Trimerisation of carbon suboxide at a di-titanium centre to form a pyrone ring system†‡

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The reaction of the syn-bimetallic bis(pentalenedititanium complex Ti2[μ:η5,η5-Pn]2 (Pn1 = C6H4(1,4-Si(Pr3)2) 1 with carbon suboxide (O=C=C=O, C3O2) results in trimerisation of the latter and formation of the structurally characterised complex [(Ti2[μ:η5,η5-Pn1]2)[μ-C3O2]]. The trimeric bridging C3O2 unit in the latter contains a 4-pyrene core, a key feature of both the hexamer and octamer of carbon suboxide which are formed in the body from trace amounts of C3O2 and are, for example, potent inhibitors of Na+/K+-ATP-ase. The mechanism of this reaction has been studied in detail by DFT computational studies, which also suggest that the reaction proceeds via the initial formation of a mono-adduct of 1 with C3O2. Indeed, the carefully controlled reaction of 1 with C3O2 affords [Ti2[μ:η7,η5-Pn1]2 (η2-C3O2)], as the first structurally authenticated complex of carbon suboxide.

Introduction

Unlike the plethora of catalytic and stoichiometric transformations of carbon’s most common oxides (i.e. CO and CO2) promoted by well-defined molecular complexes, 1–4 there is a disproportionate lack of examples featuring the activation and subsequent transformation of the sub-oxides of carbon. C2O3 is the first in the series of the synthetically available carbon sub-oxides featuring an odd number of carbons6–8 (predicted to augment their stability), and its spectroscopic8 and physical properties10,19 have been extensively studied. Its molecular structure in the solid state has been reported and shows a linear structure,11 whereas in the gas phase computational12 and spectroscopic studies13 confirm a bent structure with a bond angle of 156°. Similarly, aspects of its reactivity with a variety of organic substrates14 (e.g. ylides15–17) and main-group18 bonds have been reported since its first synthesis. Although C3O2 (hereafter referred to as carbon suboxide) is relatively unstable (it auto-polymerises above 0 °C but can be stored indefinitely below –35 °C), it is moderately straightforward to prepare via the dehydration of malonic esters5 or malonic acid19 with phosphorus pentoxide. The polymer produced by its self-polymerisation has a band-like structure with condensed pyrone rings and has been studied for its electronic properties.20,21

Carbon suboxide is also formed in small quantities in vivo during biochemical processes that normally produce carbon monoxide, for example, during heme oxidation by heme oxygenase-1 (HO-1). It is then rapidly oligomerised into macrocyclic structures, predominantly cyclic hexamers and octamers (Fig. 1), which contain fused 4-pyrene rings and are potent inhibitors of Na+/K+-ATP-ase and Ca-dependent ATP-ase; larger carbon suboxide based macrocycles are proposed to be natriuretic and endogenous digitalis like factors (EDLFS).22–24

In terms of coordination chemistry, it was proposed that the thermal decomposition of Ag3C3O2 to produce C3O2 involved a coordination complex of Ag,25 and subsequent studies of the reactivity of C3O2 towards Pt(0), Pt(ii) and Rh(i) complexes by
Pandolfo et al. proposed the formation of C₃O₂ complexes but lack of structural data plagued these early investigations. Nevertheless, later studies from the same group as well as that of Hillhouse demonstrated some aspects of the reactivity of C₃O₂ with organometallic fragments by isolating, for example, the products of its insertion into M–H bonds. A main problem of these early studies was the propensity of C₃O₂ to act as a source of ketene (:C=O). Thus, in the presence of phosphorous containing ligands in the coordination sphere of the metal centre, this led to the formation of corresponding phosphorous-ylides, as shown by Hillhouse of phosphorous containing ligands in the coordination sphere of phosphorous ylides, as shown by Hillhouse.

Undoubtedly one of the reasons is its capricious nature, which has favored in silico studies of its reactivity especially towards transition metals. Indeed, C₃O₂ is one of the least explored `small molecules’ from a synthetic chemist’s point of view, a fact underlined by only two short reviews in the current literature.

We have previously reported on the synthesis, and diverse reactivity of the syn-bimetallic complex [Ti₂[μ-η⁰,η⁰-Pn°]]₃ (Pn° = C₆₆H₄(SiPr₃)₂). This trimer is a strong oxo-carbene character.

Results and discussion

Exposure of a crimson-red toluene solution of (1) to C₃O₂ at −78 °C, instantly produced a homogeneous brown solution which, upon warming to −35 °C and then slowly to room temperature, deposited some C₃O₂ polymer, together with a brown supernatant. Filtration of the reaction mixture and work up of the filtrate afforded a brown-green solid, which was isolated in moderate to good yields (yields are dependent on the final temperature of the solution and vary between 40 and 66%), and proved to be a diamagnetic, spectroscopically pure new compound (2). The ¹H-NMR spectrum of (Fig. 3) consisted of 16 doublets in the aromatic region signifying the formation of a dimer exhibiting four inequivalent pentalene environments; this was further substantiated by the observation of eight peaks in the ²⁹Si[¹H]-NMR spectrum of (2).

The ¹³C[¹H]-NMR spectrum of (2) displayed 41 resonance in the region between 389–96 ppm, 32 of which were assigned to the four inequivalent pentalene environments (our empirical observation is that resonances associated with this type of pentalene ligand scaffold in the μ-η⁰,η⁰ coordination geometry appear in the region between 90 and 145 ppm). With the nine remaining signals found in the downfield part of the spectrum (150–400 ppm) and which corresponded to quaternary carbons. At this point, it is interesting to note that such high field resonances (300–400 ppm region) in ¹³C-NMR spectra have been observed for complexes of Zr(η⁴) and Th(η⁴) featuring dihaptocarbonyl ligands with substantial oxy-carbene character. The IR spectrum (thin film) of (2) showed a strong absorption at 2061 cm⁻¹ characteristic of a C=O moiety along with bands at 1658, 1591 and 1532 cm⁻¹ characteristic of carbonyl functionalities, but also in agreement with haptocarbonyl ligands with a strong oxo-carbene character. An X-ray diffraction study revealed the molecular structure of this new complex (2) (Fig. 4), which is consistent with the solution NMR data discussed above, and unequivocally demonstrates the first example of the

![Figure 2: Trimerization of C₃O₂ by [Ti₂[μ-η⁰,η⁰-Pn°]]₃.](image)

![Figure 3: Aromatic region of ¹H NMR spectrum of (2) (C₆D₆).](image)
trimerisation of C$_2$O$_2$ (Fig. 5). At this point, it is worth highlighting the structural similarity of the [C$_9$O$_6$] core between the two [Ti$_2$Pn] moieties found in (2) (Fig. 4 and 5), with the cyclic hexamers and octamers of carbon suboxide discussed in the Introduction (Fig. 1), all of which contain a 4-pyrone ring system.

The Ti–Ti bonds in (2) (2.4648(14) and 2.4834(16) Å) are retained but have been slightly elongated in comparison to the C–C bond distance of 1.38(3) Å. As can be seen from Fig. 4, two titanium centres (Ti3 and Ti2) bind to two CO moieties in an η^2 fashion. This bonding mode is best described as an haptocoordinated with a considerable carbonyl contribution to the resonance structure. We base this on the observed metrics of the corresponding bond lengths and angles (Ti2–C1: 2.17(3) Å, Ti2–O: 2.13(3) Å, Ti3–C7: 2.316(17) Å, Ti3–O: 2.133(19) Å, C1–O1/C7–O5: 1.30(3)/1.28(3) Å, C7–Ti–O3: 33.1(7)°, C1–Ti–O2: 35.3(8)°, C7–O–Ti3: 81.3(12)°) which compare well with those crystallographically determined for [[η^2-C$_2$H$_2$]$_2$Ti(η^2-COMe)Cl] (Ti–C: 2.07(2) Å, Ti–O: 2.194(14) Å, C–O: 1.18(2) Å, C–Ti–O: 32.0(4)°, Ti–O–C: 68.3(7)°, Ti–C–O: 79.7(6)°), as well as the $^{13}$C ($^1$H]-NMR spectroscopic data discussed above. Furthermore, the bonding of these haptocoordinated moieties to the pyrone heterocycle of the [C$_9$O$_6$] core (i.e. C2–C1 and C5–C7. 1.38(3) Å and 1.46(3) Å respectively) are in good agreement with the CO–CH$_2$ groups found in [η^2-C$_2$H$_2$]$_2$Ti(η^2-COMe)Cl (C–C: 1.473(3) Å). A notable feature of the [C$_9$O$_6$] core in (2) is that the pyrone 6-membered ring is not planar (deviates from planarity by 0.055 Å, Fig. 6), and therefore lacks aromaticity. As a result, the C–C bond lengths of this 6-member ring are elongated in comparison to the ones found in 4-pyrone, although the C=O bond distances (i.e. C6–O4: 1.207(18) Å vs. 1.253(12) Å in 4-pyrone) are similar within esd’s. Unfortunately, due to the mixed occupancy of the CCO moiety and O6 over the two sides of the [C$_9$O$_6$] core in (2) and the resulting crystallographic restraints used to model this disorder, we cannot talk with certainty about the bond lengths and angles of these two ligating moieties to this 6-member ring. Nevertheless, upon inspection of the corresponding bond lengths of these two atoms to the Ti centres, we can deduce that the bonding situation is far from straightforward. For instance, the Ti1–C2 bond distance is closer to the ones found in Ti–NHC complexes, although closer to the high end of the spectrum (2.2–2.35 Å), and is in the same range as the ones discussed for the oxy-carbonyl moieties discussed above. A comparison with the corresponding lengths and angles found for free C$_2$O$_2$ shows that the C2–C9 bond is elongated (1.2475(15) Å in free C$_2$O$_2$) while the C–O bond remains unchanged (1.442(13) Å in free C$_2$O$_2$). The same trend (i.e. C–C elongation) applies when compared with the corresponding bond lengths found in ketene (C=C: 1.314 Å, C=O: 1.162 Å). Similarly, the O6–Ti bond distance is closer to the ones found in the C=O–Ti dative interaction, e.g. in [cis-Ti(OEt)$_2$(η$^5$-maltolato)]$_2$ (2) is diamagnetic and the elongation of the Ti–Ti bonds might suggest an increase of the formal oxidation state of each Ti centre by one (i.e. Ti(n) in (1) to Ti(m) in (2)). However, the oxy-carbonyl character of the C7–O5 and C1–O1 units as well as the non-aromatic 6 membered heterocycle of the [C$_9$O$_6$] core...
suggest that complicated resonance structures are in play, and assignment of formal oxidation state and Ti-Ti bond order in (2) is therefore problematic.

In order to gain a better understanding of the formation of (2), the reaction was probed computationally. Density functional calculations using the ADF program suite (BP86/TZP) were carried out on model systems in which the Si’Pr₃ groups on the pentalene ligands were replaced by H atoms to increase computational efficiency. The computational analogues of experimental structures are denoted by italics; calculations on the analogue of the starting material 1, Ti₂(C₆H₆)₂, 1, have been described previously.27,40 Geometry optimisation of the possible addition product of the first molecule of C₃O₂ to 1, Ti₂(C₆H₆)₂(C₃O₂), led to two local minima, 3 and 3’ (Fig. 7).

Isomer 3 was the more stable being lower in energy by 0.59 eV, and resembled more closely the structure inferred from experimental structures are denoted by italics; calculations on the analogue of the starting material 1, Ti₂(C₆H₆)₂, 1, have been described previously.27,40 Geometry optimisation of the possible addition product of the first molecule of C₃O₂ to 1, Ti₂(C₆H₆)₂(C₃O₂), led to two local minima, 3 and 3’ (Fig. 7).

The coordination mode of C₃O₂ proposed here differs from some others calculated which indicate bonding primarily to the central carbon. In the cases of metal carboxylates and AuCl₃ for example the metals function primarily as electron pair acceptors whereas Ti₃Pn₂ has very high energy electrons and acts as an electron pair donor through its Ti bond.

The HOMO of C₃O₂ has electron density on the central C (Fig. 8a), hence this carbon is preferred for bonding by a Lewis acid, whereas the LUMO is localised on the outer carbons (Fig. 8b) leading to asymmetrical bonding by a Lewis base. Bending C₃O₂ to the geometry calculated for 3 concentrates the LUMO on an outer carbon (Fig. 8c).

The HOMO of 3 is a largely unperturbed Ti-Ti bonding orbital (Fig. 8d). The HOMO-1 and HOMO-2 correspond to TiPn bonding orbitals. The HOMO-3 (Fig. 8e) is responsible for the bonding situation in (3) can be found in that described for the adduct of (1) with CO₂ [Ti₂(μ-η⁵,η⁵-Pn)₂(μ-CO₂)] (6) which has been studied computationally due to the instability of (6) in solution (one can conceptually replace the C₃C₆O₂ moiety with O and vice versa).41 Indeed, a computational analysis of the orbitals involved in the coordination of C₃O₂ in (3) reveals a similar picture to the one found in (6). The Ti-O distance in 3 (2.19 Å) is shorter than that of 6 (2.27 Å) indicating increased donation to O. This analogy between (3) and (6) is further reflected by the short Ti-Ti bond distances that are characteristic of both these computational models. It should be noted that the HOMO-3 retains Ti-Ti bonding character hence there is only a slight lengthening of Ti-Ti distance from 1 to 3 (2.37 Å to 2.41 Å). A CBC representation of 3 has an arrow going from the Ti=Ti double bond to C₃O₂ acting as a Z ligand, in the same way as CO₂ behaves in [Ti₂(μ-η⁵,η⁵-Pn)₂(μ-CO₂)].44 The computed bond distances (ESI Table S2‡) of the coordinated C₃O₂ in this model are in good agreement with the ones determined crystallographically vide infra.

In order to examine the energetics for the formation of 2, and to investigate possible intermediates in the reaction, the geometries of Ti₂(C₆H₆)₂(C₃O₂)₃, 4, Ti₂(C₆H₆)₂(C₃O₂)₂, 5, and 2 were optimised (Fig. 9). Key bond lengths for all calculated species are given in the ESI (Table S2‡).

The free energies for possible reaction pathways are shown in Fig. 10, and activation energies, where identified, are given in italics. The barriers to C₃O₂ and to 5 reacting with 1 appear to be purely entropic.

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**Fig. 6** ORTEP diagram (50% probability ellipsoids) of the 6-member heterocycle found in the [C₂O₃] core of (2).

**Fig. 7** Calculated structures for the addition of C₃O₂ to model [Ti₂(μ-η⁵,η⁵-Pn)₂(Pn = C₆H₆)].

**Fig. 8** Key orbitals of linear and bent C₃O₂ and Ti₃Pn₂C₃O₂.
mixture was kept below \(-10\, ^\circ\text{C}\) throughout. Upon removing volatiles at low temperature (ca. \(-25\, ^\circ\text{C}\)), and lyophilising the residue with benzene (below \(-10\, ^\circ\text{C}\)), this new species was isolated in almost quantitative yields and with spectroscopic purity of \(\geq 98\%\). More conclusive evidence that (3) is indeed that predicted by calculations was provided by \(^{13}\text{C}\{^1\text{H}\}\)-NMR spectroscopy. The most salient features of this spectrum are three resonances located at 159.8, 260.4 and 7.03 ppm which all correspond to quaternary carbons and which we assign to coordinated \(\text{C}_3\text{O}_2\) (for free \(\text{C}_3\text{O}_2\) \(\delta (\text{CDCl}_3, -40\, ^\circ\text{C})\): 129.74 (OCCCO) and \(-14.62\) (OCCCO)\(^{39}\). The two downfield resonances are assigned to the terminal CO's with the one at 159.8 ppm assigned to an un-coordinated CO moiety and the one at 260.4 ppm to a coordinated one. The former is in good agreement with previously reported values reported by Hillhouse et al. and Pandolfo et al. using \(^{13}\text{C}\)-CP/MAS NMR spectroscopy, while the latter is significantly shifted downfield in comparison with these two literature examples (187.8 and 179.7 ppm for \([\text{M}(\eta^2\text{C}_2\text{C}_2\text{O}_2)(\text{PPh}_3)_2]\) with \(\text{M} = \text{Ni, Pt}\) respectively).\(^{28,51}\) Similarly the central carbon in the coordinated \(\text{C}_3\text{O}_2\) in (3) is found at much lower field (7.03 ppm) compared with the ones assigned to the terminal carbons (see above) and follows the trend observed in previous studies (\(-12.3\) and \(-16.2\) ppm for \([\text{M}(\eta^2\text{C}_2\text{C}_2\text{O}_2)(\text{PPh}_3)_2]\) with \(\text{M} = \text{Ni, Pt}\) respectively); it has to be noted though that is shifted downfield compared to these reported values. These discrepancies are expected as the documented examples concern electron rich monometallic metal fragments of \(d^{10}\) transition metals, unlike the present case where a syn-bimetallic Ti–Ti core is involved. The coordination of \(\text{C}_3\text{O}_2\) was further corroborated by IR spectroscopy (thin film) that showed characteristic bands for CCO (2060 cm\(^{-1}\)) and CO functionalities (1588, 1575 and 1510 cm\(^{-1}\)) (for free \(\text{C}_3\text{O}_2\) 2280 cm\(^{-1}\)) which are in good agreement with values reported for the complexes \([\text{M}(\eta^2\text{C}_2\text{C}_2\text{O}_2)(\text{PPh}_3)_2]\) (\(\text{M} = \text{Ni, Pt}\)).\(^{28,51}\) Unfortunately, mass spectrometry was not informative and microanalysis was hampered by the thermal instability of (3) even in the solid state. Nevertheless, based on the spectroscopic data discussed above, (3) was assigned as the adduct of \(\text{C}_3\text{O}_2\) with (1), \(i.e.\) the first intermediate towards the
formation of (2). This was unequivocally established by a single crystal XRD study (Fig. 11).

As can be seen from Fig. 9, C₃O₂ coordinates via one of the terminal CO’s in an η² fashion to one of the Ti centers (Ti2) and η¹ via that same carbon to the other one (Ti1). The latter also coordinates to the central carbon (C2) of the C₃O₂ ligand. The molecular structure of (4) represents the first example of a crystallographically authenticated example of C₃O₂ coordination and confirms the coordination modes of C₃O₂ predicted by Pandolfo and Hillhouse based on spectroscopic evidence. However the coordination mode calculated for M(PH₃)₂C₃O₂ (ref. 44) is closer to that found for C₃O₂ in free C₃O₂ (C₁–O₁: 1.372(12) Å in (3) vs. 1.1479(12) Å in free C₃O₂). In comparison to the CCO moiety found in (2) (Fig. 4), the corresponding C–C bond (i.e. C2–C3) is shorter (1.300(15) Å vs. 1.40(3) Å in (2)) while the C–O bond lengths are the same within esd’s. In the case of the corresponding angles, the CCO angle in both (2) and (3) are identical (172.4(16) Å and 172.0(10) Å respectively) (Fig. 11).

In conclusion, we report the first example of the trimerisation of C₃O₂ promoted by a well-defined molecular complex leading to the formation of (2). The core structure between the two [Ti₂P₅] moieties is reminiscent of biologically relevant compounds responsible for the regulation of ion concentrations in cells. This transformation was studied computationally revealing that the first step is the formation of (3), which was confirmed experimentally by its isolation and structural characterization.

Conflicts of interest
There are no conflicts of interest to declare.

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Fig. 11 Molecular structure of (3) displaying 50% probability ellipsoids. Hydrogen atoms and ¹Pr groups have been removed for clarity. Selected bond lengths (Å) and angles (°): Ti1–Ti2: 2.4293(14), Ti2–O1: 2.205(10), Ti2–C1: 2.148(5), Ti1–C1: 2.145(6), Ti1–C2: 2.304(10), C1–O1: 1.372(12), C1–C2: 1.291(13), C2–C3: 1.300(13), C3–O2: 1.175(9), O2–C3–C2: 172.0(10), C3–C2–C1: 132.5(10), C2–C1–O1: 137.0(7), C1–Ti1–Ti2: 55.58(15), C1–Ti2–O1: 55.49(16), O1–Ti2–C1: 92.2(3), C1–Ti2–O1: 36.7(3), Ti2–C1–Ti1: 68.92(17), C1–C2–Ti1: 66.5(5), Ti1–C2–C3: 161.0(9), C1–O1–Ti2: 69.4(4).
References