

Cite this: *Chem. Sci.*, 2023, 14, 9838

All publication charges for this article have been paid for by the Royal Society of Chemistry

Received 21st July 2023
Accepted 12th August 2023

DOI: 10.1039/d3sc03778a

rsc.li/chemical-science

A unified strategy for the synthesis of aldohexoses by boronate assisted assembly of CH_2X_2 derived C_1 -building blocks†‡

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A synthetic strategy for all aldohexoses with individually addressable protecting groups from dihalomethane C_1 -units is reported. The underlying synthesis of C_6 -sugar alcohols relies on three consecutive Matteson sequences, vinylation and bishydroxylation. *Erythro* and *threo* isomers have been realized for every glycol motif by strategic variation of the sequence.

Carbohydrates are of immense biological importance as a source of energy and as complex chiral scaffolds that participate in numerous recognition processes.¹ Deciphering this “glycocode” is a task, which requires modern analytics as well as organic synthesis.² Nowadays oligosaccharides can even be prepared in an automated manner from orthogonally protected monosaccharides.³ Syntheses of the latter often still rely on ex-chiral pool strategies, each of which has to face the challenge of differentiating five similar hydroxyl groups.⁴ *De novo* syntheses, such as the ones developed by Sharpless,⁵ Danishefsky⁶ or MacMillan⁷ approach this problem from the bottom up. Strategies based on C_1 -building blocks, like those by Fischer,⁸ Dondoni⁹ and Matteson¹⁰ could allow for maximal protecting group variability and enable isotopic labelling of individual atoms.¹¹ However, each of these methods has its individual limitations¹² and no unified C_1 -based strategy to aldohexoses had been reported until now. One key to our route is the Matteson homologation (MH) shown in Scheme 1A.¹³ This sequence employs chiral boronic esters (**1**), which react with a lithiated dihalomethane and ZnCl_2 at low temperatures. In the resulting ate complex (**2**) electrostatic interactions¹⁴ between the zinc bound chloride atoms and the carbenoid C–H favour an anti-periplanar arrangement of one C–X-bond relative to the boronate R-group. Upon warming 1,2-rearrangement results in the diastereoselective formation of α -halo boronates (**3**). Reaction with various nucleophiles yields α -chiral boronates (**4**) under stereochemical inversion. Thus MHs are highly useful for preparing heteroatom rich motifs.¹⁶

As shown in Scheme 1B, iterative MH and substitution with alkoxides can lead to carbohydrate like structures. This was applied by Matteson to the synthesis of *L*-ribose.¹⁰ While MH

and substitution with LiOBn worked well for the C_1 -building block **5**, and two more homologs, further homologation proved to be problematic. Attempts to react **6** with LiCHBr_2 led to intractable mixtures and the use of LiCHCl_2 only allowed for the indirect detection of product traces. The route was thus concluded by homologation with LiCH_2Cl , which does not allow for installation of another stereocenter. For detailed discussion of this surprising limitation, an explanatory hypothesis and supporting evidence see the ESI.‡ Importantly this restricted Matteson's synthesis to ribose (an aldopentose),¹⁵ while most biologically relevant monosaccharides are hexoses. Thus, a C_1 -based synthesis of aldohexoses that allows for (i) installing individual protecting groups, (ii) choosing the configuration at each stereocenter and (iii) potentially introducing isotopic labels at every individual atom, remained an open challenge.¹¹



Scheme 1 Matteson reactions in the synthesis of monosaccharides. YouTube tutorial: <https://youtu.be/vXy5oVavJUU>.

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† Dedicated to Prof. Hans-Günther Schmalz on the occasion of his 66th birthday.
‡ Electronic supplementary information (ESI) available. See DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1039/d3sc03778a>

We achieved this by preparing orthogonally protected versions of prototypical sugar alcohols from CH_2X_2 building blocks through three MHs, vinylation and bishydroxylation (Scheme 1C). By strategically combining different homologation and vinylation strategies, both *erythro* and *threo* isomers were realized. Conversion of the sugar alcohols into aldohexoses can be achieved by oxidation of either terminal hydroxyl functionality. By combining this with a short synthesis of the vinylation agent from CH_2X_2 building blocks we paved the way for the late-stage introduction of isotopic labels.

To start the discussion with the stereochemically most basic example, the synthesis of allitol **12a** is depicted in Scheme 2. It begins with the CH_2Br_2 derived C_1 -building block **7a**. MH with LiCHBr_2 and substitution with LiOPMB delivered the C_2 -building block **8a**. Two consecutive MHs, which are followed by substitution with an alkoxide, produce a masked *erythro* glycol motif. Thus, a second MH and substitution with LiOBn delivered **9a**, with an *erythro* relationship between C^2 and C^3 (as IUPAC priorities change during the route, carbon atoms are numbered according to their introduction in this article). Another homologation and substitution with LiOBn yielded **10a** in 47% yield after two steps.¹⁸ While other alkoxide based protecting groups could have been used here, a second benzyl group was chosen, to allow for confirmation of the relative configuration by direct comparison (see ESI†). Vinylation of **10a** was achieved by Zweifel-olefination.¹⁷ Although this reaction had not been described for the sterically hindered and thermodynamically stable pinanediol boronic esters, it proceeded reasonably well after some optimization (see ESI†) yielding **11a**. The product contained some unidentified contaminations, which were removed after the next step, in which Sharpless bishydroxylation delivered the desired allitol-derivative **12a** (32% yield, calculated over both steps). Several silylethers at C^1

were tested but neither the use of TBS- (*tert*-butyldimethylsilyl) nor TBDPS-groups (*tert*-butyldiphenyl-silyl) on the first hydroxyl group allowed for introduction of a fourth carbon atom (**13** → **14**). This was quite surprising as a third Matteson-sequence had worked well for the benzyl-derivative **6**. Indeed, homologation of **13** to bromides **15** proceeded with reasonable efficiency, but subsequent substitution with LiOBn led to decomposition. This was attributed to competing nucleophilic attack of benzoxide on the silyl ether. We suspected that the latter was activated by an intramolecular O–B interaction, which simultaneously deactivates the boron-atom as an electrophile. By using the TIPS-group (triisopropylsilyl) this side reaction was avoided, through better shielding of the silicon atom (further discussion in ESI†).¹⁹

In order to extend the route to other diastereomers it was necessary to modify the synthesis, so that *threo*-glycols could be obtained. This was a particular challenge for the three stereocenters generated by Matteson homologation as the exchange of the pinanediol director is quite cumbersome.²⁰ Thus the route was modified as shown in Scheme 3.

In order to establish a *threo*-relationship between C^2 and C^3 the synthesis starts with *S,S*-dicyclohexylethylenediol (*S,S*-DICHED)²¹ boronic ester **7b**. Homologation and substitution analogously to Scheme 2 delivered **8b-1**. The greater thermodynamic stability of pinanediol boronic esters²² allowed for transesterification to **8b-2** with (+)-pinanediol in Et_2O ,¹⁵ as well as recovery of the precious *S,S*-DICHED auxiliary. However, once this card had been played and the more stable pinanediol boronate was formed, a different strategy had to be applied. In order to establish a *threo* relationship between C^3 and C^4 , the third Matteson homologation was followed by substitution with vinylmagnesium bromide²³ and oxidation to **16b**. In contrast to Scheme 2 the C–B bond is now converted into the new C–O bond, while the vinyl group is introduced under inversion.



Scheme 2 Synthesis of protected allitol and associated challenges.



Scheme 3 Synthesis of protected L-glucitol and associated challenges.



Conclusions

All in all we have developed a highly modular route that opens up a vast field of opportunities for the synthesis of differentially protected sugar alcohols and carbohydrates. By combining the different approaches depicted in Schemes 2–4 a wide variety of C₆-sugar alcohols and by extension all natural and unnatural aldohexoses become available. Two consecutive MHs, followed by substitution with an alkoxide lead to *erythro*-C₃ building block **9a**. To introduce a C²–C³ *threo*-relationship the chiral director can be changed from DICHD to pinanediol. The transesterification proceeds readily and allows for recovery of the valuable DICHD auxiliary. Both enantiomers of DICHD and pinanediol are available, so that all stereoisomers of C₃-building blocks of type **9** are accessible. To gain control over the relationship between C³ and C⁴ a strategic crossroad was incorporated in the next homologation. A vinyl group was introduced either by Zweifel olefination (*erythro*) or Matteson substitution (*threo*). Thereby C₃-building blocks of type **9** can be converted into vinyl tetrol of type **11**, again with the potential for making all stereoisomers. For installing the final glycol moiety Sharpless bishydroxylation was employed. Unfortunately overwhelming substrate control only allowed for the direct synthesis of sugar alcohols of type **12** with a C⁴–C⁵-*erythro* configuration. In order to obtain a C⁴–C⁵-*threo* configuration at this position conversion into epoxide **20** was necessary. Some first attempts at epoxide opening to a diol of type **12** (with a C⁴–C⁵-*threo* configuration) were plagued by side reactions (see ESI†). Fortunately this only affects the synthesis of monosaccharides with both C²–C³-*threo* and C⁴–C⁵-*threo* configurations (*i.e.*, galactose and idose). For these cases the corresponding epoxides might be better converted into hexoses along the lines of Sharpless's carbohydrate synthesis.³¹ In all other cases conversion into the desired aldohexoses can be achieved by appropriate cyclisation *via* C¹ or C⁶ due to the orthogonal silyloxy group at C¹ (Scheme 5). Another advantage of these two cyclisation options arises as half of the carbon scaffold is introduced in the last homologation/vinylation sequence. The required vinyl metal species can be prepared from two (CH₂X₂ derived) C₁ building blocks (Scheme 5). By choosing the appropriate cyclisation route an isotopic label could thus be placed at every position in the aldohexose scaffold. Thus this C₁ based *de novo* approach to aldohexoses is uniquely suited for the synthesis of labelled aldohexoses, which we plan to pursue in the near future.

Data availability

All experimental and characterization data, as well as pictures of NMR spectra are available in the ESI.†

Author contributions

S. K. developed the synthesis of aldohexoses; G. A. developed the synthesis of vinyl metal species from C₁-units; C. H. conceived the project and wrote the manuscript.

Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts to declare.

Acknowledgements

Funding from Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG; 371758729) is acknowledged.

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