alkenes and alkynes, and the dehydrogenation of amine–boranes. For example, Shimoi and co-workers studied the coordination of H3B–NMe3 to a series of group 6 carbonyl complexes and demonstrated dehydrogenation of H3B–NHR3 under photochemical conditions. In related studies, Weller, Sabo–Etienne, Aldridge, Manners, Schneider, and others have conducted extensive investigations into the coordination of H3B–NR3, H3B–NR2 and [H3B–NR2]−, fragments to a series of late transition metals, including ruthenium, rhodium and iridium complexes. A detailed understanding of not only the electronic structure of a clath of σ-borane complexes but also the mechanisms of amine–borane dehydrogenation has emerged.

Despite a growing interest in the catalytic applications of the 1⁰ row transition metals, little is known about σ-complexes of copper. The coordination of σ-bonds to Cu(I) may fore-shadow oxidative addition to Cu(II) and play an unappreciated role in catalysis. In line with these expectations, Bourissou and coworkers have reported the intramolecular coordination of Si–Si and Si–H bonds within carefully designed ligand frameworks to Cu(I). In the case of an Sn–Sn analogue, oxidative addition of the tin–tin bond was observed allowing isolation of the corresponding Cu(II) distannyl complex. Stack, Ribas and co-workers have provided EPR and computational support for an agostic interaction in a Cu(I) metallocycle. Recently we reported the reversible, intermolecular, coordination of Al–H and Zn–H bonds to a two-coordinate copper(I) fragment generated in situ from 1-toluene (Scheme 1). Here we disclose that amine–boranes coordinate reversibly to Cu(I), and demonstrate an effective pre-catalyst for amine–borane dehydrogenation.

The reaction of 1-toluene with H3B–L (L = NMe3, lutidine) in a 1 : 2 stoichiometry CuL2 resulted in a minor perturbation of the resonances of 1 and the borane as evidenced by line-broadening and chemical shift changes in both the 1H and 11B 1H NMR spectra. Despite the weak and potentially reversible nature of the interaction, preparative scale reactions allowed the isolation of the corresponding σ-borane complexes 2a–b as yellow crystalline solids in 63–85% yield (Scheme 1).

Single crystals of 2a–b could be grown from toluene or toluene/hexane mixtures at −35 °C (Fig. 1). Compound 2a crystallises with a mirror plane that passes though the metal centre and bisects the N–Cu–N angle, necessitating that the BH3NMe3 unit be disordered (see ESI†). Due to this disorder, the hydride atoms could not be located. The Cu–B distances

![Scheme 1](https://www.rsc.org/dalton)
1.590(3), N(3)

In contrast, Shimoi and co-workers proposed

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\text{Cu} - \text{B} \text{hydride sites.9 In contrast, Shimoi and co-workers proposed}
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(12) 1.549(11), N(1)
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Selected bond lengths (Å) and bond angles (°)

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\text{Cu} - \text{B bond of the copper} \quad \text{Cu} - \text{B bond of the copper}
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\text{Cu} - \text{B} 2.191(6), \text{B} - \text{N(12)} 1.549(11), \text{N(1) - Cu - N(3A) 97.08(14)}
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\text{Cu} - \text{B} 2.152(3), \text{B} - \text{N(22)} 1.590(3), \text{N(3) - Cu - N(1) 98.58(7)}.
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The observation of a weak and reversible coordination of

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\text{Cu - B bond to C(\text{Cu}) parallels that reported for analogous}
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\text{aluminate between the terminal B(\text{Cu}) and B-H stretches (2403 cm}^{-1})
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\Delta \text{H}_{\text{ex}} = -1.40(4) \text{ kcal mol}^{-1}, \Delta S_{\text{ex}} = -5.87(2)
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\text{cal K}^{-1} \text{ mol}^{-1} \text{ and } \Delta G_{\text{ex}} = +0.17(3) \text{ kcal mol}^{-1}. \text{The data suggest}
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\text{binding of H}_3\text{B-NMe}_3 \text{ to 1-toluene is slightly endergonic.}
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In order to gain a deeper understanding of the strength

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\text{and nature of the bonding within the bis(\sigma-B-H) complexes, a}
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\text{series of DFT calculations were undertaken. A minimum on}
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\text{the potential energy surface with a bis(\sigma-B-H) coordination}
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\text{mode was obtained for the series of complexes presented in}
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\text{Scheme 2 Reversible } \sigma \text{-complex formation with copper(l).}
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Scheme 1. All attempts to optimise mono(σ-B–H) geometries led to this structure. The calculated B–H bond lengths are significantly longer than those determined in 2b by X-ray crystallography and range from 1.20–1.23 Å. Furthermore, across a choice of functionals, and in contrast to the X-ray data, the (σ-B–H) lengths were determined to be only slightly longer than the terminal B–H bond in these calculations (Δ = 0.03 Å). Based on the known difficulty in assigning the position of the hydrogen atoms in X-ray diffraction experiments, the calculated B–H bond lengths represent a more realistic description of the ground-state structure.

NBO calculations suggest only a minor perturbation of borane within the coordination complexes 2a and 2b. The Wiberg Bond Indices (WBIs) for the (σ-B–H) bonds are similar to that of the terminal B–H. Furthermore, both the Cu–H and Cu–B WBIs are low, suggestive of a weak interaction (Fig. 2). Second order perturbation analysis allows a quantification of the donorn-acceptor interactions, donation of electrons from each of the two B–H σ-bonds occurs to the 4s orbital of copper (2a, 21.7 + 22.3 kcal mol⁻¹; 2b, 15.6 + 16.8 kcal mol⁻¹), significantly back-donation from Cu(i) to the B–H σ*-orbitals is not recorded for either 2a or 2b.

These data were further underscored by a quantum theory atoms-in-molecules (QTAIM) calculation on 2a which revealed bond critical points (BCPs) between the Cu/B and H atoms, but not between Cu and B. These data show a bending of the (σ-B–H) bond critical paths toward Cu and are consistent with two 3-centre,2-electron interactions (Fig. 2). In line with the NBO analysis, the QTAIM data for coordinated (ρBcp = 0.154; VpBcp = -0.14) and non-coordinated B–H bonds (ρBcp = 0.171; VpBcp = -0.20) within 2a suggests small changes of the bonding in the B–H bond upon coordination to Cu(i).

Further modification of the amine–borane to a substrate that contained both hydridic and acidic protons resulted in facile dehydrogenation and boron–nitrogen bond formation. While reaction of H₂B–NHMe₂ with 1₂-toluene resulted in the generation of the corresponding σ-complex, compound 2c was short-lived and only observed in situ. All attempts to isolate this latter species resulted in dehydrogenation of H₂B–NHMe₂ (Scheme 3).

In line with these expectations, 1₂-toluene catalysed the dehydrogenation of H₂B–NHMe₂ in 5 mol% loading at 80 °C in C₆D₆ solution (Scheme 2). Notably 2c was observed as an intermediate in solution by ¹H NMR spectroscopy. In this case, at 298 K the J₁₁B–¹H coupling can be resolved and the J₁₁B–₁H for the equilibrium mixture of 1₂-toluene, 2c and H₂B–NHMe₂ (90.4 Hz) is slightly smaller than that of the independent amine–borane (96.4 Hz). Monitoring catalytic reactions by ¹H and ¹¹B NMR spectroscopy revealed the formation of known products [H₂B(NMe₂)]₂ (3a) and HB(NMe₂)₂ (3b). The reaction proceeded with concomitant formation of a Cu(0) mirror on the interior of the reaction vessel. Following a catalytic run, re-exposure of the Cu(0) mirror to the reaction conditions reestablished amine–borane dehydrogenation. An Hg(0) drop experiment resulted in a significant inhibition of catalysis. In this instance, data are consistent with 2c acting as a homogeneous precursor to a heterogeneous species.₃

These data contrast those found by Philips and co-workers for the dehydrogenation of ammonia-borane catalysed by a ruthenium analogue of 1-benzene and by Bertrand and co-workers using a CAAC-stabilised copper borohydride complex.₃₂,₃₃

**Conclusions**

In summary, we have reported the first examples of isolable and crystallographically characterised σ-borane complexes of Cu(i). While in the solid-state amine–boranes coordinate via an η²:H²-mode, in solution displacement of this ligand by arene solvent is both fast and reversible. Inclusion of both hydridic and protic hydrogen atoms on the ligand leads to a decomposition of the coordination compound and production of a heterogeneous copper catalyst that is capable of the dehydrogenation of an amine–borane.
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Notes and references


20 There is an additional minor species present at these temperatures that we have been unable to assign. Chemical shift data are similar to the arene complex 1-toluene and this may be the dimer or an isotopomer of this species.

