ChemComm

COMMUNICATION

View Article Online
View Journal

Cite this: DOI: 10.1039/c5cc01155h

Received 10th February 2015,
Accepted 10th March 2015

DOI: 10.1039/c5cc01155h

www.rsc.org/chemcomm

I_2-catalyzed synthesis of substituted imidazoles from vinyl azides and benzylamines†

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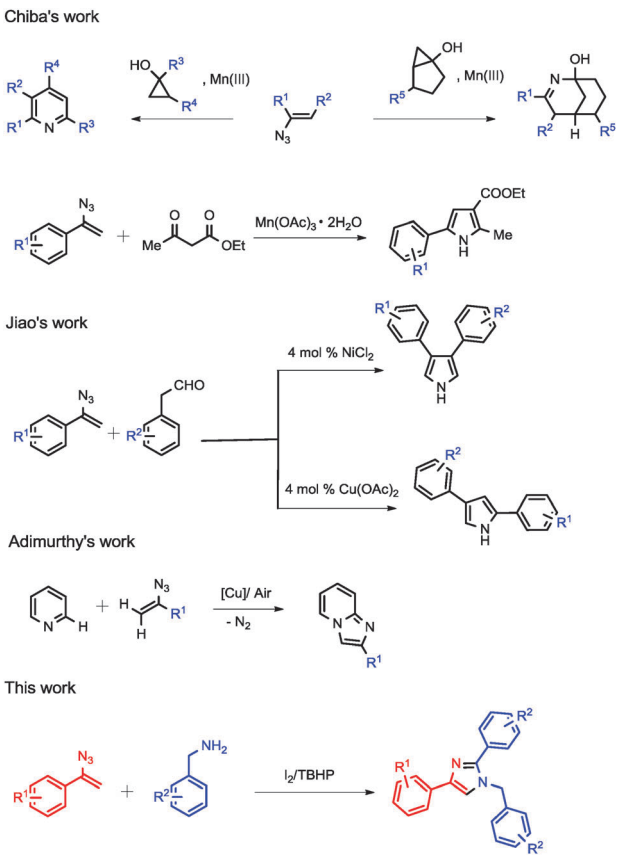
A novel and efficient I_2-catalyzed oxidative tandem cyclization of simple vinyl azides and benzylamines has been developed for the synthesis of substituted imidazoles. In this reaction, various substituted groups on vinyl azides and benzylamines proceed smoothly and the desired imidazoles are obtained in moderate to good yields.

Imidazoles and their derivatives are one of the important class of N-heterocycles widely found in natural products[1] and pharmaceutical compounds.[2] The increasing importance of substituted imidazoles has spurred a vigorous research for the development of new synthetic methods. Great progress has been achieved in the synthesis of imidazole scaffolds in the past few years.[3] Various reaction systems such as transition-metal catalyzed[4] Lewis acids[5] and bases[6] are effective in the construction of imidazole structures.[7] However, novel and efficient synthetic routes to substituted imidazoles are of continuous interest. Especially, synthetic methods to obtain simple substituted imidazoles with benzyl amines are still limited.[8]

Recently, vinyl azides, as attractive and challenging substrates, have drawn much attention for their growing applications in the synthesis of N-heterocyclic compounds.[9] In the past several years, excellent and significant studies on the construction of N-heterocycles with vinyl azides had been reported by the groups of Chiba[10] and Jiao[11] (Scheme 1). Recently, the group of Adimurthy had also reported a novel method for the synthesis of imidazo[1,2-*a*]pyridines with vinyl azides (Scheme 1).[12] To our knowledge, the new method for synthesis of substituted imidazoles with vinyl azides is still appreciated. Inspired by the studies of utilization of vinyl azides and our experiences in the development of new and efficient methods for the construction of heterocyclic compounds,[13] herein, we report a novel and facile approach to obtain substituted imidazoles from vinyl azides and benzylamines catalyzed by iodine.



Scheme 1 Vinyl azides in the synthesis of heterocycles.

Our study was initiated by treating (1-azidovinyl)benzene (**1a**) and phenylmethanamine (**2a**) with I_2 (2.2 equiv.) in DMF at 100 °C for 6 h. We found that 1-benzyl-2,4-diphenyl-1*H*-imidazole (**3aa**) was obtained in 37% yield (see Table S1, entry 1, ESI†). The structure of **3aa** was confirmed by spectroscopic analysis and further confirmed by single crystal X-ray analysis (see ESI,† Fig. S1). In order to

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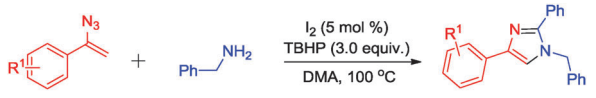
† Electronic supplementary information (ESI) available: Experimental procedures, spectroscopic, analytical and X-Ray data. CCDC 1046779. For ESI and crystallographic data in CIF or other electronic format see DOI: 10.1039/c5cc01155h

improve the yield of this reaction, we then replaced the catalyst/oxidant systems with KI/TBHP, TBAI/TBHP and I_2/TBHP (Table S1, entries 2–5, ESI†). As presented in Table S1 (ESI†), the reaction proceeded more efficiently in the systems of I_2/TBHP (Table S1, entry 5, ESI†). This result prompted us to investigate other oxidants for the reaction, but no improvement was observed after examination (Table S1, entry 7–12, ESI†). Notably, the reaction without I_2 cannot generate the desired imidazole (Table S1, entry 6, ESI†). Further optimization of solvents demonstrated that DMA was the optimized solvent for the formation of **3aa** (Table S1, entry 13, ESI†). The yields did not improve when HOAc or pyridine was added to the reaction. After screening other parameters such as reaction temperature and time, the optimized reaction system was established and is shown in Table S1 (ESI†) as entry 13.

Having identified the optimized reaction conditions, the scope and generality of this reaction were investigated and the results are illustrated in Table 1. A series of vinyl azides with electron-donating or withdrawing groups could react with benzylamine smoothly in the reaction and the desired substituted imidazoles could be efficiently obtained in moderate yields. As shown in Table 1, the reaction was not significantly affected by the nature of the groups in the aromatic ring of vinyl azides. The position of substituents on the benzene ring had a slight impact on the reaction yields.

Encouraged by these results, further experiments were conducted for the reaction of vinyl azides and substituted benzylamines under optimized conditions, and the results are shown in Table 2. A series of substituted imidazoles were obtained efficiently by this new approach. The electronic effects of substituents on the aromatic ring of benzylamines did not influence the reactivity and provided the desired imidazoles in moderate to good yields. However, the OH group on the aromatic ring of benzylamine cannot give the desired product. The process was also extended to naphthalen-1-ylmethanamine **2s** and generated the desired product **3as** in 87% yield. Additionally, the furan-2-ylmethanamine **2t** and thiophen-2-ylmethanamine **2u** displayed better compatibility and gave the desired products **3at** and **3au** in 79% and 42% yields, respectively.

Table 1 The reaction of substituted vinyl azides and phenylmethanamine[a]

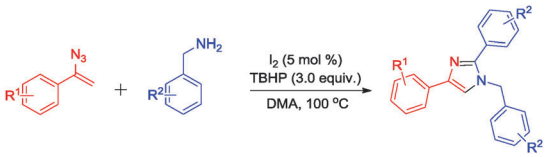


1 2a 3

Entry		R^1	Product	Yields[b] (%)
1	**1a**	H	**3aa**	76
2	**1b**	2-Me	**3ba**	51
3	**1c**	4-Me	**3ca**	72
4	**1d**	4-*t*Bu	**3da**	75
5	**1e**	2,5-DiMe	**3ea**	33
6	**1f**	2-F	**3fa**	68
7	**1g**	2-Cl	**3ga**	74
8	**1h**	2-Br	**3ha**	57
9	**1i**	3-Cl	**3ia**	79
10	**1j**	4-F	**3ja**	66
11	**1k**	4-Cl	**3ka**	56
12	**1l**	4-Br	**3la**	85

[a] Reaction conditions: **1** (0.5 mmol), **2a** (1.5 mmol), I_2 (5 mol%), TBHP (3.0 equiv.), DMA (2 mL), 100 °C, 10 h. [b] Yields of isolated products.

Table 2 The reaction of substituted vinyl azides and benzylamines[a]



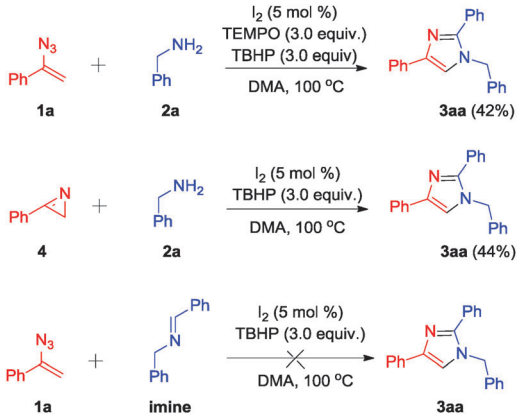
Entry		R^1		R^2	Product	Yields[b] (%)
1	**1a**	H	**2b**	2-Me	**3ab**	68
2	**1a**	H	**2c**	3-Me	**3ac**	73
3	**1a**	H	**2d**	4-Me	**3ad**	75
4	**1a**	H	**2e**	2-OMe	**3ae**	71
5	**1a**	H	**2f**	3-OMe	**3af**	56
6	**1a**	H	**2g**	4-OMe	**3ag**	81
7	**1a**	H	**2h**	2,4-DiOMe	**3ah**	88
8	**1a**	H	**2i**	3,4-DiOMe	**3ai**	42
9	**1a**	H	**2j**	3,5-DiOMe	**3aj**	79
10	**1a**	H	**2k**	4-OH	**3ak**	—
11	**1a**	H	**2l**	2-F	**3al**	84
12	**1a**	H	**2m**	3-F	**3am**	68
13	**1a**	H	**2n**	4-F	**3an**	73
14	**1a**	H	**2o**	4-CI	**3ao**	81
15	**1a**	H	**2p**	4-Br	**3ap**	70
16	**1a**	H	**2q**	4-CF_3	**3aq**	72
17	**1a**	H	**2r**	2,4-DiCl	**3ar**	71
18	**1a**	H	**2s**		**3as**	87
19	**1a**	H	**2t**		**3at**	79
20	**1a**	H	**2u**		**3au**	42
21	**1a**	H	**2v**	*n*-Octylamine	**3av**	—
22	**1c**	4-Me	**2b**	2-Me	**3cb**	77
23	**1c**	4-Me	**2f**	3-OMe	**3cf**	74
24	**1f**	2-F	**2b**	2-Me	**3fb**	50
25	**1f**	2-F	**2q**	2,4-DiCl	**3fq**	93

[a] Reaction conditions: **1** (0.5 mmol), **2** (1.5 mmol), I_2 (5 mol%), TBHP (3.0 equiv.), DMA (2 mL), 100 °C, 10 h. [b] Yields of isolated products.

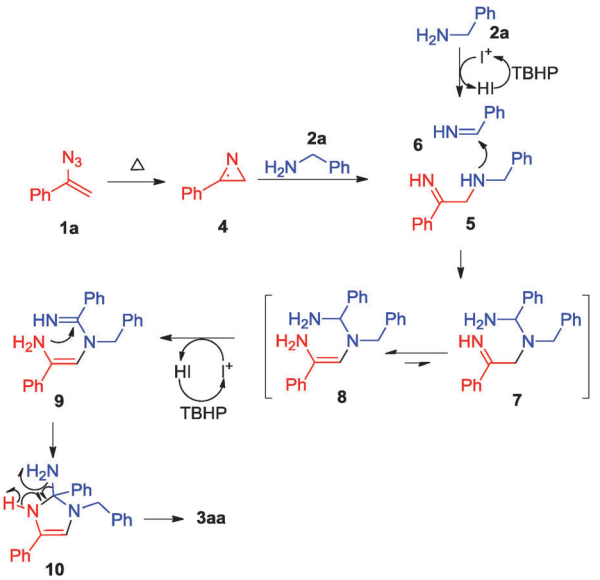
Meanwhile, the *n*-octylamine **2v** was also employed for this reaction, but no desired product was obtained. Further investigation revealed that the substituted groups on the vinyl azides and benzylamines simultaneously also performed well in this process and provided the desired products efficiently.

In order to obtain further insights into this reaction, several control experiments were investigated (Scheme 2). Firstly, the reaction of **1a** and **2a** was conducted in the presence of 3.0 equiv. of TEMPO (2,2,6,6-tetramethyl-1-piperidinyloxy) under optimized conditions, only 42% yield of **3aa** was obtained. Furthermore, the substrate **2a** was employed to react with 3-phenyl-2*H*-azirine **4** to probe the reaction and the desired product **3aa** was isolated in 44% yield. The above results reveal that compound **4** should be the intermediate of the transformation and the reaction may proceed through the radical pathway in the process. Moreover, when the substrate **1a** and imine were subjected to standard conditions, no desired product was detected.

On the basis of the above results, a proposed mechanism for this transformation is illustrated in Scheme 3. Initially, the substrate **1a** is converted to 2*H*-azirine **4** by thermal decomposition. Then, a nucleophilic attack may occur between the substrate **2a** and **4**



Scheme 2 Control experiments.



Scheme 3 Proposed mechanism.

to produce the intermediate **5**.[10a,c,11,12,14] Subsequently, **5** attacks the imine **6**, which is generated by the oxidation of **2a**, to provide the intermediate **7**. **7** equilibrates to intermediate **8** under optimized conditions. Compound **9**, which is generated by the oxidation of **8**, leads to compound **10** *via* intramolecular cyclization. Finally, the product **3aa** is achieved by elimination of the primary amine of **10**.

In summary, we have developed a novel and efficient method to synthesise substituted imidazoles from vinyl azides and benzylamines under the I_2/TBHP catalytic reaction system. Various substituents of vinyl azides and benzylamines are tolerated well in this approach resulting in the desired products in moderate to good yields.

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