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Synthesis of a terminal Ce(IV) oxo complex by photolysis of a Ce(III) nitrate complex[†]

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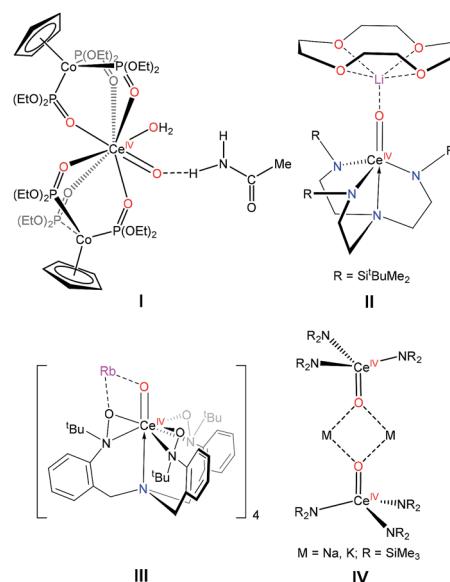
Reaction of $[\text{Ce}(\text{NR}_2)_3]$ ($\text{R} = \text{SiMe}_3$) with LiNO_3 in THF, in the presence of 2,2,2-cryptand, results in the formation of the Ce(III) "ate" complex, $[\text{Li}(2,2,2\text{-cryptand})][\text{Ce}(\kappa^2\text{-O}_2\text{NO})(\text{NR}_2)_3]$ (**1**) in 38% yield. Photolysis of **1** at 380 nm affords $[\text{Li}(2,2,2\text{-cryptand})][\text{Ce}(\text{O})(\text{NR}_2)_3]$ (**2**), in 33% isolated yield after reaction work-up. Complex **2** is the first reported example of a Ce(IV) oxo complex where the oxo ligand is not supported by hydrogen bonding or alkali metal coordination. Also formed during photolysis are $[\text{Li}(2,2,2\text{-cryptand})]_2[\mu_3\text{-O}(\text{Ce}(\mu\text{-O})(\text{NR}_2)_2)_3]$ (**3**) and $[\text{Li}(2,2,2\text{-cryptand})][\text{Ce}(\text{OSiMe}_3)(\text{NR}_2)_3]$ (**4**). Their identities were confirmed by X-ray crystallography. Complex **4** can also be prepared *via* reaction of $[\text{Ce}(\text{NR}_2)_3]$ with LiOSiMe_3 in THF, in the presence of 2,2,2-cryptand. When synthesized in this fashion, **4** can be isolated in 47% yield. To rationalize the presence of **2**, **3**, and **4** in the reaction mixture, we propose that photolysis of **1** first generates **2** and NO_2 , *via* homolytic cleavage of the N–O bond in its nitrate co-ligand. Complex **2** then undergoes decomposition *via* two separate routes: (1) ligand scrambling and oligomerization to form **3**; and, (2) abstraction of a trimethylsilyl cation to form a transient Ce(IV) silyloxide, $[\text{Ce}^{\text{IV}}(\text{OSiMe}_3)(\text{NR}_2)_3]$, followed by 1e^- reduction to form **4**. Alternatively, complex **4** could form directly *via* $\cdot\text{SiMe}_3$ abstraction by **2**.

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Introduction

The past five years has seen significant progress made toward the synthesis of lanthanide complexes containing metal–ligand multiple bonds,^{1–6} including those featuring $\text{Ln}=\text{N}$ and $\text{Ln}=\text{C}$ interactions. For example, Anwander and co-workers recently described the synthesis of the first terminal lanthanide imido complex, $[(\text{Tp}^{t\text{Bu},\text{Me}})\text{Lu}=\text{N}(3,5\text{-}(\text{CF}_3)_2\text{C}_6\text{H}_3)(\text{DMAP})]$, *via* Lewis base-induced methane elimination.² Similarly, Schelter and co-workers reported the synthesis of a series of Ce(IV) imido complexes, $[\text{ML}_n][\text{Ce}=\text{N}(3,5\text{-}(\text{CF}_3)_2\text{C}_6\text{H}_3)(\text{TriNOx})]$ (TriNOx = $\text{N}(\text{o-CH}_2\text{C}_6\text{H}_4\text{N}^+(\text{Bu})\text{O})_3$; $\text{ML}_n = \text{Li}(\text{THF})(\text{Et}_2\text{O})$, $\text{Li}(\text{TMEDA})$, $\text{K}(\text{DME})_2$, $\text{Rb}(\text{DME})_2$, $\text{Cs}(\text{DME})_2$).⁵ Significant progress has also been made toward the synthesis of cerium(IV) oxo complexes.⁷ For example, Leung and co-workers recently reported the synthesis of a Ce(IV) oxo complex ligated by the tripodal Kläui ligand, $[(\text{LOET})_2\text{Ce}(\text{O})(\text{H}_2\text{O})]\cdot\text{MeC(O)NH}_2$ (**I**, $\text{LOET} = \text{CpCo}\{\text{P}(\text{O})(\text{OEt})_2\}_3$, Scheme 1).³ Additionally, our group reported the synthesis of the cerium(IV) oxo complex, $[\text{Li}(12\text{-crown-4})][(\text{NN}'_3)\text{Ce}(\text{O})]$ (**II**, $\text{NN}'_3 = \text{N}(\text{CH}_2\text{CH}_2\text{NR})_3$, $\text{R} = \text{Si}^{\text{I}}\text{BuMe}_2$), which was synthesized by thermal decomposition of a Ce(III) nitrate precursor $[\text{Li}(12\text{-crown-4})][(\text{NN}'_3)\text{Ce}(\kappa^2\text{-O}_2\text{NO})]$.⁸ More recently,

Schelter and co-workers reported the synthesis of a Ce(IV) oxo supported by the tripodal TriNOx ligand, $[(\text{TriNOx})\{\text{Ce}(\text{O})\}\text{Rb}]_4$ (**III**).⁵ Also of note is $[\text{M}]_2[\text{Ce}(\mu\text{-O})(\text{NR}_2)_3]_2$ (**IV**, $\text{M} = \text{Na, K}$; $\text{R} = \text{SiMe}_3$), reported by Lappert and co-workers in 2010.⁹ These two complexes, which pre-date the other examples mentioned here, were isolated in low yield (*ca.* 20%) upon reaction of



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Scheme 1 Selected complexes bearing lanthanide–oxygen multiple bonds.

Ce(NR₂)₃ with MNR₂, in the presence of O₂,⁹ but they were not completely characterized.

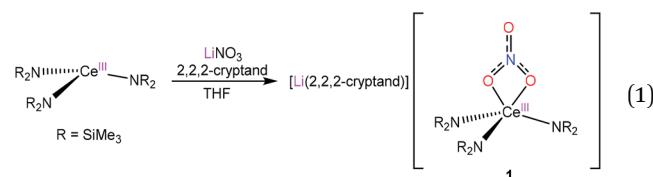
Interestingly, every cerium oxo complex isolated thus far has utilized an external non-covalent interaction to instil stability to this highly reactive functional group. For example, the Ce=O bond in **I** is stabilized by hydrogen bonding to an acetamide solvent molecule.³ Similarly, the oxo ligands in **II** and **III** are stabilized by their interactions with a capping alkali metal counterion.^{5,8} The prevalence of these non-covalent interactions can be rationalized by the poor overlap of the metal f and d orbitals with oxygen 2p orbitals, which results in weak π bonds within the Ce=O fragment, concomitant with considerable oxo nucleophilicity.^{4,9–11} Indeed, controlling this nucleophilic character has been one of the key challenges to synthesizing a terminal lanthanide oxo complex.³

The unique redox chemistry of the lanthanides also poses a barrier for the synthesis of lanthanide oxo complexes. In particular, cerium redox chemistry is dominated by the Ce(III/IV) redox couple, and thus formation of a Ce(IV) oxo complex from a Ce(III) precursor essentially mandates a 1e[–] O-atom transfer process. However, traditional O-atom transfer reagents, such as N₂O, pyridine-N-oxide, and peroxyacids, are 2e[–] oxidants.¹² In our recent synthesis of [Li(12-crown-4)][(NN')₃Ce(O)], the oxo ligand was formed *via* reduction of a nitrate ligand, in a formal 1e[–] O-atom transfer process. Several other examples demonstrating the use of nitrate as a 1e[–] O-atom source have emerged in recent years,^{13–16} suggesting that [NO₃][–] could be a valuable reagent for the generation of f-element oxo complexes. This mode of reactivity can also be promoted with light. For example, Berry and co-workers demonstrated that photolysis of Ru₂(chp)₄(NO₃) (chp = 6-chloro-2-hydroxypyridinate) generated a metal oxo with concomitant release of NO₂.¹³ Similarly, Sustlick and co-workers reported that photolysis of Mn(PP)(NO₃) also resulted in metal oxo generation and release of NO₂.¹⁵ However, it should be noted that in both of these examples the resulting metal oxo was unstable and not isolated.

Drawing on these results, we sought to further develop the use of [NO₃][–] as an O-atom source for the synthesis of f-element oxo complexes. Herein, we describe the photochemical cleavage of nitrate in a Ce(III) “ate” precursor to generate the first terminal Ce(IV) oxo complex.

Results and discussion

Reaction of [Ce(NR₂)₃] (R = SiMe₃) with LiNO₃ in THF, in the presence of 2,2,2-cryptand, results in the formation of the Ce(III) “ate” complex, [Li(2,2,2-cryptand)][Ce(κ^2 -O₂NO)(NR₂)₃] (**1**), which can be isolated as a yellow crystalline solid in 38% yield after work-up (eqn (1)). The ¹H NMR spectrum of **1** in py-d₅ displays a broad singlet at –1.32 ppm, assignable to the SiMe₃ environment, and three resonances at 2.48, 3.45 and 3.51 ppm, assignable to the cryptand moiety. The chemical shift of the methyl resonance, along with its broad appearance, support the presence of a paramagnetic Ce(III) centre in this complex. The ⁷Li{¹H} NMR spectrum reveals a broad resonance at –1.08 ppm, indicative of a single lithium environment.



The solid-state molecular structure of **1** (Fig. 1) reveals a κ^2 coordination mode of the nitrate ligand, similar to that observed for the cerium(III) nitrate TREN complex, [Li(12-crown-4)][(NN')₃Ce(NO₃)].⁸ However, the Ce–O distances in **1** (2.653(2) and 2.562(2) Å) are shorter than those observed for [Li(12-crown-4)][(NN')₃Ce(NO₃)] (2.724(6) and 2.745(6) Å), likely because of the bulkier TREN ligand in the latter and the absence of Li–O interactions in the former. In addition, the Ce–N distances in **1** (2.367(2)–2.398(2) Å) are consistent with the Ce–N distances reported for other Ce(III) amido complexes.^{17–20} For comparison, the Ce–N distances in Ce(TMP)₃(THF) (TMP = 2,2,6,6-tetramethylpiperidinato) range from 2.346(2)–2.374(2) Å, while the distances in [Li(THF)][Ce(NCy₂)₄] range from 2.320(2)–2.330(2) Å.^{18,19} The lithium counter-ion in **1** is encapsulated by the 2,2,2-cryptand moiety, rendering **1** a separated cation–anion pair. Interestingly, only five of the eight donor atoms in the cryptand moiety are bound to the lithium ion; two nitrogen atoms and one oxygen atom remain uncoordinated. Similar binding modes have been observed in other [Li(2,2,2-cryptand)]⁺ complexes.^{21–24}

With complex **1** in hand, we explored its suitability as a Ce(IV) oxo precursor. Unlike [Li(12-crown-4)][(NN')₃Ce(NO₃)], however, which is mostly consumed upon standing at room temperature for 24 h, we discovered that complex **1** is not especially temperature sensitive. A py-d₅ solution of **1**, which was stored

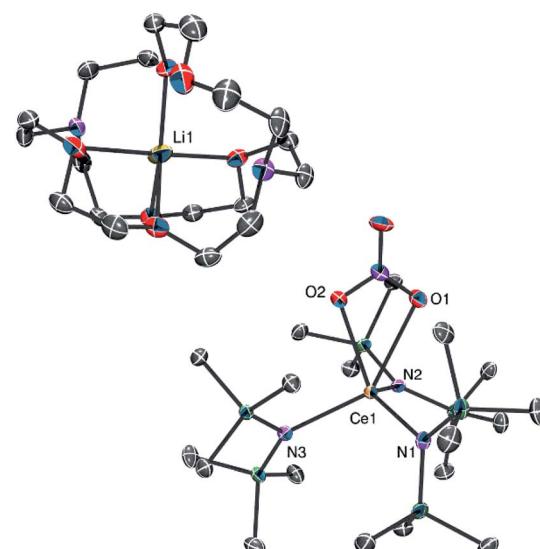


Fig. 1 ORTEP diagram of **1** shown with 50% probability ellipsoids. Hydrogen atoms are omitted for clarity. Selected bond distances (Å) and angles (°): Ce1–O1 = 2.653(2), Ce1–O2 = 2.562(2), Ce1–N1 = 2.385(3), Ce1–N2 = 2.367(2), Ce1–N3 = 2.398(2), N2–Ce1–N1 = 121.01(8), N2–Ce1–N3 = 112.82(8), N1–Ce1–N3 = 101.96(9).



for 24 h at room temperature in the absence of light, still consisted primarily of complex **1**, as determined by ^1H NMR spectroscopy. However, we do observe the formation of several new species in this sample, in small amounts, as revealed by resonances at 0.69, 0.20, and -0.58 ppm (see Fig. S10 in the ESI \dagger). These were later identified as belonging to $[\text{Li}(2,2,2\text{-cryptand})][\text{Ce}(\text{O})(\text{NR}_2)_3]$ (**2**), $[\text{Li}(2,2,2\text{-cryptand})_2][(\mu_3\text{-O})\{\text{Ce}(\mu\text{-O})(\text{NR}_2)_2\}_3]$ (**3**), and $[\text{Li}(2,2,2\text{-cryptand})][\text{Ce}(\text{OSiMe}_3)(\text{NR}_2)_3]$ (**4**), respectively (*vide infra*). These three complexes were present in a relative ratio of $2 : 27 : 1$. The relatively high thermal stability of **1** led us to conclude that formation of a terminal Ce(iv) oxo complex through thermal activation of the nitrate co-ligand in **1** was not synthetically viable.

Given the relatively high thermal stability of **1**, we sought an alternative route to reduce its nitrate co-ligand. Schelter and co-workers previously reported that photolysis of $[\text{Ce}(\text{NR}_2)_3]$ resulted in formation of a relatively long-lived excited state. 25,26 This excited state species is strongly reducing, and can elicit homolytic cleavage of the C-Cl bond in PhCH_2Cl , resulting in formation of $[\text{Ce}(\text{Cl})(\text{NR}_2)_3]$ and bibenzyl. 25 The UV-vis spectrum of **1** features two absorptions at 380 nm ($\epsilon = 200\text{ M}^{-1}\text{ cm}^{-1}$) and 336 nm ($\epsilon = 140\text{ M}^{-1}\text{ cm}^{-1}$) (Fig. S14 \dagger), and is similar to that reported for $[\text{Ce}(\text{NR}_2)_3]$. 25 We have assigned the former absorption to a metal-based $4\text{f} \rightarrow 5\text{d}_2$ transition and the latter to a $4\text{f} \rightarrow 5\text{d}_{xz/yz}$ transition, by analogy with the assignments reported for $[\text{Ce}(\text{NR}_2)_3]$. For comparison, these transitions occur at 413 nm and 341 nm , respectively, in $[\text{Ce}(\text{NR}_2)_3]$. We attribute the *ca.* 30 nm blue shift observed for the $4\text{f} \rightarrow 5\text{d}_2$ transition in **1** to the presence of the additional nitrate co-ligand, as well as its overall negative charge.

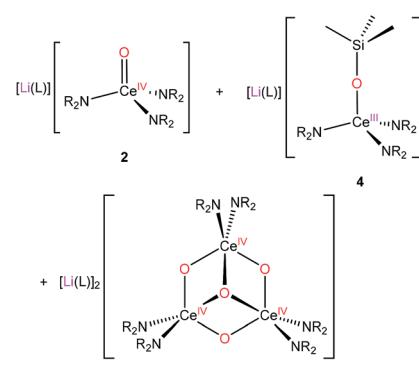
Given the similar optical properties of **1** and $[\text{Ce}(\text{NR}_2)_3]$, we hypothesized that photolysis of **1** would induce reduction of the nitrate ligand to afford a Ce(iv) oxo complex. To this end, a $2 : 1$ tol- d_8 /py- d_5 solution of **1**, in an NMR tube equipped with a J-Young valve, was exposed to light from a 380 nm LED lightstrip for 6 h at $-5\text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ (Scheme 2). A ^1H NMR spectrum of this sample revealed an approximately 80% consumption of **1**, as evidenced by the attenuation of its SiMe_3 resonance at -1.18 ppm . In addition, we observe the appearance of a sharp singlet at 0.80 ppm , as well as the appearance of broad singlets at 0.28 , -0.21 , and -0.43 ppm (see Fig. S3 in ESI \dagger). We assigned

the sharp singlet at 0.80 ppm to the terminal Ce(iv) oxo complex $[\text{Li}(2,2,2\text{-cryptand})][\text{Ce}(\text{O})(\text{NR}_2)_3]$ (**2**), while we have tentatively assigned the resonance at 0.28 ppm to the Ce(iv) oxo cluster $[\text{Li}(2,2,2\text{-cryptand})_2][(\mu_3\text{-O})\{\text{Ce}(\mu\text{-O})(\text{NR}_2)_2\}_3]$ (**3**). In addition, the resonances at -0.21 and -0.43 ppm , which integrate to 9 and 54 protons, respectively, are assignable to the Ce(III) silyl oxide $[\text{Li}(2,2,2\text{-cryptand})][\text{Ce}(\text{OSiMe}_3)(\text{NR}_2)_3]$ (**4**). After 6 h of photolysis, these three species were present in an approximately $11 : 2.5 : 1$ ratio, according to NMR spectroscopy (Fig. S4 \dagger). Attempts to photolysis the reaction mixture for longer times, in an attempt to get complete consumption of **1**, lead to decreased yields of **2**. We also found that the use of the $2 : 1$ tol- d_8 /py- d_5 solvent system was critical to maximize the amount of **2** formed in the reaction mixture. If we perform the photolysis in neat py- d_5 , the relative amount of **2** decreased substantially; under these conditions complexes **2** and **3** are formed in nearly equal amounts. Moreover, photolyses performed in neat tol- d_8 proved impractical because of the low solubility of complex **1** in that solvent. Finally, we observed that photolyses conducted in NMR tubes result in the most efficient consumption of **1**, likely due to their high surface-to-volume ratio.

Work-up of the reaction mixture resulted in the isolation of complex **2** as yellow plates in 33% yield. Its formulation was confirmed by X-ray crystallography (see below). In one instance, we also observed the deposition of small amounts of pale yellow crystals and colorless plates, which were subsequently identified as **3** and **4**, respectively, by X-ray crystallography.

Complex **2** crystallizes in the monoclinic space group $P2_1/c$ (Fig. 2). In the solid state, **2** displays a terminal Ce=O linkage and a pseudo-tetrahedral geometry about the cerium centre. Its Ce-O bond length ($1.840(7)\text{ \AA}$) is shorter than those observed for **II** ($1.902(2)\text{ \AA}$), **III** ($1.887(4)$ – $1.902(4)\text{ \AA}$), and **IV** ($1.908(3)\text{ \AA}$) 5,8,9 , possibly because of the absence of any alkali metal–oxo interaction in **2**. 5,8 The Ce-O distance in **2** is also shorter than that calculated for $[\text{K}(18\text{-crown-6})][\text{Ce}(\text{O})(\text{NR}_2)_3]$ (1.904 \AA), which also features an alkali metal–oxo interaction. 8 Interestingly, however, the Ce-O distance in **2** is identical to that observed for hydrogen-bond stabilized **I** ($1.857(3)\text{ \AA}$) by the 3σ criterion, 3 suggesting that the hydrogen bonding interaction in **I** does not substantially disrupt the Ce=O bond. Also of note, the Ce-N distances in **2** ($2.353(8)$ – $2.397(8)\text{ \AA}$) are slightly longer than those reported for other Ce(iv) amides. For example, the Ce-N distances in $\text{Ce}(\text{NCy}_2)_4$ range from $2.238(5)$ to $2.247(6)\text{ \AA}$, while those of $[\text{Ce}(X)(\text{NR}_2)_3]$ ($X = \text{Cl}, \text{Br}$) are $2.217(3)$ and $2.219(7)\text{ \AA}$, respectively. 19,27,28 This lengthening may be a consequence of the strongly donating nature of the oxo ligand, along with the complex's overall negative charge, which weakens the Ce-N bonds. For further comparison, $[\text{Li}(12\text{-crown-4})][(\text{NN}'_3)\text{Ce}(\text{O})]$ also features longer than expected Ce-N distances. 8 Finally, the Li-binding mode of the 2,2,2-cryptand moiety in **2** is similar to that observed in **1**. However, in **2**, six of the eight donor atoms in the cryptand moiety are bound to the lithium ion; only one nitrogen atom and one oxygen atom remain uncoordinated.

Complex **2** is soluble in toluene, Et_2O , benzene, and pyridine, but decomposes when exposed to THF, acetonitrile, and dichloromethane (forming $\text{HN}(\text{SiMe}_3)_2$ as the only identifiable product). Its ^1H NMR spectrum in py- d_5 features a sharp singlet



Scheme 2 Synthesis of complexes **2**, **3**, and **4** via photolysis of **1**.



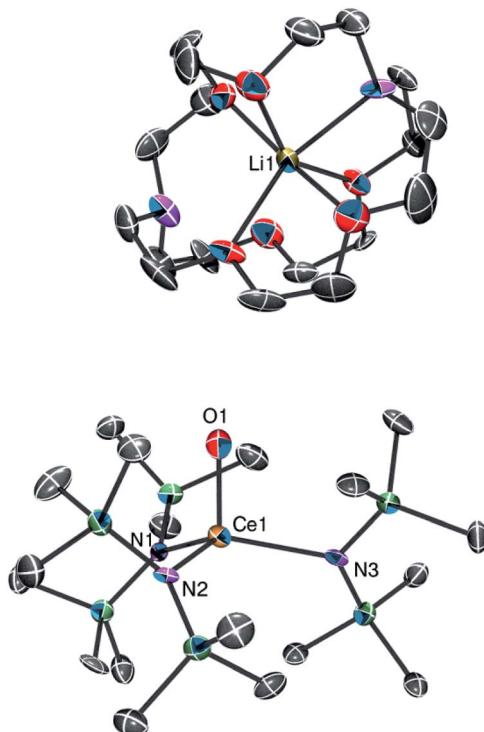


Fig. 2 ORTEP diagram of **2** shown with 50% probability ellipsoids. Hydrogen atoms are omitted for clarity. Selected bond distances (Å) and angles (°): Ce1–O1 = 1.840(7), Ce1–N1 = 2.397(8), Ce1–N2 = 2.353(8), Ce1–N3 = 2.383(8), N2–Ce1–N1 = 116.4(3), N3–Ce1–N1 = 113.4(3), N2–Ce1–N3 = 116.8(3), O1–Ce1–N1 = 103.9(3), O1–Ce1–N2 = 101.7(3), O1–Ce1–N3 = 101.5(3).

at 0.69 ppm integrating to 54 protons, which is assignable to the SiMe_3 environment, while the resonances at 2.56, 3.52, and 3.59 ppm, each integrating to 12 protons, are assignable to the cryptand moiety. The chemical shift of its SiMe_3 resonance is nearly identical to that assigned to this complex in the spectrum of the crude reaction mixture (Fig. S4†). The $^7\text{Li}\{^1\text{H}\}$ NMR spectrum of **2** features a broad singlet centred at -1.00 ppm. This chemical shift is in the range previously reported for the $[\text{Li}(2,2,2\text{-cryptand})]^+$ ion.^{29,30} We also recorded the Raman spectrum of **2**, but were unable to make a definitive assignment of the $\text{Ce}=\text{O}$ stretch. Finally, we have found that complex **2** is somewhat thermally sensitive. Upon standing in **2** : 1 $\text{tol-}d_8/\text{py-}d_5$ at room temperature for 4 d, complex **2** decomposes to a mixture of **3**, **4**, and $\text{LiN}(\text{SiMe}_3)_2$ (along with other unidentified products) with about 70% conversion (Fig. S12 and S13†). Under these conditions, complexes **3** and **4** are present in an approximately 3 : 1 ratio. Similar results are observed when **2** is left to stand in neat $\text{py-}d_5$ (Fig. S11†).

Complex **3** crystallizes in triclinic space group $P\bar{1}$ (Fig. 3). In the solid state, complex **3** consists of a partial cubane Ce_3O_4 core. Each Ce centre is also ligated by two silylamine ligands. Additionally, **3** features two $[\text{Li}(2,2,2\text{-cryptand})]^+$ counterions, confirming the tetravalent oxidation state of each cerium atom. The Ce–O distances observed for the three μ_2 -oxo ligands in **3** range from 2.071(7) to 2.133(7) Å, and are comparable to those observed in the structurally related Ce(IV) oxo cluster, $[(\mu\text{-O})$

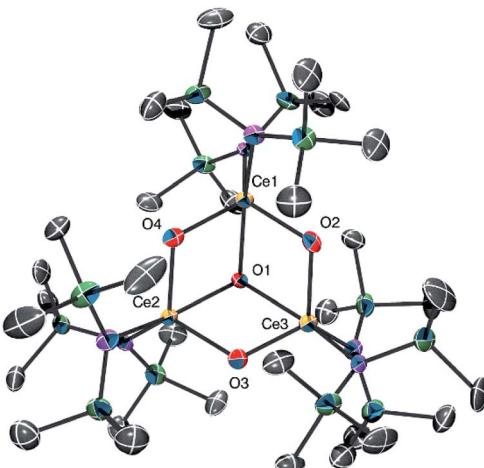


Fig. 3 ORTEP diagram of **3** shown with 50% probability ellipsoids. Hydrogen atoms, diethyl ether solvate and two $[\text{Li}(2,2,2\text{-cryptand})]^+$ counter-ions are omitted for clarity. Selected bond distances (Å) and angles (°): Ce1–O1 = 2.294(7), Ce1–O2 = 2.078(7), Ce1–O4 = 2.133(7), Ce2–O1 = 2.310(7), Ce2–O3 = 2.109(7), Ce2–O4 = 2.071(7), Ce3–O1 = 2.289(7), Ce3–O2 = 2.130(7), Ce3–O3 = 2.100(7), Ce1–N1 = 2.391(8), Ce1–N2 = 2.366(8), Ce2–N5 = 2.389(8), Ce2–N6 = 2.380(9), Ce3–N3 = 2.386(9), Ce3–N4 = 2.415(9), Ce3–O1–Ce1 = 99.8(3), Ce3–O1–Ce2 = 99.6(3), Ce1–O1–Ce2 = 99.5(3).

$\text{Ce}(\text{NR}_2)_3$]⁹ reported by Lappert and co-workers. The Ce–O distances observed for the μ_3 -oxo ligand in **3** are longer, ranging from 2.289(7) to 2.310(7) Å, but are similar to those reported for other known $[\text{Ce}_3(\mu_3\text{-oxo})]$ clusters.^{31,32} We can rule out the presence of a hydroxo ligand in **3** on the basis of our structural data. In particular, the Ce–O distances of μ_2 - or μ_3 -hydroxo ligands are anticipated to be substantially longer than the Ce–O distances observed for **2**.^{33,34} As was observed for **2**, the Ce–N distances in **3** (2.366(8)–2.415(9) Å) are somewhat longer than those typically reported for Ce(IV) amides.^{19,27,28} Unfortunately, we have been unable to isolate pure samples of **3**, and thus have been unable to complete its characterization. As such, the NMR spectroscopic assignments that we report for this complex (see above) should be considered tentative.

Complex **4** crystallizes in the monoclinic space group $P2_1/n$ and its solid-state molecular structure is shown in Fig. 4. In the solid state, complex **4** consists of a pseudo-tetrahedral Ce(III) anion and a $[\text{Li}(2,2,2\text{-cryptand})]^+$ cation. Complex **4** features a Ce–O bond length of 2.214(3) Å which is significantly longer than the Ce–O distance found in **2** (1.840(7) Å), further supporting the presence of Ce=O multiple bond character in the latter. However, this distance is similar to the average Ce– O_{SiPh_3} distance in $\text{Ce}(\text{OSiPh}_3)_3(\text{THF})_3$ (2.22 Å).³⁵ The average Ce–N distance in **4** (2.41 Å) is comparable to that observed for **1** (2.38 Å), consistent with its anticipated Ce(III) oxidation state. Finally, the Ce–O–Si bond angle (178.9(2)°) is similar to that observed for $\text{Ce}(\text{OSiPh}_3)_3(\text{THF})_3$ (av. 174°)³⁵ and $[(\text{NN}^{\prime}_3)\text{Ce}(\text{OSiMe}_2\text{Bu})]$ (167.2(2)°).⁸

Conveniently, complex **4** can be synthesized independently via reaction of $[\text{Ce}(\text{NR}_2)_3]$ with LiOSiMe_3 in THF, in the presence of 2,2,2-cryptand (eqn (2)), permitting its complete

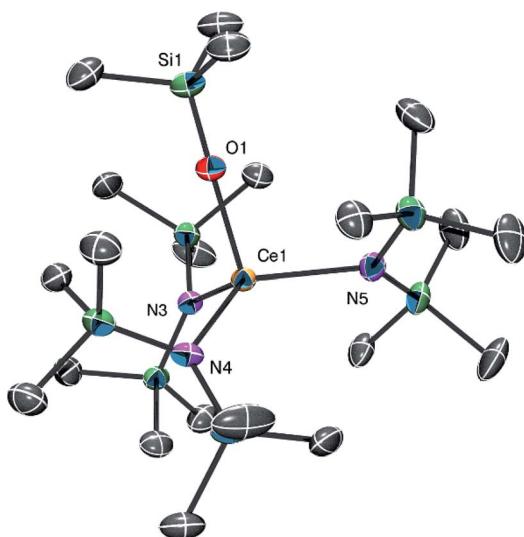
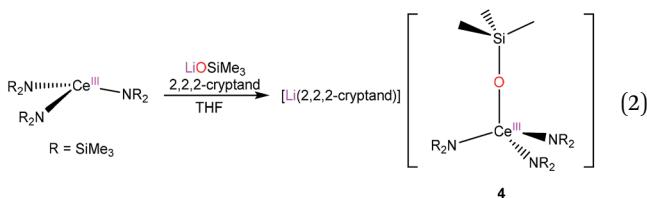


Fig. 4 ORTEP diagram of **4** shown with 50% probability ellipsoids. Hydrogen atoms and $[\text{Li}(2,2,2\text{-cryptand})]$ counterion are omitted for clarity. Selected bond distances (\AA) and angles ($^\circ$): $\text{Ce1}-\text{O1} = 2.214(3)$, $\text{Ce1}-\text{N3} = 2.430(4)$, $\text{Ce1}-\text{N4} = 2.396(4)$, $\text{Ce1}-\text{N5} = 2.413(4)$, $\text{O1}-\text{Si1} = 1.607(4)$, $\text{N4}-\text{Ce1}-\text{N3} = 109.97(13)$, $\text{N4}-\text{Ce1}-\text{N5} = 117.68(14)$, $\text{N5}-\text{Ce1}-\text{N3} = 117.42(13)$, $\text{Si1}-\text{O1}-\text{Ce1} = 178.9(2)$.

characterization. Synthesized *via* this route, **4** can be isolated as a white solid in 47% yield after work-up.



The ^1H NMR spectrum of **4** in $\text{py}-d_5$ features two broad singlets at -0.37 and -0.59 ppm, integrating to 9 and 54 protons, respectively. These resonances are assignable to the OSiMe_3 and $\text{N}(\text{SiMe}_3)_2$ methyl environments, respectively. Importantly, these resonances are nearly identical to those assigned to this complex in the spectrum of crude reaction mixture (Fig. S4 \dagger). Also observed in the ^1H NMR spectrum of **4** are resonances at 2.56 , 3.52 and 3.60 ppm, each integrating to 12 protons, which are assignable to the cryptand moiety. Finally, its $^7\text{Li}\{^1\text{H}\}$ NMR spectrum consists of a single resonance at -0.97 ppm.

To rationalize the presence of **2**, **3**, and **4** in the reaction mixture, we propose that photolysis of **1** first generates **2** and NO_2 , *via* homolytic cleavage of the N–O bond in its nitrate co-ligand. However, **2** is unstable to the reaction conditions and begins to decompose *via* two separate routes: (1) ligand scrambling and oligomerization to form **3**; and, (2) abstraction of a trimethylsilyl cation to form a transient cerium(IV) silyloxide, $[\text{Ce}^{\text{IV}}(\text{OSiMe}_3)(\text{NR}_2)_3]$, followed by 1e^- reduction to form **4**. Alternatively, complex **4** could form directly *via* $\cdot\text{SiMe}_3$ abstraction by **2**. To support these hypotheses, we note that complex **2** is thermally unstable, and slowly decomposes to

form a mixture of **3** and **4** in solution (Fig. S12 and S13 \dagger). Additionally, we observe a minor resonance at 0.53 ppm in the ^1H NMR spectrum of the photolysis reaction mixture (Fig. S4 \dagger), which is assignable to $\text{LiN}(\text{SiMe}_3)_2$. Its presence is consistent with the proposed conversion of **2** to **3** *via* ligand scrambling and loss of $\text{LiN}(\text{SiMe}_3)_2$. Finally, we previously demonstrated that the Ce(IV) silyloxide, $[(\text{NN}^{\prime}_3)\text{Ce}(\text{OSi}^{\prime}\text{BuMe}_2)_2]$, was formed as a minor by-product during the conversion of $[\text{Li}(12\text{-crown-4})][(\text{NN}^{\prime}_3)\text{Ce}(\kappa^2\text{-O}_2\text{NO})]$ to the Ce(IV) oxo, $[\text{Li}(12\text{-crown-4})][(\text{NN}^{\prime}_3)\text{Ce}(\text{O})]$,⁸ presumably *via* a similar adventitious $[\text{SiR}_3]^+$ abstraction.

To test the thermodynamic favourability of the proposed 1e^- reduction to form **4**, we investigated its electrochemistry by cyclic voltammetry. The cyclic voltammogram of **4** in THF reveals a redox feature centred at -0.53 V at 200 mV s^{-1} (vs. Fc/Fc^+ ; see Fig. S23 in ESI \dagger). This feature is marked by a large difference between the potentials of the oxidation and reduction peaks (*i.e.*, 0.72 V at 200 mV s^{-1}), suggestive of an ECE-type process. While the potential of this feature is comparable to those previously reported for cerium complexes with similar ligand frameworks, including $[\text{Ce}(\text{F})(\text{NR}_2)_3]$ (-0.56 V), $[\text{Ce}(\text{Cl})(\text{NR}_2)_3]$ (-0.30 V) and $[\text{Ce}(\text{Br})(\text{NR}_2)_3]$ (-0.31 V),^{36–38} its electrochemical irreversibility suggests that $[\text{Ce}^{\text{IV}}(\text{OSiMe}_3)(\text{NR}_2)_3]$ is not particularly stable. Therefore, complex **4** may not be formed *via* a straightforward 1e^- reduction of a $[\text{Ce}^{\text{IV}}(\text{OSiMe}_3)(\text{NR}_2)_3]$ intermediate. Instead, the cyclic voltammetry data may be evidence for a concerted $\cdot\text{SiMe}_3$ abstraction by **2** to form **4**. A similar $\cdot\text{SiMe}_3$ abstraction by the uranyl fragment has been reported by Arnold and co-workers.^{39–41}

Conclusions

In summary, we report the synthesis of the first lanthanide oxo complex where the oxo ligand is not supported by hydrogen bonding or alkali metal coordination, namely, $[\text{Li}(2,2,2\text{-cryptand})][\text{Ce}(\text{O})(\text{NR}_2)_3]$ (**2**). This complex was generated by photolysis of the Ce(III) nitrate precursor $[\text{Li}(2,2,2\text{-cryptand})][\text{Ce}(\kappa^2\text{-O}_2\text{NO})(\text{NR}_2)_3]$ (**1**), which results in photochemical cleavage of the nitrate co-ligand. Also formed in the photolysis reaction are the Ce(IV) oxo cluster, $[\text{Li}(2,2,2\text{-cryptand})]_2[(\mu_3\text{-O})\{\text{Ce}(\mu\text{-O})(\text{NR}_2)_2\}_3]$ (**3**), and the Ce(III) silyloxide complex, $[\text{Li}(2,2,2\text{-cryptand})][\text{Ce}(\text{OSiMe}_3)(\text{NR}_2)_3]$ (**4**). We believe these two complexes are formed upon thermal (or photochemical) decomposition of **2** after its initial generation in the reaction mixture. Overall, this work further highlights the utility of $[\text{NO}_3]^-$ as a 1e^- O-atom source for the generation of lanthanide oxo complexes. Indeed, we have now shown that nitrate reduction to form cerium oxos can proceed *via* both thermal and photochemical routes. Going forward, we will attempt to synthesize a Ln(III) oxo complex *via* 1e^- O-atom transfer from $[\text{NO}_3]^-$. This is anticipated to be a greater synthetic challenge because the lower Ln oxidation state results in reduced Ln–O bond covalency.⁴²

Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts to declare.



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