ChemComm



COMMUNICATION

View Article Online



Cite this: Chem. Commun., 2022, **58**, 13019

Received 12th August 2022, Accepted 28th October 2022

DOI: 10.1039/d2cc04497h

rsc.li/chemcomm

Dynamics of the alkyne → copper(ı) interaction and its use in a heteroleptic four-component catalytic rotor†

Suchismita Saha, Sohom Kundu, Pronay Kumar Biswas, Michael Bolte b and Michael Schmittel **

The HETPYNE (HETeroleptic Phenanthroline and alkYNE metal) and DABCO (zinc porphyrin), interactions were used to assemble the four-component nanorotor ROT-1 that exhibited a highly dynamic alkyne \rightarrow copper(ı) dissociation (k_{298} = 240 kHz) at 298 K. Quantitative click reaction transformed ROT-1 into the new rotor ROT-2 (k_{298} = 77 kHz) with a triazole → copper(i) linkage thus opening perspectives for bioorthogonal click strategies to biohybrid machinery.

Inspired by nanomechanical motions¹ in biological machines, ²⁻⁴ scientists have developed an enormous interest in the development of artificial molecular devices.^{5–8} Among them, molecular motors,^{9–11} rotors,¹² shuttles,^{13–15} tweezers,^{16–18} turnstiles,¹⁹ muscles, 20 elevators, 21 pumps, 10 walkers 22 etc. 5-8 are well studied. Though numerous examples of artificial covalent molecular devices are known in the literature, 5-8 evolution toward multicomponent artificial machineries still represents a major challenge due to the limited amount of dynamic orthogonality in hetero-assemblies. 23,24

For designing artificial multicomponent rotors, orthogonal dynamic interactions are a key requirement.²⁵ To the best of our knowledge, all literature known dynamic interactions that have been used to construct artificial multicomponent rotors are derived from H-bonding or N,O-donor¹⁹ metal interactions.^{26–30} Clearly, development of any new dynamic interaction will open further opportunities. Here, we demonstrate for the first time a supramolecular assembly and a rotor built on the dynamic alkyne → copper(1) interaction. 31,32 Specifically, we designed a four-component supramolecular assembly and nanorotor based

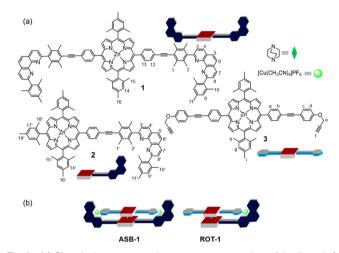


Fig. 1 (a) Chemical structure and cartoon representation of the ligands 1, 2, 3 and DABCO. (b) Cartoon representation of the four-component assembly ASB-1 and nanorotor ROT-1

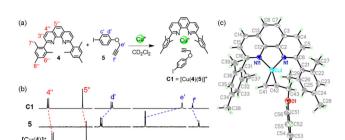
on the heteroleptic Cu⁺-phenanthroline alkyne (HETPYNE: HETeroleptic Phenanthroline and alkYNE metal) complexation (Fig. 1). Addition of stoichiometric quantities of azide to the rotor afforded the new class of a Cu⁺-triazole rotor through an in situ copper(i) catalysed click reaction.

For our study, we decided to use the phenanthrolineappended zinc(II) porphyrin ligands 1 or 2 as stator. Bulky aryl groups³³ at the 2,9-position of the phenanthroline phenAr₂ are essential to avoid the unwanted formation of the corresponding homoleptic Cu⁺ complexes. 34-36 In order to design rotator 3, we performed a few model experiments to evaluate the binding of a terminal ethynyl group to [Cu(phenAr₂)]⁺. Mixing of 4, 5 and [Cu(CH₃CN)₄]PF₆ in 1:1:1 ratio (2.5 mM each) in CD₂Cl₂ accomplished quantitative formation of $C1 = [Cu(4)(5)]^{-1}$ (Fig. 2a). In the ¹H NMR, a downfield shift of all phenanthroline protons indicated binding of 5 to [Cu(4)]+, for instance, proton 4"-H shifted from 8.67 to 8.74 ppm and 5"-H from

^a Center of Micro and Nanochemistry and (Bio)Technology, Organische Chemie I, Universität Siegen, Adolf-Reichwein-Str. 2, Siegen D-57068, Germany. E-mail: schmittel@chemie.uni-siegen.de; Tel: +49(0) 2717404356

^b Institut für Organische Chemie und Chemische Biologie, Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität, Max-von-Laue Strasse 7, Frankfurt am Main D-60438, Germany

[†] Electronic supplementary information (ESI) available: Experimental procedures, compound characterizations, spectral data, NMR titration, and VT-1H-NMR kinetics, CCDC 2199510. For ESI and crystallographic data in CIF or other electronic format see DOI: https://doi.org/10.1039/d2cc04497h



Communication

Fig. 2 (a) Formation of model complex **C1**. (b) Partial 1 H NMR (400 MHz, 298 K) of $[Cu(4)]^{+}$, **5** and **C1** in $CD_{2}Cl_{2}$ (2.5 mM). (c) X-ray crystal structure of complex **C1**. Carbons are shown in light grey; H, light green; N, blue; O, red; Cu^{+} , cyan and I, violet.

42 26

8.14 to 8.20 ppm (Fig. 2b). In contrast, protons d'-H (from 6.77 to 6.60 ppm) and e'-H (from 4.68 to 4.09 ppm) of the ethynyl ligand 5 shifted upfield upon its complexation to $[Cu(4)]^+$, due to the shielding of these protons by the π -ring current of the mesityl groups. On the other hand, despite being in the shielding region of a strong π -electron cloud, the downfield shift of proton f'-H (from 5 to C1: 2.58 to 2.68 ppm) validated the ethynyl binding to the Cu⁺ center. Single crystal X-ray analysis of C1 revealed a triclinic crystal system with the space group P1 (ESI,† Fig. S27). Importantly, it clearly demonstrated the side-on binding of Cu⁺ to both ethynyl carbons whereas there was no binding visible between oxygen and Cu⁺ center (Fig. 2c). The solid state structure disclosed the bond lengths of Cu(1)-C(41), Cu(1)-C(42), Cu(1)-N(11) and Cu(1)-N(1) to be 1.958(5) Å, 1.969(4) Å, 2.002(3) Å and 2.013(3) Å, respectively. The angle between the planes defined by N(1)-Cu(1)-N(11) and C(41)-Cu(1)-C(42) was determined as 16°. This geometry around the copper(1) center is not very common. From an NMR titration, the binding constant of 5 to $[Cu(4)]^+$ was determined as log $K = 2.81 \pm 0.16$ (ESI,† Fig. S26). We propose to denote the heteroleptic complexation motif between a [Cu(phenAr₂)]⁺ and an alkyne as HETPYNE interaction (vide supra).

After establishing the HETPYNE motif, the zinc(Π) porphyrin 3 with two ethynyl terminals was designed. To synthesize ligand 3, we first reacted 5,15-di(4-iodophenyl)-10,20-dimesityl zinc(Π) porphyrin and 4-ethynylphenol under Sonogashira coupling conditions providing the corresponding diphenol. In the final step, a Williamson ether synthesis between the phenol-substituted zinc(Π) porphyrin and propargyl bromide in presence of base furnished ligand 3 in 85% yield. Protons e-H of 3 appear in the Π H NMR well separated from other proton signals and should serve as good indicator of any binding.

As expected from the model studies, the four-component self-assembly **ASB-1** was quantitatively afforded by mixing DABCO, ligands **1** & **3**, and $[Cu(CH_3CN)_4]PF_6$ in a 1:1:1:2 ratio in CD_2Cl_2 (Fig. 3a). Two characteristic multiplets for the CH_2 -units of DABCO in the negative region of the 1H NMR indicated quantitative formation of the hetero-sandwich complex (Fig. 3b). Significant changes at all phenanthroline protons in the 1H NMR upon moving from $[Cu_2(1)]^{2^+}$ to **ASB-1** supported the binding of **3** to the copper(i)-loaded phenanthroline stations (Fig. 3c and d).

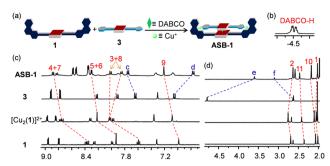


Fig. 3 (a) Cartoon representation of the four-component self-assembly leading to the formation of **ASB-1**. (b) DABCO-H signal of **ASB-1** in 1 H NMR (CD₂Cl₂, 400 MHz, 298 K). Partial 1 H NMR (CD₂Cl₂, 400 MHz, 298 K) of **1**, [Cu₂(**1**)] $^{2+}$, **3** and **ASB-1** showing the (c) aromatic and (d) aliphatic region.

Downfield shift of proton f-H from 2.64 to 3.10 ppm in **ASB-1** attested the terminal ethynyl binding of **3** at the Cu⁺ center of **1** (Fig. 3d). Drastic upfield shifts of proton signal e-H from 4.79 to 3.60 ppm and of d-H from 7.05 to 6.77 ppm along with a downfield shift of proton signal c-H from 7.64 to 7.75 ppm validated the formation of the HETPYNE complex. Furthermore, a single peak in the ESI-MS at m/z = 1489.1 confirmed formation of the hetero-assembly (ESI,† Fig. S23) and a single diffusion trace in the ¹H-DOSY NMR representing structure **ASB-1** excluded the presence of other undesired assemblies (ESI,† Fig. S20).

The clean formation of the heteroleptic sandwich complex encouraged us to test the HETPYNE motif as a dynamic interaction in a multicomponent rotor. To assemble the rotor, we selected zinc(π) porphyrin 2 containing just one phenanthroline station as stator and ligand 3 as rotator. Dissolving the ligands 2, 3, DABCO and [Cu(CH₃CN)₄]PF₆ in a 1:1:1:1 ratio in CD₂Cl₂ quantitatively furnished rotor **ROT-1** irrespective of the sequence of addition (Fig. 4a). As in **ASB-1**, two broad signals in the negative region corresponding to DABCO and significant shifts of all phenanthroline protons in the ¹H NMR validated formation of the heteroassembly (Fig. 4b–d). Upfield shifts of rotator proton signals e-H from 4.79 to 4.19 ppm along with downfield shift of f-H from 2.64 to 2.88 ppm authenticated the rotor structure (Fig. 4c and d). Its formation was further confirmed by DOSY NMR and ESI-MS data (ESI,† Fig. S21 and S24).

A single set of ¹H NMR signals for protons c-H, d-H, e-H and f-H of **ROT-1** suggested fast rotation of the rotor on the NMR

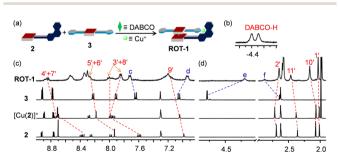


Fig. 4 (a) Cartoon representation of the self-assembly of rotor **ROT-1** from four components. (b) $(CH_2)_{DABCO}$ signal of **ROT-1** in the 1H NMR $(CD_2Cl_2, 400 \text{ MHz})$. Partial 1H NMR $(CD_2Cl_2, 400 \text{ MHz})$. Partial 1H NMR $(CD_2Cl_2, 400 \text{ MHz})$, 298 K) of 2, $[Cu(2)]^+$, 3 and **ROT-1** in the (c) aromatic and (d) aliphatic region.

ChemComm Communication

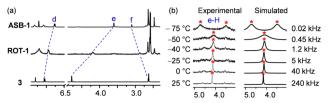


Fig. 5 (a) Partial ¹H NMR (CD₂Cl₂, 400 MHz, 298 K) of **3**, **ROT-1** and **ASB-**1. (b) VT-1H NMR (CD₂Cl₂, 600 MHz) of ROT-1 exhibiting the splitting of proton signal e-H into a 1:1 set and the corresponding rotational frequency at different temperatures.

time scale (Fig. 4c and d). Comparison of the ¹H NMR spectra of the free rotator 3, ROT-1 and ASB-1 showed that the proton signals d-H, e-H and f-H of rotor ROT-1 appeared approximately in the averaged position of those of free 3 and ASB-1 (Fig. 5a). Variable temperature (VT) ¹H NMR of **ROT-1** was thus performed to evaluate its dynamic behavior. Upon lowering the temperature, the sharp singlet at 4.19 ppm corresponding to proton e-H broadened and split into two singlets in a 1:1 ratio at -75 °C with a coalescence temperature around -50 °C (Fig. 5b). The upfield signal at 3.50 ppm was assigned to the HETPYNE-complexed proton e-H and the downfield signal at 4.71 ppm is ascribed to proton e-H at the uncomplexed arm. The rotational frequency of the rotor at different temperatures was evaluated using winDNMR-based spectral simulations.³⁸ The activation data for the rotation was derived from the Eyring plot (Table 1 and ESI,† Fig. S18). The rotational frequency turned out to be 240 kHz at 25 °C and $\Delta G_{298}^{\ddagger}$ = 42.5 kJ mol⁻¹.

After the clean formation of rotor ROT-1, our next target was the in situ rotor-to-rotor transformation. The presence of a copper(1) ion and terminal alkynes in the rotor suggested a conversion of ROT-1 to a triazole rotor through an in situ click reaction. For this purpose, 2.0 equiv. of benzyl azide was added to ROT-1 in CD₂Cl₂ (Fig. 6a). To accelerate the reaction, 1 μL of Et₃N was added. After 24 h of heating at 40 °C, the solvent was evaporated to remove NEt3 and the residue was redissolved in CD₂Cl₂. ¹H NMR showed quantitative formation of ROT-2 and a disappearance of the proton signal f-H (Fig. 6b). Upon moving from ROT-1 to ROT-2, characteristic shifts for all phenanthroline protons were observed. The downfield shift of proton signal e-H (from 4.19 to 4.81 ppm), upfield shifts of proton signals d-H (from 6.93 to 6.78 ppm) and c-H (from 7.72 ppm to 7.61 ppm) along with the appearance of a new singlet at 5.52 ppm (j-H) corroborated the formation of **ROT-2**. The broad signal of the DABCO protons at -4.39 ppm confirmed the

Table 1 Exchange frequencies of ROT-1 and ROT-2 along with their activation parameters^a

Rotor	k_{298}/kHz	$\Delta H^{\ddagger}/\mathrm{kJ} \; \mathrm{mol}^{-1}$	$\Delta S^{\ddagger}/J \text{ K}^{-1} \text{ mol}^{-1}$	$\Delta G_{298}^{\ddagger}/\mathrm{kJ} \mathrm{mol}^{-1}$
ROT-1	240	44.0 ± 0.2	5.0 ± 0.7	42.5
ROT-2	77	50.1 ± 0.4	16.7 ± 0.6	45.2

 $[^]a$ The higher ΔH^\ddagger for ROT-2 than ROT-1 reflects the stronger binding constant of a triazole to [Cu(4)]⁺ (see triazole 6 in ESI, Fig. S27). As often seen in enthalpy-entropy compensation, strong binding leads to higher positive activation entropy.

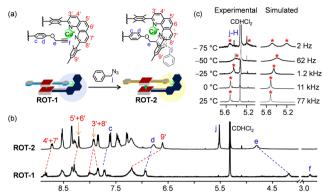


Fig. 6 (a) In situ transformation of ROT-1 to ROT-2 upon addition of 2.0 equiv. of benzyl azide. (b) Partial ¹H NMR (CD₂Cl₂, 400 MHz, 298 K) of ROT-1 and ROT-2. (c) VT-1H NMR (CD₂Cl₂, 600 MHz) of ROT-2 showing splitting of the proton signal j-H (1:1 ratio) and the corresponding rotational frequency at different temperatures.

intactness of the assembly (ESI,† Fig. S15). ROT-2 was further characterized by ESI-MS and DOSY NMR data (ESI,† Fig. S25 and S22).

A single set of ¹H NMR signals for protons c-H, d-H, e-H and j-H of ROT-2 indicated a fast rotation on the NMR time scale. Upon performing the VT ¹H NMR the proton signal for j-H split into two singlets in 1:1 ratio at −75 °C (Fig. 6c). Rotational frequencies at different temperature along with activation parameters were calculated (Fig. 6c and Table 1). The facile transformation of the self-catalyzing rotor ROT-1 to rotor ROT-2 opens interesting perspectives to generate biohybrid materials via bioorthogonal click reactions.³⁹

In conclusion, we have synthesized a four-component heterosandwich complex and a four-component rotor based on the dynamic $[Cu(phenAr_2)(alkyne)]^+$ motif. Though alkyne \rightarrow copper(1) interactions are well known in the literature, 40 for the first time its high dynamics has been determined and used to assemble a high-speed multicomponent rotor. The utility of this dynamic orthogonal motif in supramolecular rotors opens new venues for molecular machines. Furthermore, a successful quantitative transformation of the Cu⁺-alkyne rotor to a new Cu⁺-triazole rotor was achieved through in situ click reaction. It is expected that thermal self-catalyzing rotors will find their way into diverse applications, e.g., in catalysis, 35,41 biohybrid materials via bioorthogonal functionalization⁴² and elsewhere.⁴³

We are indebted to the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft for continued support under Schm 647/22-1 (No 491092614). We thank Dr Paululat for measuring the VT-1H NMR.

Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts to declare.

Notes and references

- 1 M. Dutta and B. Jana, Chem. Commun., 2021, 57, 272-283.
- 2 J. E. Walker, Biochem. Soc. Trans., 2013, 41, 1-16.
- 3 R. D. Vale and R. A. Milligan, Science, 2000, 288, 88-95.

Communication ChemComm

- 4 H. Noji, R. Yasuda, M. Yoshida and K. Kinosita, Jr, Nature, 1997, 386, 299-302.
- 5 A. Goswami, S. Saha, P. Biswas and M. Schmittel, Chem. Rev., 2020, **120**, 125-199.
- 6 S. Kassem, T. van Leeuwen, A. S. Lubbe, M. R. Wilson, B. L. Feringa and D. A. Leigh, Chem. Soc. Rev., 2017, 46, 2592-2621.
- S. Erbas-Cakmak, D. A. Leigh, C. T. McTernan and A. L. Nussbaumer, Chem. Rev., 2015, 115, 10081-10206.
- 8 A. J. McConnell, C. S. Wood, P. P. Neelakandan and J. R. Nitschke, Chem. Rev., 2015, 115, 7729-7793.
- 9 S. Kassem, T. van Leeuwen, A. S. Lubbe, M. R. Wilson, B. L. Feringa and D. A. Leigh, Chem. Soc. Rev., 2017, 46, 2592-2621.
- Y. Feng, M. Ovalle, J. S. W. Seale, C. K. Lee, D. J. Kim, R. D. Astumian and J. F. Stoddart, J. Am. Chem. Soc., 2021, 143, 5569-5591.
- 11 M. Baroncini, S. Silvi and A. Credi, Chem. Rev., 2020, 120, 200-268.
- 12 B. Lin, I. Karki, P. J. Pellechia and K. D. Shimizu, Chem. Commun., 2022, 58, 5869-5872.
- 13 T. Kumpulainen, M. R. Panman, B. H. Bakker, M. Hilbers, S. Woutersen and A. M. Brouwer, J. Am. Chem. Soc., 2019, 141, 19118-19129.
- 14 H. V. Schröder, F. Stein, J. M. Wollschläger, S. Sobottka, M. Gaedke, B. Sarkar and C. A. Schalley, Angew. Chem., Int. Ed., 2019, 58, 3496-3500.
- 15 J. E. M. Lewis, R. J. Bordoli, M. Denis, C. J. Fletcher, M. Galli, E. A. Neal, E. M. Rochette and S. M. Goldup, Chem. Sci., 2016, 7, 3154–3161.
- 16 B. Doistau, L. Benda, J.-L. Cantin, L.-M. Chamoreau, E. Ruiz, V. Marvaud, B. Hasenknopf and G. Vives, J. Am. Chem. Soc., 2017, 139, 9213-9220.
- 17 H. Yoon, J. M. Lim, H.-C. Gee, C.-H. Lee, Y.-H. Jeong, D. Kim and W.-D. Jang, J. Am. Chem. Soc., 2014, 136, 1672-1679.
- 18 A. Petitjean, R. G. Khoury, N. Kyritsakas and J.-M. Lehn, J. Am. Chem. Soc., 2004, 126, 6637-6647.
- 19 B. Godde, A. Jouaiti, A. Fluck, N. Kyritsakas, M. Mauro and M. W. Hosseini, Dalton Trans., 2017, 46, 14897-14906.
- M. C. Jimenez, C. O. Dietrich-Buchecker and J.-P. Sauvage, Angew. Chem., Int. Ed., 2000, 39, 3284-3287.
- 21 J. D. Badjic, V. Balzani, A. Credi, S. Silvi and J. F. Stoddart, Science, 2004, 303, 1845-1849.

- 22 M. von Delius, E. M. Geertsema and D. A. Leigh, Nat. Chem., 2010, 2, 96-101.
- 23 M. Schmittel, Chem. Commun., 2015, 51, 14956-14968.
- 24 M. Schmittel, Isr. J. Chem., 2018, 59, 197-208.
- 25 P. K. Biswas, S. Saha, Y. Nanaji, A. Rana and M. Schmittel, Inorg. Chem., 2017, 56, 6662-6670.
- 26 B. E. Dial, P. J. Pellechia, M. D. Smith and K. D. Shimizu, J. Am. Chem. Soc., 2012, 134, 3675-3678.
- 27 S. Saha, P. K. Biswas and M. Schmittel, *Inorg. Chem.*, 2019, **58**, 3466–3472.
- 28 P. K. Biswas, A. Goswami, S. Saha and M. Schmittel, Chem. Eur. J., 2020, 26, 14095-14099.
- 29 I. Paul, A. Goswami, N. Mittal and M. Schmittel, Angew. Chem., Int. Ed., 2018, 57, 354-358.
- 30 S. Hiraoka, M. Shiro and M. Shionoya, J. Am. Chem. Soc., 2004, 126, 1214-1218.
- 31 D. Parasar, T. T. Ponduru, A. Noonikara-Poyil, N. B. Jayaratna and H. V. R. Dias, Dalton Trans., 2019, 48, 15782-15794.
- 32 H. V. R. Dias, J. A. Flores, J. Wu and P. Kroll, J. Am. Chem. Soc., 2009, 131, 11249-11255.
- 33 S. K. Samanta and M. Schmittel, J. Am. Chem. Soc., 2013, 135, 18794-18797.
- 34 B. Ralahy, U. Hahn, E. Wasielewski and J.-F. Nierengarten, Eur. I. Inorg. Chem., 2021, 2625-2635.
- 35 S. Saha, A. Ghosh, T. Paululat and M. Schmittel, Dalton Trans., 2020, 49, 8693-8700.
- 36 S. De, S. Pramanik and M. Schmittel, Angew. Chem., Int. Ed., 2014, 53, 14255-14259.
- 37 S. K. Samanta, D. Samanta, J. W. Bats and M. Schmittel, J. Org. Chem., 2011, 76, 7466-7473.
- 38 H. J. Reich, NMR Spectrum Calculations: WinDNMR, Version 7.1.13, Department of Chemistry, University of Wisconsin, 2008.
- 39 C. G. Parker and M. R. Pratt, Cell, 2020, 180, 605-632.
- 40 M. Meldal and C. W. Tornøe, Chem. Rev., 2008, 108, 2952-3015.
- 41 A. Goswami, T. Paululat and M. Schmittel, J. Am. Chem. Soc., 2019, 141, 15656-15663.
- 42 https://www.nobelprize.org/uploads/2022/10/popular-chemistryprize 2022.pdf.
- 43 K. T. Fam, L. Saladin, A. S. Klymchenko and M. Collot, Chem. Commun., 2021, 57, 4807-4810.