

Cite this: *Chem. Sci.*, 2021, 12, 1810

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

Received 7th October 2020
Accepted 6th December 2020

DOI: 10.1039/d0sc05551d

rsc.li/chemical-science

Three-component three-bond forming cascade via palladium photoredox catalysis†

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A highly modular radical cascade strategy based upon radical cyclisation/allylic substitution sequence between alkyl/aryl bromides, 1,3-dienes and nucleophiles ranging from sulfinates to amines, phenols and 1,3-dicarbonyls is described (>80 examples). Palladium phosphine complexes – which merge properties of photo- and cross coupling-catalysts – allow to forge three bonds with complete 1,4-selectivity and stereocontrol, delivering highly value added carbocyclic and heterocyclic motifs that can feature – *inter alia* – vicinal quaternary centers, free protic groups, *gem*-difluoro motifs and strained rings. Furthermore, a flow chemistry approach was for the first time applied in palladium-photocatalysed endeavors involving radicals.

Introduction

Cascade strategies have emerged as pivotal transformations that can enable formation of multiple C–C and C–X linkages in a single operational step. Particularly, the rapid generation of intricate chemical architectures and enhanced step-atom economy are among the salient features of domino processes, which are both prevalent in nature and complex total syntheses (Schemes 1A and B).¹ In such realm, radical cascade processes^{2a} either driven by single-electron transfer events,^{2b} radical chains or UV-irradiation stand as a synthetic toolbox in natural product synthesis, often complementary to nature's cationic cascade processes (*e.g.* lanosterol *vs.* Pattenden's estrone synthesis).^{2c,d} Despite the intriguing bond disconnections that can be envisaged *via* radical cascades, these methods are often plagued by the use of toxic and hazardous chemicals – for instance organotin reagents and radical initiators.^{3a–c} Seeking for milder and environmentally friendly alternatives of generating radicals, visible light photocatalysis can harness the energy of photons to promote single-electron transfer events by exploiting catalytic amounts of light-absorbing species.^{4a–e} Photocatalysis – often in combination with nickel (synergistic or dual catalysis) – has fostered the rapid development of radical cascade manifolds.^{5a–f} Approaching the problem using a single catalytic species, Gevorgyan,^{6a–e} Shang and Fu,^{6f,g} Glorius^{6h–k} and others^{6l–n} have utilized palladium complexes as single-component^{7a,b} photo- and cross coupling-catalysts for reactions *via* radical intermediates, obviating the need for a dual catalytic system featuring

two species (*e.g.* synergistic catalysis with Ni and Ir-photocatalyst), therefore simplifying the set up and reducing operational costs.^{4a–e} Furthermore, previously inaccessible transformations – which significantly complement well-established means of generating radicals in synthetic endeavours – have been devised.^{7a–e} Particularly, the plethora of substrates amenable for palladium-catalysed coupling reactions extends well-beyond sp²-hybridised species,^{8a,b} thus offering a gateway towards increasingly complex scaffolds to «Escape from Flatland» (Lovering *et al.*).⁹ In this regard, radical species prove highly suitable to generate congested quaternary centres, thus overcoming typical limitations of ionic pathways. In 2020, our group^{6j,k} and Gevorgyan^{6e} independently reported a radical trapping/allylic substitution sequence under palladium-photocatalysis, affording decorated alkenes: in the latter case, aryl-substituted dienes controlled the 1,2-selective difunctionalisation process, while in the former a sterically driven 1,4-substitution has been observed. Given the scarcity of palladium-photocatalysed three-bond three-component cascades¹⁰ and perpetuating our interest in the development of metallaphotoredox strategies towards highly congested carbon architectures,^{6h–k} we wondered whether visible light could enable a domino reaction between olefin-tethered alkyl/aryl bromides, 1,3-dienes and nucleophiles. Building on the aforementioned radical palladium π -allyl generation approaches,^{6e–k} the perspective strategy would involve the following steps (Scheme 1C): (I) excitation of palladium(0) complex **A** through visible light; (II) SET to generate an alkyl/aryl radical **D**; (III) 5-*exo* *trig* cyclisation to generate intermediate **E**;¹¹ (IV) radical trapping with dienes to generate a stabilised allyl radical **F** and the second bond; (V) Pd(I)-radical-to-polar cross-over towards Pd(II)-allyl intermediate **G**; (VI) allylic substitution to yield the product **H** and the catalytically active palladium(0)

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† Electronic supplementary information (ESI) available. See DOI: 10.1039/d0sc05551d





Scheme 1 (A) Cationic cascades: lanosterol biosynthesis; (B) radical cascades: total synthesis of estrone; (C) three-component three-bond cascade strategy.

species.¹² A careful tuning of the catalytic manifold is needed to prevent the following potential pitfalls: (I) unproductive protodehalogenation; (II) early Pd(I)-radical recombination, followed by fast β -H elimination;^{7d} (III) elimination processes from G; (IV) scarce control of regio- (1,2/1,4) and *E*-selectivity due to η^3 - η^1 - η^3 equilibria.^{13a-c}

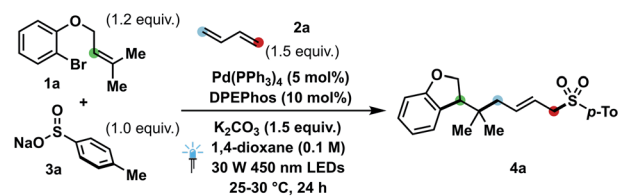
Herein, we report the palladium-photocatalysed three-component three-bond cascade featuring a powerful 5-*exo* trig cyclisation, radical trapping and allylic functionalisation sequence to generate highly complex motifs bearing one or more contiguous quaternary centres with excellent 1,4-selectivity and stereocontrol (*E/Z* ratio). Remarkably, this process can tolerate both (hetero-)aryl and alkyl bromides bearing different functional groups, a vast array of nitrogen, sulfur, carbon and oxygen nucleophiles and variously substituted dienes, allowing the modification of the core structure at will in a highly modular fashion. Furthermore, the newly developed palladium-photocatalysed cross coupling process was performed in flow, thus

enabling the streamlined product formation with higher output thanks to reduced reaction times.^{14a,b}

Results and discussion

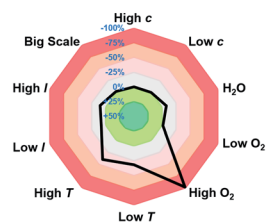
In line with our previous results on palladium-photocatalysed processes,^{6h-k} we investigated a set of bidentate ligands (Fig. 1C) and conditions (Fig. 1A) in the three-component coupling of bromide **1a** with butadiene **2a** and sodium *p*-toluenesulfinate **3a** to yield dihydrobenzofuran **4a**. Interestingly, DPEPhos (**L1**) outperformed *rac*-BINAP (**L2**) and XantPhos (**L3**) as ligand, while moderate conversion (45%) could be detected even in the absence of added ligand (entry 2). While the presence of **L2** caused a diminished initial cyclisation rate (C to E), the ligand was successfully used upon longer reaction times when the allylic substitution step proved troublesome (Scheme 2C, 3C and D).¹⁵ Furthermore, ethereal solvents – in particular 1,4-dioxane – afforded better yields in comparison with other polar aprotic solvents (entry 3).¹⁶ Both inorganic and organic bases (entry 4) proved compatible with the catalytic manifold, as well as reduced catalyst loading (2 or 1 mol%), albeit with a moderate reduction of yield of **4a** (77 and 62%, respectively).

A. Optimisation of the three-component coupling^a



Entry	Deviation	Yield % ^b
1	none	88
2	L2, L3, no ligand	76, 38, 45
3	DMSO ^c , DMA ^c , MeCN or DMF	44, 40, 68, 34
4	KOAc, NaHCO ₃ , Et ₃ N	88, 80, 86
5	Pd(PPh ₃) ₄ (2 mol%) ^c or (1 mol%) ^c	77, 62
6	No Pd(PPh ₃) ₄	< 5
7	No light, RT or 100 °C	< 5
8	No base	66

B. Sensitivity assessment



C. Ligands



Fig. 1 (A) Optimisation of the three-component coupling. ^aConditions: **1a** (0.12 mmol), **2a** (0.15 mmol, 2 M in THF), **3a** (0.10 mmol), K₂CO₃ (0.15 mmol), Pd(PPh₃)₄ (5 mol%), DPEPhos (10 mol%), 1,4-dioxane (0.1 M), 30 W 450 nm LEDs, 25–30 °C, 24 h. ^bYields were determined using ¹H NMR spectroscopy with CH₂Br₂ as internal standard; ^cReaction time increased to 48 h. (B) Sensitivity assessment radar diagram. (C) Ligands screened in the catalytic reaction. *p*-Tol = *para*-tolyl. DPEPhos = (oxydi-2,1-phenylene)bis(diphenylphosphine); BINAP = 2,2'-bis(diphenylphosphino)-1,1'-binaphthyl; XantPhos = 4,5-bis(diphenylphosphino)-9,9-dimethylxanthene.



towards concentration fluctuations, different light intensities, presence of trace water and even upon scaling-up the process. Conversely, high oxygen content, significantly elevated or reduced temperatures proved detrimental to the reaction yield.¹⁷

Having assessed the feasibility of the cascade process, we investigated the generality of our newly developed manifold with respect of bromides (Schemes 2A and B), dienes (Scheme 2C) and nucleophilic partners (Scheme 3). When olefin-tethered bromoaryl ethers were used as radical precursors

(**1a-aj**), the corresponding dihydrobenzofurans arising from the three-bond three-component coupling were obtained with excellent *E*- (>95 : 5) and 1,4-selectivity (>20 : 1). Furthermore – when the catalyst loading was reduced to 2 mol% and the process scaled-up to 2 mmol – product **4a** was afforded in 79% yield. A plethora of different functional groups, spanning from aliphatic (**4c-d**, **4i-m**) to halide substituents such as chlorides (**4b**, **4s**), fluorides (**4g**, **4p**, **4r**), as well as aryls (**4f**, **4o**), aryl/alkyl esters (**4e**, **4h**) and condensed aromatics (**4n**) were tolerated. As shown by examples **4i-l**, substitution can be accommodated at



Scheme 3 Substrate scope with regards to nucleophiles (A–D). Yields of the corresponding isolated products are given. For experimental details, see ESI.† ^aConditions: **1b** (0.20 mmol), **2a** (0.30 mmol, 2 M in THF), **7a–i** (0.20 mmol), K₂CO₃ (0.30 mmol), Pd(PPh₃)₄ (5 mol%), DPEPhos (10 mol%), 1,4-dioxane (0.1 M), 25–30 °C. ^bProduct **8f** underwent spontaneous partial dechlorination upon purification. ^cConditions: **1b** (0.20 mmol), **2a** (0.60 mmol), **9a–l** (0.30 mmol), Et₃N (0.60 mmol), Pd(PPh₃)₄ (5 mol%), DPEPhos (10 mol%), 1,4-dioxane (0.1 M), 30 W 450 nm LEDs, 25–30 °C. ^dKOH (0.6 mmol) was used as base. ^e93 : 7 *E/Z*. ^f94 : 6 *E/Z*. ^gConditions: **1a** (0.30 mmol), **2a** (0.60 mmol), **11a–k** (0.20 mmol), K₂CO₃ (0.60 mmol), Pd(PPh₃)₄ (5 mol%), *rac*-BINAP (10 mol%), 1,4-dioxane (0.2 M), 30 W 450 nm LEDs, 25–30 °C. ^hConditions: **1a** (0.20 mmol), **2a** (0.30 mmol), **13a–d** (0.60 mmol), KOAc (0.30 mmol), Pd(PPh₃)₄ (5 mol%), *rac*-BINAP (10 mol%), 1,4-dioxane (0.2 M), 30 W 450 nm LEDs, 25–30 °C. ⁱ**1h** (0.20 mmol), **13b** (0.20 mmol) and K₂CO₃ (0.30 mmol) were used. Cy = cyclohexyl.





Fig. 2 (A) Reaction under flow conditions, comparison with batch process and synthetic application of the product. Flow reaction: **1b** (0.20 mmol), **2a** (0.60 mmol), morpholine (0.30 mmol), Et₃N (0.60 mmol), 1,4-dioxane (0.1 M), 30 W 450 nm LEDs, 25–30 °C, flow rate: 4 mL h⁻¹. (B) Reductive desulfonation. (C) Radical probe experiment. (D) TEMPO trapping experiments. (E) UV-vis spectroscopic analysis. (F) *In situ* formation of catalytically active species from Pd(DPEPhos)Cl₂. ^asyn : anti nomenclature in accordance to ref. 27. ^bSee Fig. 1 – entry 1. ^c**1a** (0.12 mmol), **2a** (0.15 mmol, 2 M in THF), **3a** (0.10 mmol), K₂CO₃ (0.15 mmol), 1,4-dioxane (0.1 M), 30 W 450 nm LEDs, 25–30 °C, 24 h. ^dYields were determined using ¹H NMR spectroscopy with CH₂Br₂ as internal standard. ^eIsolated yield. DIPEA = diisopropylethylamine; dppe = 1,2-bis(diphenylphosphino) ethane; DIBAL-H = diisobutylaluminium hydride.

photocatalytic process to occur (Fig. 2E, see also Fig. 1 – entry 7). Upon addition of **1a**, the fluorescence attributable to the Pd(PPh₃)₄/DPEPhos system changed, hinting that aryl bromides can interact with the catalytically competent mixture. As suggested by ³¹P NMR spectroscopy, facile displacement of PPh₃ by bidentate DPEPhos occurs under the experimental conditions. By testing Pd(DPEPhos)Cl₂ in combination with various reductants, we observed a considerable degree of catalytic activity in presence of phosphines (Fig. 2F).¹⁶ This latter finding – in combination with the observed fast ligand displacement by ³¹P NMR – corroborates the notion of DPEPhos-ligated species to be active under the reaction conditions.

Conclusions

In conclusion, we have developed a highly modular three-component dicarbofunctionalisation/allylic substitution sequence that can generate three C–C and C–Nu linkages in

sequence by exploiting palladium as dual catalyst. The catalytic manifold tolerates a variety of functional groups – including unprotected protic groups and small ring systems – thus allowing to generate highly relevant motifs (*e.g.* allyl sulfones, allyl amines) with remarkable levels of structural flexibility. Moreover, the amenable coupling partners span from aryl to alkyl bromides and allow the generation of sterically congested quaternary centres and even vicinal quaternary carbons (**4ah**), which are challenging scaffolds to be accessed. For the first time, a palladium-catalysed photoredox reaction involving radical species was performed in flow, enabling the reduction of reaction times and the potential streamlined utilization of the process. Mechanistic experiments are supportive of a radical-to-polar crossover mechanism, whereby palladium acts – upon visible light irradiation – both as SET- and transition metal-catalyst.



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