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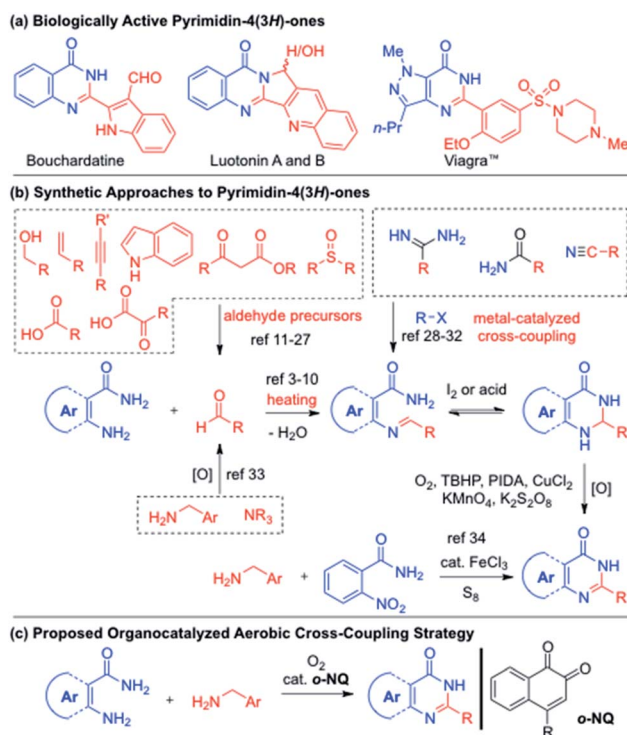
ortho-Naphthoquinone-catalyzed aerobic oxidation of amines to fused pyrimidin-4(3*H*)-ones: a convergent synthetic route to bouchardatine and sildenafil†

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A facile access to fused pyrimidin-4(3*H*)-one derivatives has been established by using the metal-free *ortho*-naphthoquinone-catalyzed aerobic cross-coupling reactions of amines. The utilization of two readily available amines allowed a direct coupling strategy to quinazolinone natural product, bouchardatine, as well as sildenafil (ViagraTM) in a highly convergent manner.

N-Heterocyclic compounds with a pyrimidin-4(3*H*)-one core constitute a large number of natural products and biologically active molecules. For example, quinazolinone alkaloids possess a phenyl-fused pyrimidin-4(3*H*)-one structure and display a wide spectrum of pharmacological activities (Scheme 1a).¹ Sildenafil (ViagraTM), a potent and selective inhibitor of type 5 phosphodiesterases on smooth muscle cell, is based on the pyrazole-fused pyrimidin-4(3*H*)-one structure and marketed for erectile dysfunction.² The synthetic approaches to the phenyl-fused pyrimidin-4(3*H*)-ones, quinazolinones, typically involve the condensation between anthranilamides and aldehydes to give amination intermediates that in turn oxidized to quinazolinones under oxidation conditions (Scheme 1b). The oxidation catalysts include Cu,³ Fe,⁴ Ga,⁵ Ir,⁶ Mn,⁷ iodine,⁸ peroxide,⁹ however the aerobic oxidation of amination intermediates is also known at 150 °C.¹⁰ The utilization of alcohols also effects the one-pot synthesis of quinazolinones through *in situ* oxidation to aldehydes in the presence of Fe,¹¹ Ir,¹² Mn,¹³ Ni,¹⁴ Pd,¹⁵ Ru,¹⁶ V,¹⁷ Zn,¹⁸ and iodine catalysts.¹⁹ Other precursors to aldehydes have been also identified using alkynes,²⁰ benzoic acids,²¹ indoles,²² α -keto acid salts,²³ β -keto esters,²⁴ styrenes,²⁵ sulfoxides,²⁶ and toluenes.²⁷ Non-aldehyde approaches to quinazolinones have been also demonstrated in the cross coupling of amidines,²⁸ amines,²⁹ benzamides,³⁰ isocyanides,³¹ and nitriles.³² In 2013, the Nguyen group disclosed the synthesis of four quinazolinones, utilizing the autooxidation of benzylamines to imines that subsequently condensed with anthranilamides.³³ While a closed system at 150 °C was necessary, the use of 40 mol% AcOH without solvent provided the quinazolinones in 46–75%

yields. The Nguyen group also developed the FeCl₃·6H₂O-catalyzed condensation of 2-nitroanilines and benzylamines in the presence of 20 mol% of S₈, where six quinazolinones were obtained in 68–75% yields.³⁴ While the cross condensation of anthranilamides and benzylamines was accomplished, there exists a significant knowledge gap due to the limited substrate scope combined with less optimal reaction conditions (*i.e.* high



Scheme 1 Biologically active fused pyrimidin-4(3*H*)-one derivatives and their synthetic methods.

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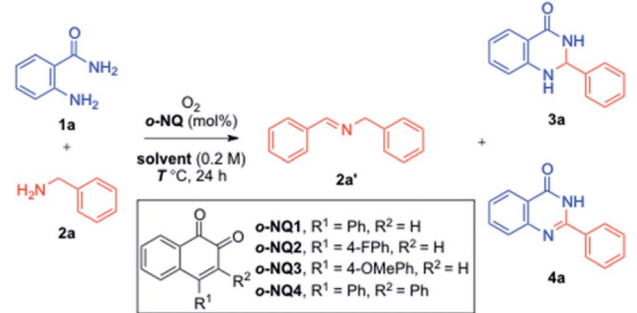
reaction temperature, closed system in neat conditions and excess use of amines). In addition, it is not entirely clear if the cross condensation of amide-containing amines and benzylamines would work for other fused pyrimidin-4(3*H*)-one derivatives.³⁵ To address such shortcomings in the cross condensation of amines, the *ortho*-naphthoquinone (***o*-NQ**)-catalyzed aerobic cross amination strategy was investigated (Scheme 1c).³⁶ Herein, we report a highly general approach to fused pyrimidin-4(3*H*)-one derivatives in the presence of ***o*-NQ** catalyst, culminating to the direct aerobic coupling of two amines to bouchardatine and sildenafil.

Given that the ***o*-NQ**-catalyzed aerobic cross coupling of benzylamines and aniline derivatives such as *o*-phenylenediamines provided a facile approach to heterocyclic compounds including benzoimidazoles,³⁷ the use of anthranilamide **1a** and benzylamine **2a** was examined as a model study (Table 1). The catalytic use of ***o*-NQ1** smoothly converted benzylamine **2a** to

the corresponding homocoupled imine **2a'** under aerobic conditions. However, the subsequent *in situ* condensation reaction of **2a'** with anthranilamide **1a** only provided the aminal product **3a** in 11% yield (entry 1). To facilitate the cross coupling between the amine **2a** and anthranilamide **1a**, a catalytic amount of TFA was utilized where a significant improvement in yield was observed for **3a** (entry 2). Faced with the inability to oxidize the aminal **3a** to the corresponding product, quinazolinone **4a**, other *ortho*-naphthoquinone catalysts were screened without much success (entries 3–5). To our delight, the examination of solvents revealed that the reaction temperature of 100 °C was needed for the formation of **4a** (entries 6–11).³⁸ The reaction in DMSO lowered down the ratio of **1a** and **2a** from 1.0 : 1.5 to 1.0 : 1.2 (entry 12) and the catalyst loading to 5 mol% without affecting the overall reaction efficiency (entry 13). The control experiments confirmed the critical roles of both ***o*-NQ1** and TFA (entries 15–18), and the reaction utilized molecular oxygen as a terminal oxidant (entries 19 and 20). Piecing together the experimental data, the employment of 5 mol% ***o*-NQ1** and 20 mol% TFA in DMSO at 100 °C was selected for further studies.

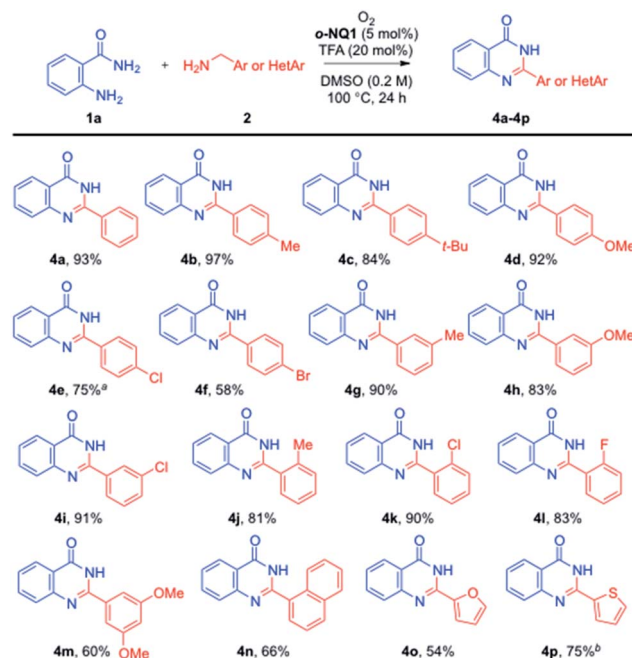
The optimized aerobic cross-coupling condition was applied to a variety of benzylamine derivatives (Scheme 2). In general, the electronic and steric characters of benzylamines did not significantly affect the formation of quinazolinones (**4a–4m**). However, the use of halogen-substituted and dimethoxy-substituted benzylamines led to the slightly lower yields of quinazolinones (**4e**, **4f** and **4m**) in 58–75% yields. In addition, the current aerobic cross-coupling reaction tolerated the furanyl and thiophenyl moieties, where the corresponding quinazolinones (**4o** and **4p**) were obtained in 54% and 75% yields, respectively.

Table 1 Optimization of ***o*-NQ**-catalyzed aerobic cross-coupling of amines to quinazolinone^a



| Entry | Cat. (mol%) | Solvent | T (°C) | Yield ^b (%) |
|-----------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------|--------|------------------------|
| 1 | <i>o</i>-NQ1 (10) | CH ₃ CN | 80 | 3a , 11 |
| 2 | <i>o</i>-NQ1 (10)/TFA (20) | CH ₃ CN | 80 | 3a , 83 |
| 3 | <i>o</i>-NQ2 (10)/TFA (20) | CH ₃ CN | 80 | 3a , 13 |
| 4 | <i>o</i>-NQ3 (10)/TFA (20) | CH ₃ CN | 80 | 3a , 66 |
| 5 | <i>o</i>-NQ4 (10)/TFA (20) | CH ₃ CN | 80 | 3a , 32 |
| 6 | <i>o</i>-NQ1 (10)/TFA (20) | MeOH | 65 | 3a , 5 |
| 7 | <i>o</i>-NQ1 (10)/TFA (20) | EtOH | 78 | 3a , 31 |
| 8 | <i>o</i>-NQ1 (10)/TFA (20) | DMF | 150 | 4a , >95 |
| 9 ^c | <i>o</i>-NQ1 (10)/TFA (20) | DMSO | 150 | 4a , >95 |
| 10 | <i>o</i>-NQ1 (10)/TFA (20) | DMSO | 100 | 4a , >95 |
| 11 | <i>o</i>-NQ1 (10)/TFA (20) | DMSO | 80 | 3a , 30 |
| 12 ^d | <i>o</i>-NQ1 (10)/TFA (20) | DMSO | 100 | 4a , >95 |
| 13 ^d | <i>o</i>-NQ1 (5)/TFA (20) | DMSO | 100 | 4a , >95 (93) |
| 14 | <i>o</i>-NQ1 (5)/TFA (10) | DMSO | 100 | 3a/4a , 45/50 |
| 15 | — | DMSO | 100 | 3a , 10 |
| 16 | <i>o</i>-NQ1 (10) | DMSO | 100 | 3a/4a , 34/51 |
| 17 | TFA (20) | DMSO | 100 | NR |
| 18 | <i>o</i>-NQ1 (5)/AcOH (20) | DMSO | 100 | 3a , 25 |
| 19 ^e | <i>o</i>-NQ1 (5)/TFA (20) | DMSO | 100 | 3a , 33 |
| 20 ^f | <i>o</i>-NQ1 (5)/TFA (20) | DMSO | 100 | NR |

^a Reaction using **1a** (0.20 mmol), **2a** (0.30 mmol), and ***o*-NQ** in solvent (0.2 M) under O₂ balloon for 24 h. ^b Yields based on internal standard and isolated yield in parentheses. ^c Reaction for 6 h. ^d Use of **2a** (0.24 mmol, 1.2 equiv.). ^e Reaction under air. ^f Reaction under argon. NR = no reaction.

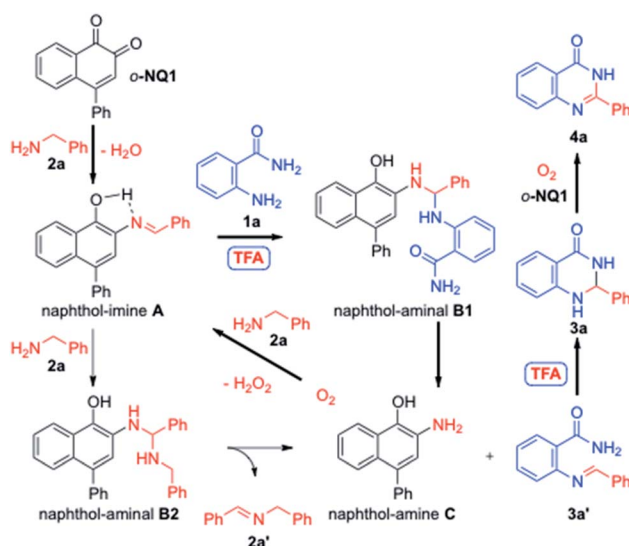


Scheme 2 Substrate scope of aerobic oxidation to quinazolinones (^areaction for 36 h, ^breaction for 12 h).



Further extension of the current aerobic cross-coupling reactions of amines is illustrated in Scheme 3. Thus, an array of substituted anthranilamides was readily employed to give the fused pyrimidin-4(3*H*)-one derivatives (**4q–4x**) in 61–84% yields. In particular, the *N*-substituted anthranilamides also participated in the current aerobic cross-coupling reaction in excellent yields (**4y–4za**). While the use of 3-amino-2-naphthamide led to the corresponding quinazolinone **4zb** in 46% yield, the synthetic advantage of the current method was well demonstrated in the preparation of heteroaryl fused pyrimidin-4(3*H*)-one derivatives (**4zc–4zh**), where a variety of heterocyclic amines were successfully utilized in a tandem sequence of aerobic oxidation processes.

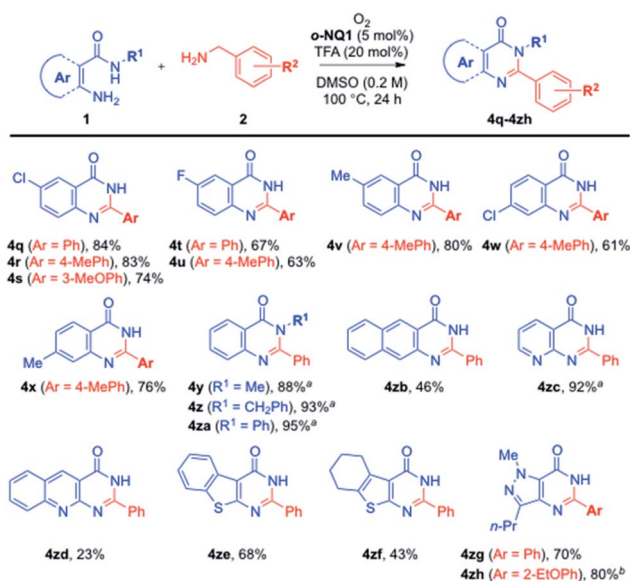
The mechanistic rationale of the aerobic cross-coupling reactions of amines is depicted in Scheme 4. Thus, the benzylamine **2a** is condensed with the *o*-NQ1 catalyst to give the naphthol-imine species **A**.^{37a} While the nucleophilic attack of **2a** to the naphthol-imine **A** is favored due to the low nucleophilicity of the anthranilamide **1a**, the presence of TFA promotes the cross-coupling between naphthol-imine **A** and anthranilamide **1a** to give the naphthol-aminal **B1**. This process releases the hetero-coupled imine **3a'** and naphthol-amine **C**. The use of TFA promotes the intramolecular Mannich cyclization of imine **3a'**, leading to the aminal **3a** that in turn converts to the desired fused pyrimidin-4(3*H*)-one **4a** with the help of *o*-NQ1 catalyst and molecular oxygen. Alternatively, the naphthol-imine **A** can produce the homocoupled imine **2a'** and the naphthol-amine **C** via the naphthol-aminal **B2** through the nucleophilic attack of benzylamine **2a**. The conversion of the naphthol-amine **C** to *o*-NQ1 catalyst is effected upon exposure to oxygen atmosphere.³⁸ The homocoupled imine **2a'** undergoes hydrolysis at >80 °C to the benzaldehyde and benzylamine **2a** that in turn re-enters the catalytic cycle.^{37b} Our experimental observation of the homocoupled imine **2a'** by the ¹H NMR and TLC analysis during the



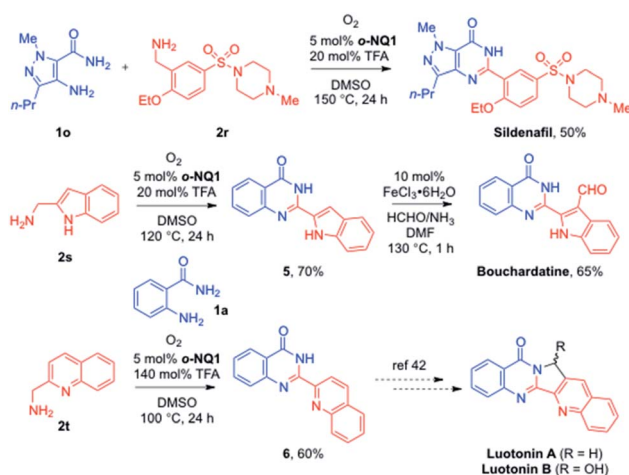
Scheme 4 Mechanistic rationale for aerobic cross coupling reaction of amines.

reaction supports the involvement of **2a'**. However, the major pathway to the fused pyrimidin-4(3*H*)-one **4a** appears to involve the naphthol-aminal **B1** since the use of benzaldehyde instead of benzylamine **2a** under the optimized conditions only led to the 80% conversion. The *o*-NQ1 catalyst without added TFA provided a mixture of aminal **3a** and quinazolinone **4a** in 34% and 51% yields, respectively (Table 1, entry 16). Thus, it is likely that the role of TFA is the catalyst for the cross-coupling of two amines to give the naphthol-aminal **B1** and the cyclization of the imine **3a'** to aminal **3a**. Our control experiments also revealed that TFA alone slowly oxidize **3a** to **4a**, but rapidly oxidized by the action of *o*-NQ1 within 10 h.³⁹

The synthetic utility of the aerobic cross-coupling strategy is demonstrated in the synthesis of quinazolinone alkaloids and sildenafil (Scheme 5). The direct cross coupling of a commercially available pyrazole amine **1o** and benzylamine **2r** afforded



Scheme 3 Further substrate scope for fused pyrimidin-4(3*H*)-one derivatives (^areaction at 120 °C, ^breaction at 140 °C).



Scheme 5 Synthetic utilization to quinazolinone alkaloids and sildenafil.



a highly convergent synthetic approach to sildenafil.⁴⁰ Likewise, the employment of anthranilamide **1a** and 2-(aminomethyl) indole **2s** provided the desired quinazolinone **5** in 70% yield, and the subsequent formylation under the Zeng's conditions⁴¹ paved a way to the total synthesis of bouchardatine. In addition, while the basicity of quinolin-2-ylmethanamine **2t** required an excess of TFA, the corresponding quinazolinone **6** was obtained in 60% yield under the optimized conditions. The conversion of **6** to the luotonin natural products has been reported by the Argade group and others.⁴²

Conclusions

In summary, we have developed the aerobic cross-coupling reactions of amines to fused pyrimidin-4(3H)-one derivatives. This metal-free tandem aerobic oxidation sequence utilizes 5 mol% of **o**-NQ catalyst and 20 mol% of TFA as co-catalyst. The developed aerobic oxidation protocol allows a highly convergent approach to quinazolinone alkaloids and sildenafil. Given that the fused pyrimidin-4(3H)-one derivatives possess a diverse array of biological activities, the **o**-NQ-catalyzed tandem aerobic cross-coupling reactions should find their synthetic utility in the medicinal chemistry projects. We are current extending the **o**-NQ-catalyzed aerobic oxidation protocols to other heterocycles of medicinal interest, and our results will be reported in due course.

Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts to declare.

Acknowledgements

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