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# Solvent-free anhydrous $\text{Li}^+$ , $\text{Na}^+$ and $\text{K}^+$ salts of $[\text{B}(3,5\text{-(CF}_3)_2\text{C}_6\text{H}_3)_4]^-$ , $[\text{BAr}^{\text{F}}_4]^-$ . Improved synthesis and solid-state structures†

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**A modified, convenient, preparation of solvent-free, anhydrous,  $\text{Li}^+$ ,  $\text{Na}^+$  and  $\text{K}^+$  salts of the ubiquitous  $[\text{BAr}^{\text{F}}_4]^-$  anion is reported, that involves a simple additional recrystallisation step. Anhydrous  $\text{Na}[\text{BAr}^{\text{F}}_4]$ ,  $\text{K}[\text{BAr}^{\text{F}}_4]$ , and  $[\text{Li}(\text{H}_2\text{O})][\text{BAr}^{\text{F}}_4]$ , were characterised by single-crystal X-ray diffraction.**

The use of weakly coordinating anions<sup>1</sup> for the stabilisation of reactive low, or latent-low, coordinate cationic metal and main-group complexes now plays a central role in synthesis and catalysis,<sup>2</sup> both in solution and in the solid-state.<sup>3</sup> The anion  $[\text{BAr}^{\text{F}}_4]^-$  ( $\text{Ar}^{\text{F}} = 3,5\text{-(CF}_3)_2\text{C}_6\text{H}_3$ ),<sup>4</sup> Fig. 1, enjoys particular utility amongst the small suite of common anions used, *e.g.*  $[\text{B}(\text{C}_6\text{F}_5)_4]^-$ ,<sup>5</sup>  $[\text{Al}(\text{OR}^{\text{F}})_4]^-$  ( $\text{R}^{\text{F}} = \text{fluoroalkyl}$ ),<sup>6</sup>  $[\text{B}(3,5\text{-Cl}_2\text{C}_6\text{H}_3)_4]^-$ ,<sup>7</sup> and  $[\text{CB}_{11}\text{X}_{12}]^-$  ( $\text{X} = \text{halogen}$ )<sup>8</sup> derivatives. A combination of synthetic accessibility, desirable properties of the resulting salts, *i.e.* solubility and crystallinity, and simple NMR-reporter groups, make  $[\text{BAr}^{\text{F}}_4]^-$  the go-to choice for many organometallic, main-group and catalytic applications. Very often such reactive species are generated by metathesis with the group 1 salts  $\text{M}[\text{BAr}^{\text{F}}_4]$  ( $\text{M} = \text{Li, Na, K}$ ), although alternative activating cations are also known, *e.g.*  $[(\text{Et}_2\text{O})_2\text{H}][\text{BAr}^{\text{F}}_4]$  (Taubé and Brookhart)<sup>9</sup> and  $[\text{Ph}_3\text{C}][\text{BAr}^{\text{F}}_4]$  (Boudjouk).<sup>10</sup> The alkali salts have also been used as polymerisation initiators,<sup>11</sup> in electrochemistry,<sup>12</sup> as an additive in lithium ion batteries,<sup>13</sup> in ionic liquids,<sup>14</sup> and for the extraction of aqueous lanthanide ions.<sup>15</sup> While considered to be non-interacting, under appropriate conditions  $[\text{BAr}^{\text{F}}_4]^-$  can coordinate to metal centres through its arene ring,<sup>16,3a</sup> or *via* metal...F- $\text{CF}_2$  interactions.<sup>17</sup> It can also undergo B-C bond cleavage.<sup>18</sup>

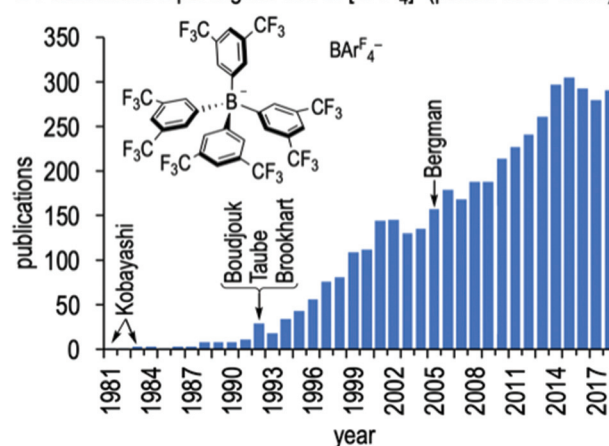
The synthesis and use, as a phase transfer catalyst,<sup>4</sup> of the  $[\text{BAr}^{\text{F}}_4]^-$  anion was first reported by Kobayashi in 1981, fol-

lowed by the preparation of hydrated  $[\text{Na}(\text{H}_2\text{O})_3][\text{BAr}^{\text{F}}_4]$ .<sup>19</sup> Brookhart subsequently reported the synthesis of  $\text{Na}[\text{BAr}^{\text{F}}_4]$ , by drying under vacuum and a cold  $\text{CH}_2\text{Cl}_2$  wash.<sup>9a</sup> Both these preparations used the Grignard reagent  $1,3,5\text{-XMg}(\text{CF}_3)_2\text{C}_6\text{H}_3$  ( $\text{X} = \text{Br, I}$ ). In 2005, Bergman described an alternative protocol that avoided the use of the Grignard/magnesium metal mixture<sup>20</sup> for the preparation of anhydrous  $\text{Na}[\text{BAr}^{\text{F}}_4]$ ,<sup>21</sup> but required prolonged drying under vacuum over  $\text{P}_2\text{O}_5$ . Synthetic protocols have been reported for hydrated  $\text{Li}^+$  and  $\text{K}^+$  salts;<sup>22</sup> or where the water content has not been reported.<sup>23</sup> To date, the synthesis ( $\text{Li}^+$ ,  $\text{K}^+$ ) and structures<sup>24</sup> ( $\text{Li}^+$ ,  $\text{Na}^+$ ,  $\text{K}^+$ ) of anhydrous  $\text{M}[\text{BAr}^{\text{F}}_4]$  have not been reported in the open literature. Such anhydrous salts are of importance when using the  $[\text{BAr}^{\text{F}}_4]^-$

### A Generation of a vacant site using $\text{M}[\text{BAr}^{\text{F}}_4]$



### B Publications reporting the use of $[\text{BAr}^{\text{F}}_4]^-$ (period 1981–2018)



**Fig. 1** (A) Generalised use of the  $[\text{BAr}^{\text{F}}_4]^-$  anion for the generation of low-coordinate metal centres. (B) Number of publications per year reporting use of the  $[\text{BAr}^{\text{F}}_4]^-$  anion. Scifinder CAS (<https://scifinder.cas.org>) accessed 18/12/2018.

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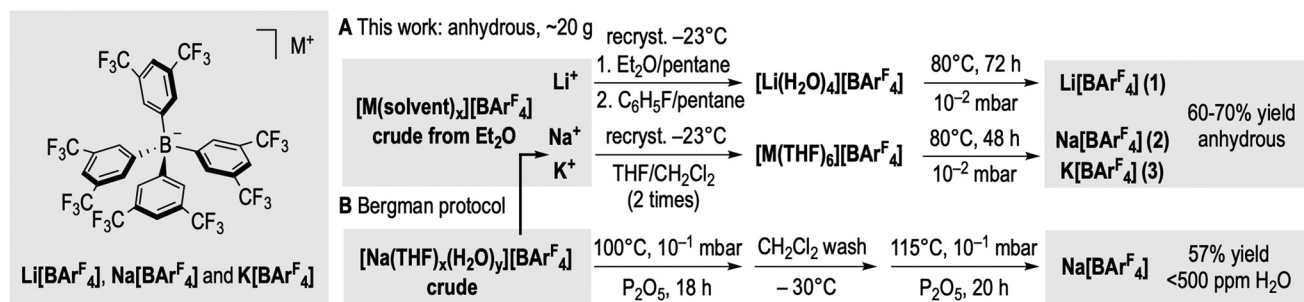


Fig. 2 Preparation and isolation of solvent-free anhydrous Li<sup>+</sup>, Na<sup>+</sup> and K<sup>+</sup> salts of [BArF<sub>4</sub>]<sup>−</sup> and comparison with the Bergman synthesis.

anion to access highly Lewis-acidic, and low-coordinate, complexes.<sup>25</sup>

We now detail here a robust multigram protocol to prepare solvent-free anhydrous Li<sup>+</sup>, Na<sup>+</sup> and K<sup>+</sup> salts of the [BArF<sub>4</sub>]<sup>−</sup> anion on ~20 g scale in 60–70% yields, by adding a simple recrystallisation step of the crude product prior to drying under vacuum. As well as being synthetically expedient, this allows for the structures of solvent-free anhydrous Na<sup>+</sup> and K<sup>+</sup>, and mono aquo Li<sup>+</sup> salts of [BArF<sub>4</sub>]<sup>−</sup> to be determined.

Following a modified Kobayashi synthesis, Li<sup>+</sup>, Na<sup>+</sup> and K<sup>+</sup> salts of [BArF<sub>4</sub>]<sup>−</sup> (Fig. 2) were prepared from 1,3,5-BrMg(CF<sub>3</sub>)<sub>2</sub>C<sub>6</sub>H<sub>3</sub>/BF<sub>3</sub> followed by treatment with the aqueous alkali metal carbonate of choice (M<sub>2</sub>CO<sub>3</sub>, M = Li<sup>+</sup>, Na<sup>+</sup> and K<sup>+</sup>). Extraction into diethyl ether gave the corresponding crude [M(solvent)<sub>x</sub>][BArF<sub>4</sub>] (solvent = H<sub>2</sub>O and/or Et<sub>2</sub>O). Our key improvement is a subsequent double recrystallisation step to yield the corresponding pure solvent-complexes in high yield. [Li(solvent)<sub>x</sub>][BArF<sub>4</sub>] was successively recrystallised from undried diethyl ether/*n*-pentane and then undried fluorobenzene/*n*-pentane at −23 °C to give [Li(H<sub>2</sub>O)<sub>4</sub>][BArF<sub>4</sub>]<sup>22a</sup> as determined by NMR spectroscopy and single-crystal X-ray diffraction (ESI). Anhydrous Li[BArF<sub>4</sub>] **1** was then conveniently obtained as a highly hygroscopic off-white solid (64% yield) after drying under dynamic vacuum (10<sup>−2</sup> mbar) at 80 °C for 72 h. Shorter drying times (24 h) gave [Li(H<sub>2</sub>O)][BArF<sub>4</sub>] **4**. Using [Li(H<sub>2</sub>O)<sub>4</sub>]<sup>+</sup> is crucial, as any bound ether results in decomposition on drying. Anhydrous Na[BArF<sub>4</sub>] **2** (68%, white solid), and K[BArF<sub>4</sub>] **3** (58%, off-white solid), were obtained from drying the pure THF solvates [M(THF)<sub>6</sub>][BArF<sub>4</sub>] under vacuum (80 °C, 48 h).<sup>22c</sup> [M(THF)<sub>6</sub>][BArF<sub>4</sub>] were themselves isolated by two consecutive recrystallisations of crude [M(solvent)<sub>x</sub>][BArF<sub>4</sub>] from THF/CH<sub>2</sub>Cl<sub>2</sub>. These two recrystallisation steps ensure high purity of the final anhydrous salts. These procedures routinely yield ~20 g of anhydrous hygroscopic Li<sup>+</sup>, Na<sup>+</sup> and K<sup>+</sup> salts of [BArF<sub>4</sub>]<sup>−</sup>. This method also works for the Bergman synthesis, by recrystallising crude [Na(solvent)<sub>x</sub>][BArF<sub>4</sub>] prior to drying, to give anhydrous Na[BArF<sub>4</sub>] (12.3 g isolated yield, 58%).

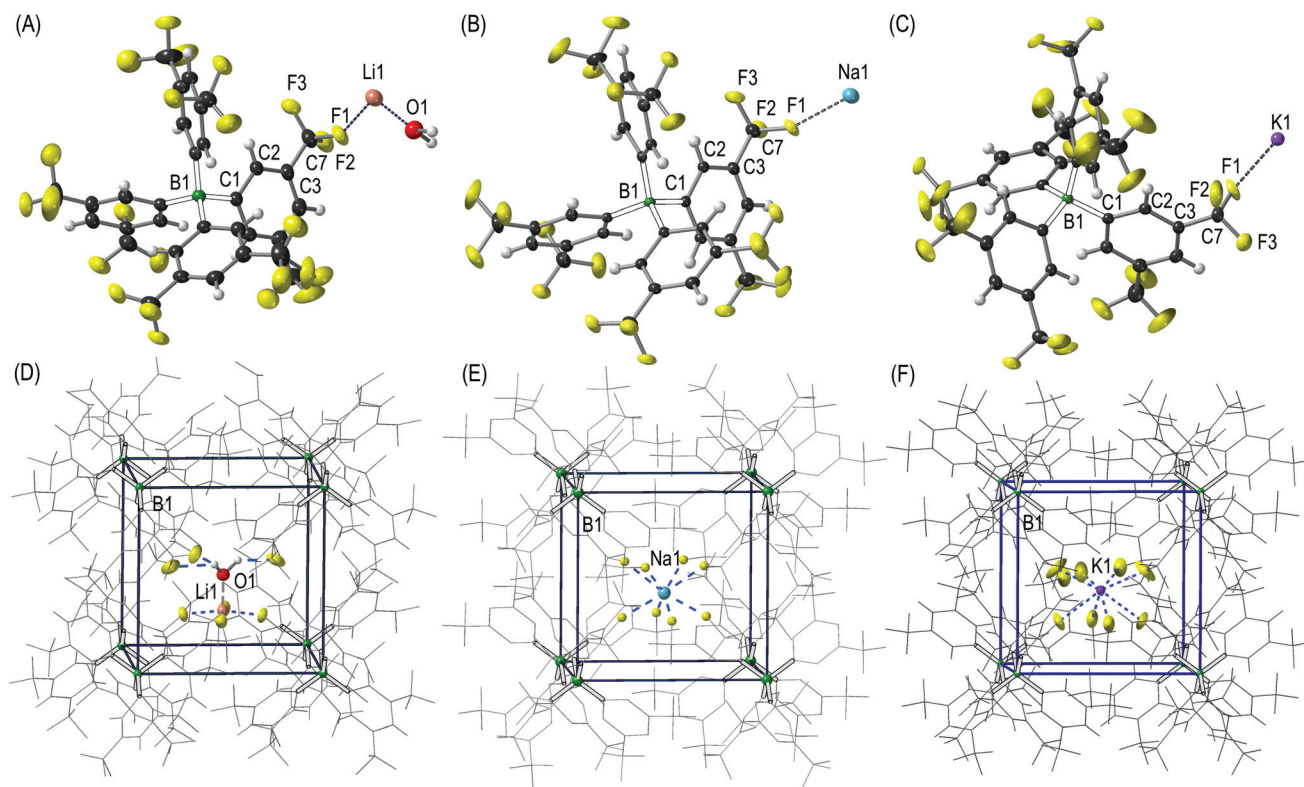
The [BArF<sub>4</sub>]<sup>−</sup> salts **1–4** were fully characterised in solution using multinuclear <sup>1</sup>H, <sup>11</sup>B, <sup>13</sup>C and <sup>19</sup>F NMR spectroscopy in THF-*d*<sub>8</sub> (298 K) and ESI-MS, and these data are consistent with previously reported examples (ESI<sup>†</sup>).<sup>21,22a,23</sup> Additionally, in the <sup>7</sup>Li NMR spectrum of **1** a single resonance is observed at δ

−0.54, which shifts to δ −0.38 in **4**. The H<sub>2</sub>O ligand in complex **4** is observed at δ 4.02 as a sharp singlet (2 H) in the <sup>1</sup>H NMR spectrum. While elemental analysis did not suggest the presence of water in **1–3**, following Bergman's procedure, (η<sup>5</sup>-C<sub>5</sub>H<sub>5</sub>)<sub>2</sub>ZrMe<sub>2</sub> was used to determine H<sub>2</sub>O content, using <sup>1</sup>H NMR spectroscopy to measure the thus formed oxo-bridged complex (and CH<sub>4</sub>).<sup>21</sup> No evidence of residual H<sub>2</sub>O was observed in any of the dried salts. Importantly, this <sup>1</sup>H NMR titration method confirmed the presence of one molecule of H<sub>2</sub>O in **4**.

Single-crystals of solvent-free anhydrous Na[BArF<sub>4</sub>] **2** and K[BArF<sub>4</sub>] **3** suitable for X-ray diffraction studies were obtained by slow diffusion of dry *n*-pentane into a solution of the corresponding anhydrous salt in a 1 : 1 mixture of dry C<sub>6</sub>H<sub>5</sub>F/CH<sub>2</sub>Cl<sub>2</sub> (Fig. 3). For Li[BArF<sub>4</sub>] **1**, although isolated in bulk in its anhydrous form, its highly hygroscopic nature meant that adventitious moisture present during the recrystallisation process routinely resulted in single crystals of [Li(H<sub>2</sub>O)][BArF<sub>4</sub>] **4** being isolated (Fig. 3A). Complexes **2**, **3**, and **4** crystallise in the tetragonal space group *P*4/*n* as contact ion-pairs (Fig. 3A–C). The contents of asymmetric units include 1/4 of the alkali metal and [BArF<sub>4</sub>]<sup>−</sup> anion (*S*<sub>4</sub> symmetry), with an additional quarter of one molecule of water for **4**. The [BArF<sub>4</sub>]<sup>−</sup> anions dictate the microenvironment around the [Li(H<sub>2</sub>O)]<sup>+</sup>, Na<sup>+</sup> and K<sup>+</sup> cations, and eight [BArF<sub>4</sub>]<sup>−</sup> anions encapsulate each alkali metal cation through CF<sub>3</sub>...alkali metal interactions forming an essentially cubic environment (Fig. 3D–F). The alkali metal sits in a pseudo body centred position, displaced towards one face of the cube. The Li<sup>+</sup> ion in **4** has a square pyramidal geometry, interacting with CF<sub>3</sub> groups from four distinct [BArF<sub>4</sub>]<sup>−</sup> anions [Li...F, 1.995(7)–2.045(4) Å] with the water molecule [Li–O, 1.842(8) Å] in the apical position (Fig. 3D). Additional CF<sub>3</sub>...H<sub>2</sub>O interactions are also present in **4** (F...H, 1.854(5)–2.09(1) Å). In **2** and **3** the Na<sup>+</sup> and K<sup>+</sup> centres, respectively, interact with a total of eight CF<sub>3</sub> groups from the [BArF<sub>4</sub>]<sup>−</sup> anions that surround each cation (Fig. 3E and F) through M...F interactions. The increase in the ionic radius,<sup>26</sup> in the series Li < Na < K, translates into correspondingly longer M...F distances [Li: 1.995(7)–2.045(4); Na: 2.473(2)–2.631(3); and K: 2.72(3)–2.74(2) Å].

In conclusion, solvent-free anhydrous Li[BArF<sub>4</sub>], Na[BArF<sub>4</sub>] and K[BArF<sub>4</sub>] has been prepared in multigram scale following a revised protocol, that rests upon a simple recrystallisation





**Fig. 3** Molecular structures of (A)  $[\text{Li}(\text{H}_2\text{O})][\text{BARF}_4]$  **4**, (B) anhydrous  $\text{Na}[\text{BARF}_4]$  **2** and (C)  $\text{K}[\text{BARF}_4]$  **3**. Crystal packing diagrams showing the cubic arrangement of  $[\text{BARF}_4]^-$  anions around (D)  $[\text{Li}(\text{H}_2\text{O})]^+$ , (E)  $\text{Na}^+$  and (F)  $\text{K}^+$  cations. Minor disordered components for the  $\text{CF}_3$  groups have been omitted for clarity. Displacement ellipsoids are shown at 50% probability. Selected bond lengths (Å) and angles ( $^\circ$ ): **4**, C1–B1 1.641(2), Li1–O1 1.842(8), Li1...F1 2.045(4), Li1...F1a 1.995(7), H1a...F5a' 1.854(5), H1b...F5'' 2.096(10), H1b...F5a'' 1.894(5), C1–B1–C1' 110.41(6), C1–B1–C1'' 107.6(1); **2**, C1–B1 1.639(2), Na1...F1 2.473(2), Na1...F5' 2.631(3), C1–B1–C1'' 110.68(7), C1–B1–C1''' 107.1(2); **3**, C1–B1 1.641(2), K1...F1 2.72(3), K1...F1a 2.74(2), C1–B1–C1' 110.59(7), C1–B1–C1'' 107.3(1). Intermolecular B...B distances (Å): **4**, 9.51755(7) and 9.66072(13); **2**, 9.44044(10) and 9.3899(2); and **3**, 9.53420(15) and 9.4747(5).

step. Our method stands by its simplicity to obtain the  $\text{Li}^+$ ,  $\text{Na}^+$  and  $\text{K}^+$  salts of the  $[\text{BARF}_4]^-$  anion and high purity. This allows for the characterisation of these salts by single-crystal X-ray diffraction. Given the importance of these salts in synthesis and catalysis we hope the community finds these improvements useful.

## Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts to declare.

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