



Cite this: *Chem. Sci.*, 2019, 10, 161

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

Received 26th July 2018  
Accepted 28th September 2018

DOI: 10.1039/c8sc03315c

rsc.li/chemical-science

# Transition-metal free C–C bond cleavage/borylation of cycloketone oxime esters†

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An efficient transition-metal free C–C bond cleavage/borylation of cycloketone oxime esters has been described. In this reaction, the  $B_2(OH)_4$  reagent not only served as the boron source but also acted as an electron donor source through formation of a complex with a DMAc-like Lewis base. This complex could be used as an efficient single electron reductant in other ring-opening transformations of cycloketone oxime esters. Free-radical trapping, radical-clock, and DFT calculations all suggest a radical pathway for this transformation.

## Introduction

Alkylboronic esters are very important building blocks in organic synthesis as well as in medicinal chemistry and materials science (Fig. 1).<sup>1,2</sup> For instance, they have been widely used in Suzuki–Miyaura coupling reactions.<sup>3</sup> Thus, many chemists have devoted their efforts to develop facile and efficient methods for the synthesis of alkylborons.<sup>4</sup> The classical method relies on the trapping of highly reactive alkyl-Li or alkyl-Mg reagents with suitable boron compounds.<sup>5</sup> However, this procedure suffers from strict conditions as well as poor functional-group tolerance. In recent years, a number of C–B bond formation reactions, including transition-metal catalyzed borylation of alkyl halides, decarboxylative borylation of aliphatic esters,<sup>6</sup> hydroboration of alkenes and others have emerged as attractive alternatives to classical methods.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, noble metal catalysts, strong bases and ligands are usually required in these reactions. Therefore, developing mild borylation reactions to access functionalized alkylboron compounds is still desirable and highly in demand.<sup>4</sup>

Since the pioneering work of Zard and Uemura, C–C bond cleavage of cycloketone oxime derivatives has emerged as an attractive strategy to construct C–C and C–Y (Y = O, S, Se, Te, or X) bonds.<sup>8–10</sup> Recently, an array of radical C–C bond cleavages of cycloketone oxime derivatives have been developed under different catalytic systems including transition-metal catalysis and visible-light photocatalysis (Fig. 2, route a).<sup>9a–h</sup> In addition, the Castle group reported a microwave-promoted C–C bond cleavage of cycloketone oxime ethers.<sup>9i</sup> In this regard, our group presented a series of iron and copper catalyzed C–C bond

cleavages of cycloketone oxime esters.<sup>10</sup> These established protocols provided efficient approaches to incorporate the versatile cyanoalkyl moieties into structurally diverse molecules, wherein the iminyl radical was the pivotal intermediate. Although remarkable advances have been made, the C–C bond cleavage/borylation of cycloketone oxime derivatives remains unexplored. Very recently, some elegant transition metal-free borylation reactions have been reported by different research groups.<sup>11</sup> Intriguingly, the diboron species not only served as a boron source but also acted as an electron donor source to generate reactive radical intermediates.<sup>11,12</sup> Inspired by these studies and our previous results, we wish to explore a novel catalytic system to form a reactive iminyl radical and simultaneously to construct  $C(sp^3)$ –B bonds (Fig. 2, route b). Herein, we report a transition metal free C–C bond cleavage/borylation of cyclobutanone oxime esters through using a diboron reagent as the boron source and activator. This protocol provided a straightforward access to cyanoalkyl boronic esters, a class of versatile building blocks in organic synthesis,<sup>2,13</sup> in good yields.

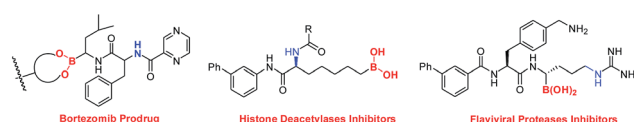


Fig. 1 Biologically active compounds containing alkylboronic moieties.



Fig. 2 Transformation of cyclobutanone oxime derivatives.

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† Electronic supplementary information (ESI) available: Experimental procedures and characterization of new compounds are provided. See DOI: 10.1039/c8sc03315c





accounts partly for the formation of **2u** and **2v** (eqn (1) and (2)). The tricyclo[5.2.1.0(2,6)]decan-8-one oxime ester **1w** also gave the anticipated secondary boronic ester **2w** as a single diastereomer under the modified conditions, albeit in somewhat low yield (eqn (3)). Unfortunately, the oxime ester derived from 2-substituted cyclopentanone or cyclohexanone could not afford the desired product under the present conditions.



Satisfactorily, this metal free C–C cleavage/borylation reaction of cyclobutanone oxime esters could be scaled up. For instance, the reaction of **1a** on a 2.0 mmol scale gave the product **2a** in 67% isolated yield. Furthermore, the product of this reaction was not limited to pinacol boronic ester. Using methyl iminodiacetic acid (MIDA) instead of pinacol for the reaction workup, the corresponding product **3a** was obtained in 60% yield. Moreover, the product **2a** could be oxidized by  $\text{H}_2\text{O}_2$  followed by hydrolysis to deliver the alcohol **4a** in 80% yield (Scheme 1). Finally, treatment of cyanoalkyl boronic ester **2r** with 4-trifluoromethylbromobenzene in the presence of a palladium catalyst afforded the coupling product **4b** in 28% yield (without optimization).



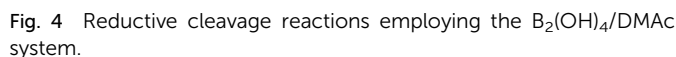
Scheme 1 Synthesis of **2a** on a gram scale and derivatization of the product.

To gain some understanding of the reaction, several control experiments were conducted (Fig. 3). When TEMPO, a typical radical scavenger was subjected to the reaction conditions, only trace amount of **2a** was observed, along with the cyanoalkyl-TEMPO adduct **5a** which was isolated in 50% yield, implying that a radical intermediate was involved in this transformation. In contrast, without  $\text{B}_2(\text{OH})_4$  or DMAc, the reaction of **1a** with TEMPO did not take place, suggesting that both the diboron reagent and amide-based solvent play a critical role in this ring-opening process (Fig. 3, eqn (4)). Furthermore, the radical-clock substrates **6a** and **6b** furnished the cyclized products **7a** and **7b** via a ring-opening/cyclization/borylation cascade, wherein no linear coupling product was detected (Fig. 3, eqn (5) and (6)). Treatment of **6c** under the standard conditions led to the product **7c** in 58% yield as the sole product (Fig. 3, eqn (7)). These results also support a radical pathway.

Based upon the preliminary results and previous reports, a possible mechanism was proposed for this reaction with the further aid of DFT calculation (Scheme 2, for details, see the ESI†). This borylation reaction probably proceeds through a radical chain propagation mechanism. First, cyclobutanone oxime ester **1a** gives the DMAc-stabilized radical intermediate **I** through thermal cleavage of the B–B bond of  $\text{B}_2(\text{OH})_4 \cdot \text{DMAc}$  complex.<sup>11,12</sup> Second, N–O bond cleavage of radical **I** affords the iminyl radical **II**, which delivers radical **III** through a  $\beta$ -carbon elimination process.<sup>7–9</sup> Afterward, the alkyl radical **III** reacts with DMAc-ligated  $\text{B}_2(\text{OH})_4$  to produce the precursor of the desired product **2a'** and DMAc-stabilized boryl radical **IV**.<sup>11,12,14</sup> Finally, the resulting boryl radical **IV** might propagate a radical chain process. It is worth mentioning that  $\text{ArCOOB}(\text{OH})_2$  can be detected by LCMS during the reaction, which also provided evidence for our proposed catalytic cycle. On the other hand, based on the above result and UV-vis spectrum of **1u** and  $\text{B}_2\text{Cat}_2$  in DMAc, direct light-triggered homolysis of  $\text{B}_2\text{Cat}_2$  might be involved in the reaction of **1u** with  $\text{B}_2\text{Cat}_2$ .



Fig. 3 Control experiments.



Remarkably, this simple B<sub>2</sub>(OH)<sub>4</sub>/DMAc system was also applicable to other C–C bond cleavage/C–C bond formations (Fig. 4). The reaction of **1a** with quinoxalin-2(1*H*)-one **8a** and quinine **8b** also worked smoothly to give the cyanoalkylated products **9a** and **9b** in 52% and 32% yields, respectively (without optimization).<sup>10a,b</sup> These results suggested that this new transition metal free system could be used instead of transition metal catalytic systems, further indicating their potential applications in radical chemistry.

In summary, we have demonstrated the first transition-metal free C–C bond cleavage/borylation of cyclobutanone oxime esters. This protocol is amenable to a variety of cyclobutanone oxime esters, thus providing a facile access to cyanoalkyl boronic esters in good yields. Primary mechanism studies revealed that  $\text{B}_2(\text{OH})_4$  not only serves as a boron source but also plays a crucial role in the C–C bond cleavage process. Further studies on the mechanistic details are currently underway in our laboratory.

There are no conflicts to declare.

Financial support from Natural Science Basic Research Plan in Shaanxi Province of China (No. 2016JZ002), and the Fundamental Research Funds of the Central Universities (No. zrzdz2017001 and xjj2016056) is greatly appreciated. We thank Prof. Pengfei Li in XJTU for a helpful discussion. We also thank Miss Lu at the Instrument Analysis Center of Xi'an Jiaotong University for her assistance with HRMS analysis.

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