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Synthesis and use of ortho-(branched alkoxy)-tert-butoxybenzenes

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ABSTRACT

A series of sterically hindered *o*-(branched alkoxy)-*tert*-butoxybenzenes was efficiently prepared in good yields owing to a new practical and simple preparation of *o*-*tert*-butoxyphenol starting from catechol and isobutene. Use of DMF di-*tert*-butyl acetal reagent instead of isobutene/H₂SO₄ (cat.) for *O*-*tert*-butylation was very convenient in case of *ortho* bulky phenols affording the corresponding *tert*-butyl ethers in high yield and purity. This general route proved to be useful since no reliable access was available to *o*-di-*t*-BuO-substituted arenes. Application to the synthesis of congested phosphorus-based compounds is presented.

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Despite the availability of a variety of simple-to-perform synthetic routes toward *tert*-butoxyarenes,¹⁻³ still access to *ortho* congested ones represents a particular challenge in organic chemistry.⁴ Among the devised strategies to the former class of compounds, the acid-catalyzed addition of phenols to isobutene is the most economical and practical.² By contrast, a comprehensive literature survey revealed only a very limited number of poorly characterized *o*-di-*t*-BuO-substituted arenes; as for example, the fully peralkoxylated hexa-*tert*-butoxybenzene and a densely substituted 2,3-di-*tert*-butoxynaphthalene which were prepared though via aromatic cyclization reactions.⁵

Pursuing our study of bulky P-based compounds,⁶ we aimed to increase the vicinal steric crowding of the appended *P*-o-RO-Ph groups wherein R represents a branched alkyl. Therefore, it was of special interest to prepare a series of *o*-(branched alkoxy)-*tert*-butoxybenzenes.⁷

To the best of our knowledge, the preparation of *o*-di-*tert*-butoxybenzene and its further use in phosphines' synthesis has been only reported by Horner and Simons in 1983.⁸ They have also described therein the *para* isomer claiming their both preparations via the H₂SO₄-catalyzed addition of the corresponding diphenol to isobutene at 70 °C. However, our repetitive attempts to prepare the requisite *o*-di-*tert*-butoxybenzene according to their published procedure were consistently unsuccessful as a variety of ring *tert*butylated catechols (variable yields) was being formed instead in

* Corresponding authors. Present address: PhosPhoenix SARL, 115, rue de l'Abbé Groult, F-75015 Paris, France (M.S.), Tel.: +386 1 4760250; fax: +386 1 4760300. our hands (Scheme 1, *Route A*). A closer look at their published data revealed that the corresponding ¹H NMR⁹ does not match with the expected compound profile compared to a well-known series of *o*-dialkoxybenzenes.^{7,10} Facing this discrepancy,¹¹ we ventured to synthesize the symmetric *o*-di-*tert*-butoxybenzene and its closely related *o*-(branched alkoxy)-*tert*-butoxybenzenes which results are presented herein.

We initiated our investigation by studying the reaction of catechol with isobutene under milder conditions (rt to 35 °C) employing a catalytic amount of H_2SO_4 in an aprotic solvent (PE 100–120, heptane, or CH_2Cl_2) (Scheme 1, *Route B*). Such conditions were



Scheme 1. O-tert-Butylation of catechol under various conditions.

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already recommended by Stevens back in 1955 for the preparation of mono *tert*-butoxyarenes.¹²

While the rt reaction in CH₂Cl₂ of PhOH with excess isobutene in the presence of a trace of H₂SO₄ (performed in a glass pressure-bottle) led in our hands to the major formation of 4-tert-butyl- and 2,4-di-tert-butylphenol mixture wherein Friedel-Crafts C-alkylation had taken place,¹² interestingly enough starting from catechol (reaction in CH₂Cl₂ at 35 °C) and neutralizing H₂SO₄ with Et₃N after 3 h, furnished o-tert-butoxyphenol (1) in 92% (86% isolated yield) accompanied by 8% of the targeted O,O'-di-tert-butylated product 2 (by ¹H NMR analysis). In the literature, 1 has been prepared in 23-33% overall yield via a protection-etherification-deprotection sequence from catechol.¹³ We have noticed that a reaction equilibrium exists during O-tert-butylation of 1 (protection of catechol remaining free OH group) as prolonging reaction time did not lead to a significant vield increase of 0.0'-di-tertbutylcatechol (2), but to isobutene polymerization. Advantageously, neutralizing H₂SO₄ prior to reaction workup proved to prevent C-tert-butylation as well as de-O-tert-butylation. Our study showed that 1 rearranges readily into isomeric 4-tert-butyland 3-tert-butylcatechols (4-TBC/3-TBC 9:1 ratio) in heptane at rt in the presence of a trace of H₂SO₄. Also, employing CH₂Cl₂ instead of heptane or petroleum ethers was beneficial for reaction rate due to a better catechol solubilization. Further on, instead of the acidcatalyzed O-tert-butylation of phenols using isobutene, the nonacidic working conditions (toluene at 80-110 °C) provided by the commercially available DMF di-tert-butyl acetal reagent¹⁴ (~8 equiv) permitted finally the formation of o-di-tert-butoxybenzene (2) from 1 in 72% isolated yield. Thus, following the above optimized protocols, o-tert-butoxyphenol (1) and o-di-tert-butoxybenzene (2) were efficiently prepared from catechol on multigramscale (up to 20 g).

In parallel, alternative strategies to *o*-di-*tert*-butoxybenzene (**2**) from catechol were explored but to no avail. Applying Bandgar's conditions (Zn in *t*-BuCl, rt)^{2f} or Bartoli's conditions (5 mol% Sc(OTf)₃ in excess Boc₂O, rt)^{2g,2h} resulted in the exclusive formation of 3,5-di-*tert*-butylcatechol (3,5-DTBC) in quantitative isolated yield within 1 day for the former and in ~20% isolated yield (30% total conversion) after 2 days for the latter (Scheme 2).

Another potential stepwise route to *o*-di-*tert*-butoxybenzene (**2**) was attempted inspired from the preparation of *tert*-butoxybenzene via PhMgBr addition to PhCO₂Ot-Bu.^{3a} Surprisingly, the *ortho*-metallated *tert*-butoxybenzene (metal = Li or MgBr) reacted with PhCO₂Ot-Bu to yield 2-*tert*-butoxy-benzophenone (**4**) in 52% isolated yield with concomitant formation of *o*-*tert*-butoxyphenol (**1**) and PhCO₂t-Bu (Scheme 3). Nevertheless, *o*-*tert*-butoxyphenol could be prepared in 65% yield via *o*-*tert*-butoxyphenyllithium addition to B(OMe)₃ followed by oxidation.

Next, we were interested to extend this study to other phenols. Thus, the mild *O-tert*-butylation conditions employing isobutene/ H_2SO_4 (cat.) in CH_2Cl_2 at <40 °C (with low-temperature H_2SO_4 neutralization using Et₃N) were applied to *o-tert*-butylphenol, 3,5-di-*tert*-butylcatechol, 3-bromocatechol, 4,5-dibromocatechol, 2,3-dihydroxynaphthalene, 4,6-di-*tert*-butylresorcinol, and pyrogallol (Scheme 4). However, a complex mixture was obtained in the case of *o-tert*-butylphenol and pyrogallol.



Scheme 2. Attempts to *O-tert*-butylate catechol under selected literature conditions applied toward *tert*-butoxybenzene.



Scheme 3. Oxidation of o-tert-butoxyphenyllithium.



Scheme 4. O-tert-Butylation of selected dihydroxyarenes using isobutene/ H_2SO_4 (cat.) in CH_2Cl_2 at 35–40 °C and low-temperature acid neutralization with Et_3N (after 0.5–7 days).

Similarly as noted in the case of catechol, an equilibrium was observed in the H₂SO₄-catalyzed addition of the examined series to isobutene, especially during the second *O-tert*-butylation; prolonging reaction time did not favor a significant yield increase of the *O,O'*-di-*tert*-butylated product. Fortunately, the latter could be obtained in good yield reverting to the DMF di-*tert*-butyl acetal reagent. Steric hindrance and electron-poor catechols had detrimental effect on *O-tert*-butylation using isobutene/H₂SO₄ in general, and on *O,O'*-di-*tert*-butylation in particular. For example, 3 h, 3 days and 12 h were necessary for a reasonable conversion to mostly mono *O-tert*-butylated products of catechol, 3-bromocatechol, and 4,5-dibromocatechol, respectively.

In particular, *O-tert*-butylation of 3-bromocatechol led to a mixture of 2-bromo-6-*tert*-butoxyphenol (**5**), 3-bromo-2-*tert*-butoxyphenol

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(**6**), and 2,3-di-*tert*-butoxy-bromobenzene (**7**) in 72:22:6 ratio, accompanied with an unreacted starting material. Noteworthy, forcing *O*-*tert*-butylation under the same conditions of 2-bromo-6-*tert*-but-oxyphenol (**5**) (prepared via another route, vide infra) resulted in no conversion to the desired diether. Hence, it can be concluded that O,O'-di-*tert*-butylated product **7** is derived from **6**.

2,3-Dihydroxynaphthalene yielded after 7 days a mixture of 3-*tert*-butoxy-2-hydroxynaphthalene (**10**), 2,3-di-*tert*-butoxy-naphthalene (**11**), and 3-*tert*-butoxy-1-*tert*-butylnaphthalen-2-one (**12**)¹⁵ in 70:15:15 ratio. As H₂SO₄-catalyzed rearrangement of **10** gave 6-*tert*-butyl-2,3-dihydroxynaphthalene (**13**), the formation of **12** could stem either from a possible *C*-*tert*-butylation of a ketonic form of 2,3-dihydroxynaphthalene or a direct aromatic *C*-*tert*-butylation followed by enol-keto tautomerization to accommodate the bulky *tert*-butyl group.

Pursuing the functionalization of *o-tert*-butoxyphenol (1), its Williamson's etherification in acetone using the reactive 3-bromocyclohexene or *i*-PrI and K₂CO₃, furnished after 2–3 days the targeted dissymmetric diethers in 85% and <5% yields, respectively (Scheme 5). Using NaH in excess with *i*-PrI as the solvent and performing the reaction in a glass pressure-tube at 75 °C for 2–3 days afforded the *o-tert*-butoxy-iso-propoxybenzene (16) in up to 91% yield. Further on, PtO₂-catalyzed hydrogenation of *o-tert*-butoxy-(2-cyclohexenyloxy)benzene (17) afforded *o-tert*-butoxy-cyclohexyloxybenzene (18) in 78% isolated yield.

The high yield generation of *ortho*-lithiated 1,2-dialkoxyarene species used in phosphines' synthesis, can be conveniently facilitated under mild conditions via bromine–lithium exchange. Moreover, regioselective arene bromination is crucial when utilizing unsymmetrical 1,2-dialkoxyarenes with two non-equivalent and competing free *ortho*-positions. Thus, the contiguous bromine atom-incorporated 2,3-di-*tert*-butoxybenzene **7** and analogue **20** (Scheme 6) were prepared in good yields by *O-tert*-butylation using excess DMF di-*tert*-butyl acetal of the *o*-bromo-hydroxyarenes derived in turn from *ortho*-regioselective ring bromination (*t*-BuNH₂/Br₂)¹⁶ of *o*-(branched alkoxy)phenols. Unfortunately, 2-bromo-6-neopentoxyphenol (**19**) resisted *O-tert*-butylation under these standard conditions. Noteworthy, *O-tert*-butylation with DMF di-*tert*-butyl acetal of **1** or **5** proceeded with comparable reaction rates.

Finally, incorporation of the bulky 3-(α -branched alkoxy)-2*tert*-butoxyphenyls onto P-based compounds was undertaken (Scheme 7). Starting from the corresponding 3-(α -branched alkoxy)-2-*tert*-butoxy-bromobenzenes **7** and **20**, (3-RO-2-*tert*-butoxyphenyl)diphenylphosphines **22** (R = *t*-Bu) and **23** (R = *i*-Pr) were



Scheme 5. Williamson's etherification of o-tert-butoxyphenol (1).



Scheme 6. Synthesis of 3-(branched alkoxy)-2-tert-butoxy-bromobenzenes.



Scheme 7. Preparation of congested P-based compounds calling upon *ortho*- $(\alpha$ -branched alkoxy)-*tert*-butoxybenzenes.



Figure 1. ORTEP drawing of 22 at the 50% probability level.

obtained in 93-96% yields. In another synthetic variant for 22 (29% overall yield), the diphenylphosphino group was first introduced starting from 5 followed by O-tert-butylation with DMF di-tert-butyl acetal. ¹H NMR of the *P*-(2,3-di-tert-butoxyphenyl)substituted phosphine 22 is in utter disagreement with the corresponding one reported by Horner and Simons⁸ bringing an additional proof against their misleading claim concerning preparation of both o-di-tert-butoxybenzene (2) and its P-derivative. Our characterization of 22 is backed up by its X-ray crystal structure determination (Fig. 1).¹⁷ Progressing toward bulky P-stereogenic P-based compounds, we have prepared the stereomerically pure P-(2,3-di-tert-butoxyphenyl)-appended aminophosphine-P-borane 24 by ring-opening of enantiopure (-)-oxazaPB with preformed 2,3-di-tert-butoxyphenyllithium.^{18,19} Such intermediate (24) serves as key-precursor in the Jugé-Stephan asymmetric route to P-stereogenic phosphines.²⁰ Preparation of derived bulky phosphines and their application in asymmetric catalysis will be presented elsewhere.

In summary, taking advantage of a new simple and straightforward preparation of *o-tert*-butoxyphenol, we have succeeded to prepare in high yields the elusive *o*-di-*tert*-butoxybenzene along with a series of congested *o*-RO-*tert*-butoxybenzenes wherein R = i-Pr, 2-cyclohexenyl, and Cy. In addition, the DMF di-*tert*-butyl acetal reagent proved to be quite effective for *O*-*tert*-butylation of a variety of congested phenols. Thus, starting from catechols, isobutene/H₂SO₄ (cat.) system can be applied for the preparation of *o*-*tert*-butylation), while when

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targeting *o*-di-*tert*-butoxyarenes, DMF di-*tert*-butyl acetal reagent can be practical starting from *o*-*tert*-butoxyphenols. Moreover, successful use of the bulky *ortho*-(α -branched alkoxy)-*tert*-butoxy-benzenes for the preparation of achiral and chiral P-based compounds was accomplished.

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Supplementary data

Supplementary data associated with this article can be found, in the online version, at http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tetlet.2012.10. 010. These data include MOL files and InChiKeys of the most important compounds described in this article.

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