

Cite this: *Chem. Commun.*, 2017,
53, 2483Received 25th January 2017,
Accepted 6th February 2017

DOI: 10.1039/c7cc00727b

rsc.li/chemcomm

Neutral tetradentate halogen bond donor foldamers were synthesised and exhibit enhanced anion affinities over their hydrogen bonding analogues, displaying iodide selectivity over lighter halide, carboxylate and dihydrogen phosphate anions. A foldamer with a chiral (*S*)-binaphthol motif was demonstrated to distinguish between enantiomers of chiral anions.

Halogen bonding (XB) is the attractive non-covalent interaction between a terminal σ -hole on an electron deficient halogen atom and a Lewis base.¹ Its strength and directionality have led to several applications in materials science and, more recently, in supramolecular chemistry^{2,3} and organocatalysis.⁴ In particular, XB donors have been successfully used in anion receptors for molecular recognition and sensing applications.⁵ Many of these have shown enhanced binding properties over their hydrogen bonding (HB) analogues.^{6,7}

The electron-deficient⁸ 1,2,3-triazole motif has been exploited for anion recognition as an effective C–H hydrogen bond donor when integrated into multidentate macrocycles⁹ and acyclic foldamers.^{10–12} While the related 5-iodotriazole unit has been used as XB donor for anion binding, such XB anion hosts are rare in the literature.¹³ No tetradentate XB donor foldamers have been described to date; the closest examples are a tridentate halopyridinium¹⁴ and the use of triazole foldamers as XB acceptor hosts for organohalogens.¹⁵

Herein we sought to apply the potency of XB to enhance the anion affinity of the known triazole-based HB foldamer framework. Thus, XB foldamers with four 5-iodo-1,2,3-triazole XB donors were synthesized (Fig. 1) and their anion binding properties probed in comparison with HB analogues. A few variants were prepared: **1** and **2** contain triethylene glycol (TEG) chains for improved solubility, while in **3** and **4** 9-anthrylmethyl termini have

Neutral iodotriazole foldamers as tetradentate halogen bonding anion receptors†

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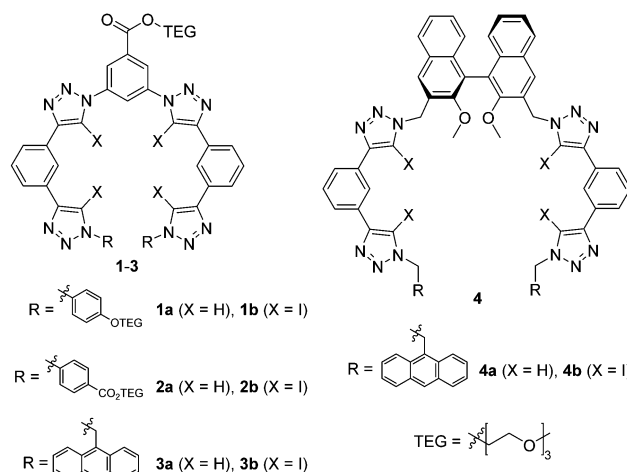


Fig. 1 Structures of the XB and HB anion receptors **1–4**.

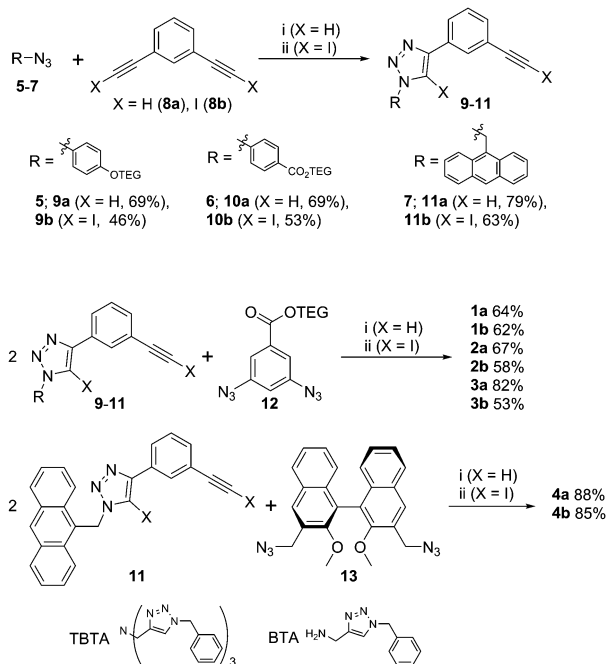
been introduced to provide a fluorescent response.^{15,16} System **4** also includes a chiral (*S*)-binaphthol core in order to investigate XB chiral recognition, which has only previously been observed in a bidentate receptor.¹⁷ Importantly, the XB foldamers exhibited overall stronger anion affinity than their HB analogues with the chiral XB host **4b** displaying chiral discrimination with bulky amino acid anions.

XB and HB foldamers **1–4** were synthesized *via* Cu(I)-catalysed azide-(iodo)alkyne cycloaddition (CuAAC) reactions (Scheme 1) using Cu(MeCN)₄PF₆ in the presence of tris(benzyltriazolylmethyl) amine (TBTA) ligand. For the preparation of **1a** and **2a** an alternative benzyltriazolylmethylamine (BTA) ligand¹⁸ was used as these compounds co-eluted with TBTA during chromatographic purification. As seen in Scheme 1, a terminal azide synthon **5–7** was reacted statistically with an excess of bis-alkyne **8a** or **8b** to afford an arm fragment **9–11**. Two equivalents of **9–11** were then coupled under CuAAC conditions with a bis-azide core synthon **12** or **13** to give the anion receptors **1–4**. The cycloadditions proceeded in moderate to high yields of 64–88% for 5*H*-triazole and 46–85% for 5*T*-triazole formation (see ESI† for full synthetic details).

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† Electronic supplementary information (ESI) available: Compound data, crystal data for **3b·NaI**, details of anion binding studies. CCDC 1529410. For ESI and crystallographic data in CIF or other electronic format see DOI: 10.1039/c7cc00727b





Scheme 1 Synthesis of the anion receptors **1–4**. Reaction conditions: (i) 0.05 eq. $\text{Cu}(\text{MeCN})_4\text{PF}_6$, 0.05 eq. TBTA or BTA, 0.1 eq. DIPEA, DCM, rt; (ii) 0.1 eq. $\text{Cu}(\text{MeCN})_4\text{PF}_6$, 0.1 eq. TBTA, THF, rt, darkness.

The anion binding properties of **1–4** were studied by ^1H NMR titrations by adding increasing amounts of different anions as tetrabutylammonium (TBA) salts and monitoring changes in ^1H NMR spectra. For the HB receptors **1a–4a** large downfield shifts ($\Delta\delta$) of up to 2 ppm were observed for the triazole protons H_A and H_B ; while smaller $\Delta\delta$ of 0.4–0.5 ppm occurred for the phenylene protons H_C and H_E (Fig. 2). This is consistent with the known binding mode of tetradentate triazole HB receptors¹⁰ wherein the triazole protons and the phenylene *ortho* protons all contribute to guest complexation. Binding isotherms were obtained by monitoring H_A signals and 1:1 stoichiometric association constants calculated using WinEQNMR2 software.¹⁹

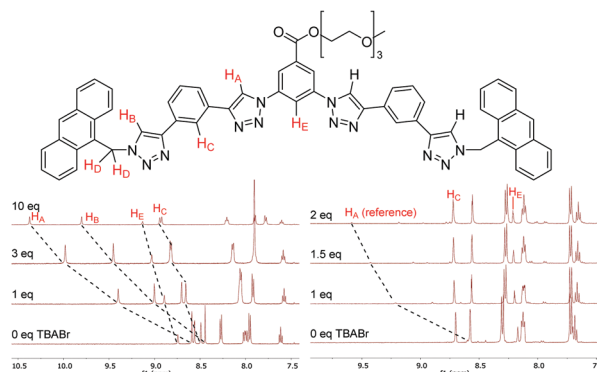


Fig. 2 Top: Labeling of protons monitored in ^1H NMR anion binding studies (consistent across **1–4**). Bottom left: Partial ^1H NMR spectra of **2a** titrated with TBABr. Bottom right: Partial ^1H NMR spectra of a competition experiment where **2b** with 5 mol% of **2a** as reference is titrated with TBABr (500 MHz, CDCl_3 , 298 K).

In the case of XB foldamers **1b–4b** only small downfield perturbations $\Delta\delta$ of 0.03–0.2 ppm were observed for the *ortho* phenylene protons H_C and H_E . This is most likely due to the large size of the receptors' iodine atoms binding the guest anion at a significant distance from these protons (*vide infra*). Upfield shifts of similar magnitude were also observed for the aromatic and methylene protons in the terminal groups. Due to very small $\Delta\delta$ values reliable association constants could not be obtained for **1b–3b** using the standard ^1H NMR titration protocol. Therefore, **1b–3b** were instead analysed using a host–host competition binding method similar to approaches previously employed to study alkali metal complexation with crown ethers.²⁰ In a typical experiment a small amount (5 mol%) of HB receptor **2a** was added to the solution of a XB compound **1b–3b** as a reference. Changes of the reference compound H_A signals upon anion addition were then monitored (Fig. 2), which enabled reliable association constant data to be determined for **1b–3b** (see ESI† for full details). While **4b** could not be analysed by this technique due to the lack of a suitable reference compound, it exhibited sufficient magnitude of downfield shifts in its H_C protons to provide good quality data using a standard ^1H NMR titration protocol.

As shown by the anion association constants for **1–4** given in Table 1, the XB foldamers **1b–4b** were found to be stronger halide and oxoanion receptors than their HB analogues. This difference is especially prominent in systems **3** and **4**. This is because the XB receptors rely predominantly on the iodotriazole XB donors for anion affinity, whereas their HB analogues benefit in part from secondary HB donors at the phenylene rings next to the triazoles.^{10,11} Deletion of these binding elements as in **3a** and **4a** leads to fewer convergent HB interactions and consequently a large loss of anion affinity. The XB receptors, on the other hand, are tolerant to these modifications. Thus, the anthryl-terminated **3b** displayed affinity for Br^- and I^- that was two orders of magnitude stronger than of **3a**. Likewise, XB receptor **4b** exhibited notable K_a values of up to 500 M^{-1} in 1:1 $\text{CDCl}_3/\text{acetone-}d_6$, while **4a** displayed almost no binding (too weak to be quantified).

Table 1 Association constants^a K_a [M^{-1}] for **1–4** with halides and oxoanions^a

	Cl^-	Br^-	I^-	H_2PO_4^-	AcO^-	l-Tartrate
1a	232 (3)	356 (10)	427 (9)	1244 (83)	69 (1)	331 (3)
1b	433 (44)	600 (46)	1202 (87)	— ^b	320 (57)	281 (27)
2a	466 (18)	740 (29)	960 (46)	2751 (92)	174 (4)	672 (9)
2b	592 (59)	902 (76)	2131 (142)	— ^b	504 (88)	549 (41)
3a	20 (2)	15 (1)	24 (1)	87 (11) ^c	— ^d	64 (1)
3b	742 (65)	1235 (79)	2712 (187)	493 (80) ^e	753 (116)	585 (43)
4a	— ^d	— ^d	— ^d	37 (3)	— ^d	— ^d
4b	335 (14)	384 (28)	511 (94)	207 (4)	165 (9)	445 (16)

^a 1:1 binding stoichiometry. All anions introduced as TBA salts; **1–3** studied in CDCl_3 ; **4** in 1:1 $\text{CDCl}_3/\text{acetone-}d_6$ (500 MHz, 298 K); [receptor] = 1.5 mM. Unless stated otherwise, K_a for **1a–4a** were derived from H_A ; for **4b** from H_C ; for **1b–3b** from H_A of the reference compound **2a** using the competition method. Uncertainties are given in parentheses. ^b Could not be determined as HB foldamers are too strong H_2PO_4^- binders to be used as reference compounds. ^c Derived from H_E . ^d Too weak to be quantified. ^e Derived from H_C using the standard ^1H NMR titration method.



Chiral XB **4b** receptor was titrated with both enantiomers of Boc-Ala, Boc-Leu, Boc-Trp, Glu and tartrate as TBA salts. The association constant values shown in Table 2 reveal varying degrees of chiral discrimination were observed with different anions. The greatest difference in affinity was observed for tryptophan ($K_D/K_L = 1.69$), followed by leucine and alanine, which correlates with the steric bulk of the amino acid residue. In the case of the dicarboxylate guests, a modest degree of discrimination was seen for tartrate while no difference was observed for glutamate. This is once again consistent with the steric factors of guest anions.

In summary a series of novel neutral tetrakis(5-iodo-1,2,3-triazole) foldamers **1b–4b** was prepared and evaluated as halogen bonding anion receptors. Importantly, compared to their HB analogues **1a–4a**, the XB foldamers showed enhanced anion affinities, with a general preference for binding heavier halides over oxoanions. The advantage of XB for anion binding is especially evident in **3b** and **4b** where the HB analogues **3a** and **4a** displayed very weak affinities due to the deletion of secondary HB donors, while the XB foldamers **3b** and **4b** remained effective as anion receptors. The incorporation of anthracene and chiral BINOL groups into the XB foldamer structure design demonstrated fluorescent anion sensing and chiral discrimination capabilities which are currently under further investigation.

We thank the EPSRC centre for Doctoral Training in Synthesis for Biology and Medicine (EP/L015838/1), the Agency for Science, Technology and Research (A*STAR), Singapore, and the European Research Council (FP7/2007–2014, ERC Advanced Grant Agreement No. 267426) for financial support, Diamond Light Source for an award of beamtime on I19 (MT13639) and the beamline scientists for technical support.

Notes and references

‡ Single crystal diffraction data were collected at 100(2) K using a custom-built Crystal Logic diffractometer and synchrotron radiation ($\lambda = 0.6889 \text{ \AA}$) at Diamond Light Source, beamline I19.²⁴ Unit cell parameter determination and data reduction were carried out using CrysAlisPro. The structures were solved by charge-flipping with SUPERFLIP²⁵ and refined by full matrix least squares on F^2 using CRYSTALS.^{26–28} Full refinement details are given in the ESI.† Single crystal data: $C_{64}H_{48}I_5N_{12}NaO_5Zn_4(C_3H_6O)$, $M_r = 1954.99$; triclinic, $P\bar{1}$; $a = 14.3220(4) \text{ \AA}$, $b = 17.7665(5) \text{ \AA}$, $c = 17.7815(5) \text{ \AA}$, $\alpha = 113.335(2)^\circ$, $\beta = 100.303(2)^\circ$, $\gamma = 93.903(2)^\circ$, $V = 4038.8(2) \text{ \AA}^3$; data, restraints,

parameters: 11420/955/928; $R_{int} = 0.195$, final $R_1 = 0.100$, $wR_2 = 0.281$ (F^2 ; [$I > 2\sigma(I)$]); $\Delta\rho_{min,max} = -3.28, +2.38 \text{ e \AA}^{-3}$. CCDC 1529410.

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