

## Access to the Bicyclic Core of Isatisine, and an Investigation of Its Antibacterial Activity

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**Abstract:** A chemoselective Dieckmann ring closure using an oxazolidine derived from serine may be used to generate a tetramic acid, the further manipulation of which by reduction and ring closure leads to the bicyclic core of isatisine; depending on the nature of the ring closing electrophile, different diastereomers are obtained. None of the compounds from this sequence exhibited activity against *S. aureus* but several showed activity against *E. coli*.

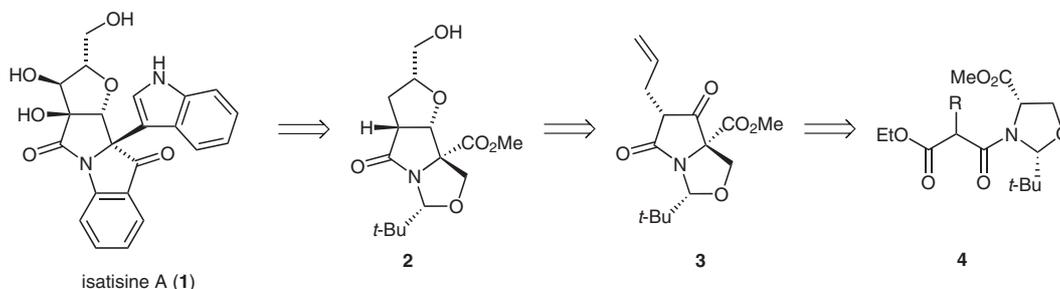
**Key words:** heterocycles, natural products, cyclisation, antibiotics, lactams

The discovery of new antibiotics has become imperative by reason of the emergence of bacterial strains resistant to current clinically-effective drugs,<sup>1</sup> and the urgency of the task has recently been emphasised.<sup>2</sup> However, since there is a paucity of New Chemical Entities (NCE) entering the antibacterial pipeline,<sup>3</sup> a number of new strategies for more efficient drug development have been elaborated in recent years<sup>4</sup> and re-examination of the function and availability of natural products has been pivotal.<sup>5</sup> In particular, it has recently become apparent that the physicochemical characteristics of antibacterial compounds differ sufficiently from the property space of commonly available compound libraries that re-investigation of natural products to identify novel antibacterials is fully justified<sup>6</sup> and that the structural information thus obtained will be useful for the design of NCE suitable for fragment-based drug design.<sup>7</sup> Libraries based upon such natural product leads have several key benefits which do not apply to combinatorially-derived systems: they will have benefited from the optimisation of bioactivity for a given receptor as a result of natural selection; they will be expected to provide an enhanced rate of positive hits for a given library size; they are more likely to provide novel structural chemotypes not currently in use in existing therapeutic regimes; they would not be immediately susceptible to resistance-conferring genes in the bacterial and DNA pools and they are likely to provide novel new target proteins and receptors.<sup>8</sup> Mindful of the long-standing application of traditional Chinese medicine,<sup>9</sup> and to develop further the compound and bioactivity space encompassed by pyrrolidin(on)es as commonly occurring core structural components of natural products,<sup>10–12</sup> we examined isatisine A as an unusual lead structure. Isatisine A (**1**) is a structural-

ly novel alkaloid shown to have moderate anti-HIV activity (EC<sub>50</sub> 37.8 μM) and cytotoxicity against C8166 cells (CC<sub>50</sub> 302 μM).<sup>13</sup> This compound was first isolated from the leaves of the Chinese plant *Isatis indigotica* Fort. (cruciferae) in 2007, and the roots and leaves of *I. indigotica* have been used in traditional Chinese medicine for the treatment of bacterial and viral infections, and immunoregulatory and tumour diseases.<sup>14</sup> The first total synthesis of (+)-isatisine A was completed earlier this year by Karadeolian and Kerr in 14 steps with an overall yield of 5.8%.<sup>15</sup>

Retrosynthetic analysis (Scheme 1) of isatisine **1** suggested that functional group simplification could give tricycle **2**, which would in turn be readily generated from tetramic acid **3** by reduction and cyclisation; such systems are available from oxazolidines **4** using our previously published approaches by aldol<sup>16</sup> or Dieckmann<sup>17</sup> cyclisation. An initial investigation of this strategy (Scheme 2) using oxazolidine **7a** (prepared by acylation of oxazolidine **5** with the malonate half ester **6a**) involved allylation using cinnamyl bromide to give **7b**, confirmation of the relative stereochemistry being readily achieved by single crystal X-ray analysis.<sup>18</sup> Chemoselective Dieckmann cyclisation gave tetramate **8a** in 63% yield. Reduction by a well-established<sup>19</sup> procedure using NaBH<sub>4</sub>-AcOH gave epimeric alcohols **10a** and **11a** in a ratio of 1:1.5 and modest overall yield (relative stereochemistry assigned on the basis of nOe data; see Supporting Information). This stereochemical outcome resulted from epimerisation at the acidic C(7) position, although fully diastereoselective *endo*-hydride addition at C-6 was observed.<sup>20</sup> Epoxidation (MCPBA) of **10a** and **11a** proceeded without diastereoselective control to give **12** and **13**, both in good yield, and ring closure of **12** under basic conditions gave the desired tricyclic core **14** as a mixture of four inseparable diastereomers, as shown by NMR and MS analysis. As expected, similar treatment of epimeric epoxide **13** returned unreacted starting material. This approach demonstrated that a strategy based upon cycloetherification was possible, but that improvements in yield and diastereoselectivity would be required.

To develop this approach further, allylation of oxazolidine **7a** proved to be possible, but the yield was only 36%, and we found that the synthesis of the required allyl derivative **7c** could be better achieved in 58% yield by acylation of oxazolidine **5** with ethyl allylmalonate **6b** directly (prepared by partial hydrolysis of diethyl allylmalonate) using



Scheme 1

DCCI–DMAP, conditions which we found to be superior to a similar recently reported coupling using  $\text{MsCl-Et}_3\text{N}$ .<sup>21</sup> Dieckmann ring closure of oxazolidine **7c** to give allyl tetramate **8b** proceeded smoothly and in excellent yield (92%), but column chromatographic purification required the use of alumina, since silica gel led to epimerisation at C(7); the relative stereochemistry was determined by an NOE experiment (see Supporting Information). Moreover, we found that variable quantities of **9** were also obtained from this cyclisation, presumably as a result of adventitious water leading to ester hydrolysis and decarboxylation, and this material could not be separated from the major product **8b**; careful exclusion of water successfully prevented this side reaction, as has been noted previously.<sup>17</sup> Application of the above reduction procedure using excess  $\text{NaBH}_4\text{-AcOH}$  led to formation of alcohols **10b** and **11b** (ratio 2:1), along with significant recovery of starting material **8b** (18–41%). Alternative conditions were investigated (2–15 equiv of  $\text{NaBH}_4$  with addition of  $\text{CeCl}_3$  or  $\text{CaCl}_2$ ; use of  $\text{LiBH}_4$ ), but selective formation of **10b** could not be achieved. The relative stereochemistries of **10b** and **11b** were readily established by NOE experiments (see Supporting Information). Attempted conversion of **11b** to **10b** by deprotonation (LDA,  $-78^\circ\text{C}$ ) and low temperature quench with ammonium chloride gave a 49% recovery of **11b**, along with some of the desired alcohol **10b** (13% isolated yield).

With the desired allylpyroglutamate **10b** in hand, investigation of electrophilic tetrahydrofuran ring closure was investigated (Scheme 2). Treatment with  $\text{I}_2\text{-NaHCO}_3$  resulted in 5-*exo-tet* ring closure giving diastereomers **15a** and **16a** in a ratio of 10:3 (61% yield). The two epimers were inseparable by column chromatography, but careful recrystallisation ( $\text{CH}_2\text{Cl}_2\text{-}n\text{-heptane}$ ) provided access to the pure major epimer **15a**, whose structure was determined by an NOE experiment and single crystal X-ray analysis (see Supporting Information and Figure 1).<sup>18</sup> Reaction of the **15a/16a** mixture with potassium *p*-nitrobenzoate and a catalytic amount of 18-crown-6 gave inseparable benzoates **15b/16b** in 31% overall yield, and another separable by-product **17** (24%), presumably arising by elimination from **15b/16b** followed by double bond equilibration. Hydrolysis of the mixture of esters **15b/16b** proceeded smoothly under basic conditions and furnished alcohols **15c/16c** in quantitative yield. Unsurprisingly, epimeric alcohol **11b** did not ring close under these con-

ditions, since this would have led to a *trans*-fused bicyclic ring system.

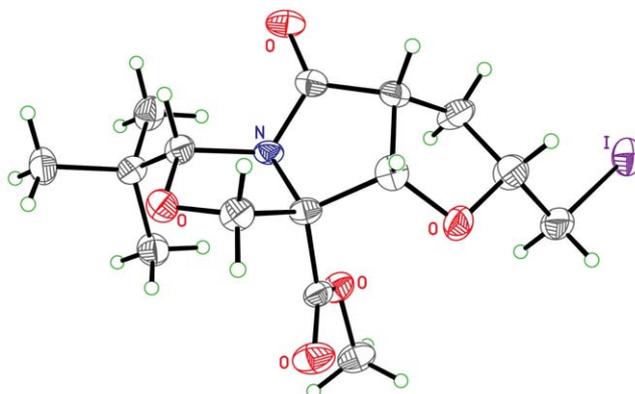
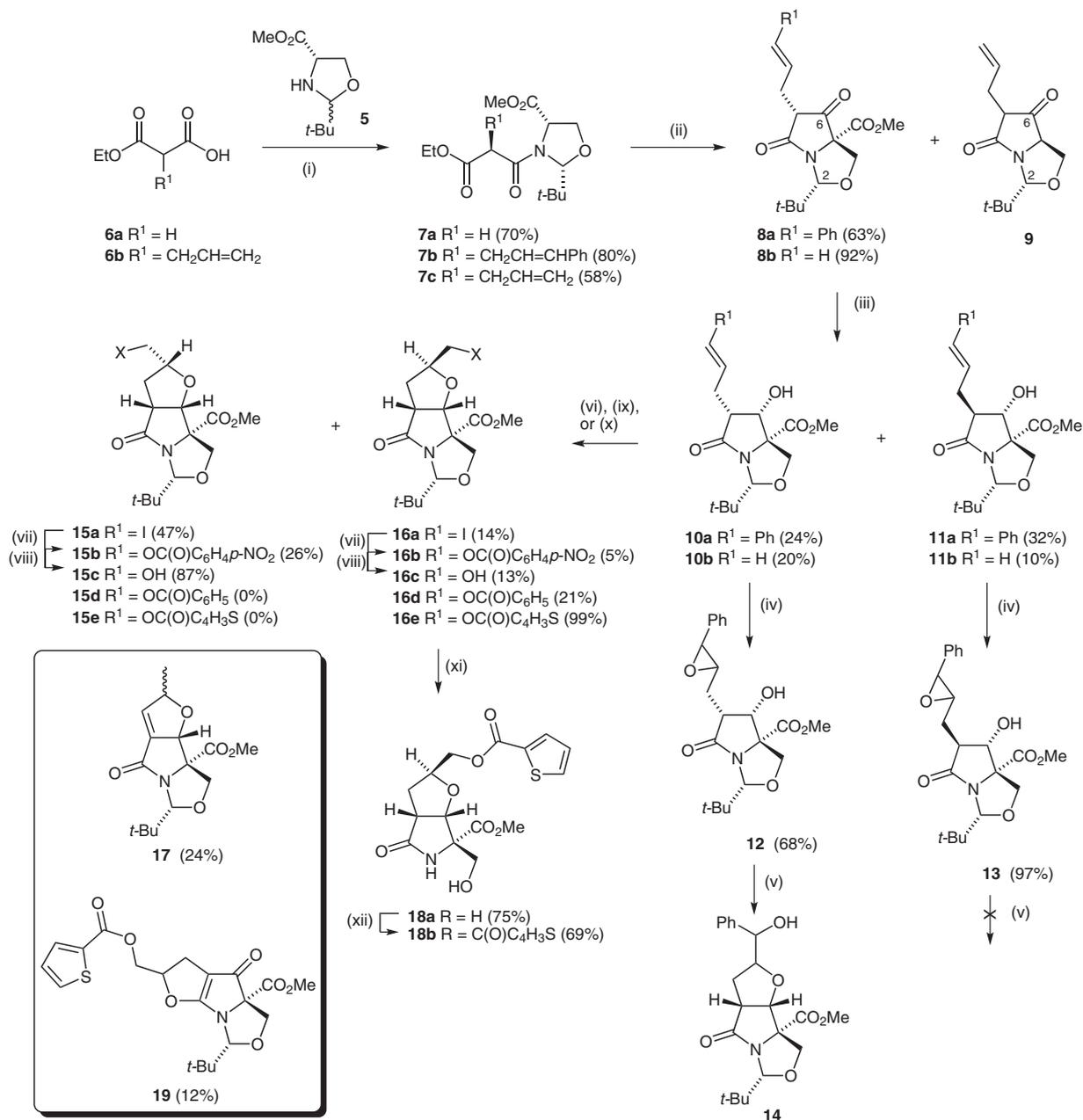


Figure 1 Thermal ellipsoid plot of **15a** with the heteroatoms labeled and drawn at 50% probability

With the expectation that this route might be shortened by one step, it was of interest to apply our recently published protocol for plumbolactonisation,<sup>22</sup> a modification of which was found to be also suitable for plumboetherification;<sup>23</sup> we found that cyclisation of tetramate **10b** using lead tetrabenzoate or lead tetra(thiophene-2-carboxylate) gave the desired products, but only as the unwanted diastereomers **16d** and **16e**, respectively (yields of 21% and 99%) with no trace of the other stereoisomers **15d** and **15e**; relative stereochemistry being again established by NOE experiments (see Supporting Information). We have observed that the thiophene-2-carboxylate system gives better yields and is also much more reactive than other arylcarboxylates in these cyclisations<sup>22–24</sup> and believe that the change in stereochemical outcome in this case arises because the reaction proceeds by initial co-ordination of the C(6) hydroxy function rather than the alkene to the lead(IV) followed by *syn*-oxyplumbylation.<sup>25</sup> Deprotection of **16e** using Corey–Reichard conditions<sup>26</sup> gave the bicyclic product **18a** in excellent yield (75% yield) and this material was readily converted to diester **18b** by DCC–DMAP coupling. Once again, epimeric alcohol **11b** did not ring close under these conditions, but of interest is that tetramate **8b** cyclised to give tricycle **19**, whose structure was established by NMR analysis, although it was formed in only 12% yield.

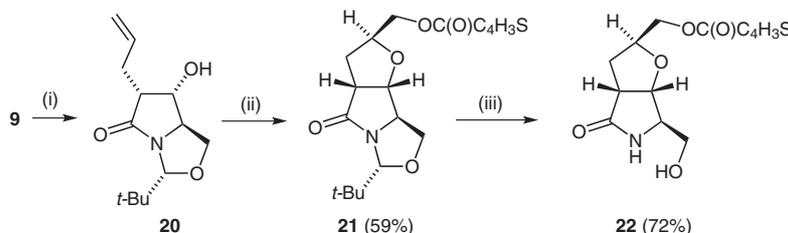


**Scheme 2** Reagents and conditions: (i) EDAC or DCC, DMAP, **5**; (ii) NaOMe, MeOH, r.t., 3 d; (iii) NaBH<sub>4</sub> (15 equiv), AcOH (10%), CH<sub>2</sub>Cl<sub>2</sub>, r.t.; (iv) MCPBA, CH<sub>2</sub>Cl<sub>2</sub>; (v) K<sub>2</sub>CO<sub>3</sub>, MeOH; (vi) I<sub>2</sub>, NaHCO<sub>3</sub>, MeCN; (vii) KO<sub>2</sub>CC<sub>6</sub>H<sub>4</sub>NO<sub>2</sub>, 18-C-6, MeCN; (viii) Na<sub>2</sub>CO<sub>3</sub>, H<sub>2</sub>O, EtOH; (ix) (PhCO<sub>2</sub>)<sub>4</sub>Pb, F<sub>3</sub>CPh; (x) (C<sub>4</sub>H<sub>3</sub>SCO<sub>2</sub>)<sub>4</sub>Pb, F<sub>3</sub>CPh; (xi) HS(CH<sub>2</sub>)<sub>3</sub>SH, F<sub>3</sub>CCH<sub>2</sub>OH, r.t.; (xii) DCC, DMAP, C<sub>4</sub>H<sub>3</sub>SC(O)Cl.

In those reactions in which tetramate **9** was formed along with **8b** (Scheme 2), reduction of the mixture permitted isolation of alcohol **20** (Scheme 3) and plumboetherification gave tricycle **21** (59% yield). Assignment of the formation of the five-membered ring and the stereochemistry was made by comparison of the chemical shifts with those of product **16e** [C(8)H, the two C(9)H and the two C(12)H have very similar chemical shifts in both compounds] and deprotection to lactam **22** proceeded efficiently (72% yield).

Of interest is that bioassay<sup>27</sup> against *S. aureus* and *E. coli* indicated that no compounds were active against the

former, but that several were active against the latter, typically with a potency of about 0.05–0.07% of the cephalosporin standard; this outcome is of interest given that Gram-negative bacteria are intrinsically more resistant to antibacterials as a result of a more impermeable outer cell membrane, and particularly efficient efflux pumps.<sup>6</sup> Bioactivity and chemical informatics<sup>28</sup> analysis is of interest (see Table in Supplementary Information). Although oxazolidinones **7c**, tetramates **8a,8b**, pyroglutamates **10a,b, 11a,b, 12, 13** and **18b** are active against *E. coli*, tricycles **15a, 16a, 16d** and **16e** (which might be considered most closely to mimic the core ring system of isatisine) are totally inactive against both organisms. For the active mol-



**Scheme 3** Reagents and conditions: (i) NaBH<sub>4</sub>, AcOH (10%), CH<sub>2</sub>Cl<sub>2</sub>, r.t.; (ii) (C<sub>4</sub>H<sub>9</sub>SCO)<sub>2</sub>Pb, F<sub>3</sub>CPh; (iii) HS(CH<sub>2</sub>)<sub>3</sub>SH, F<sub>3</sub>CCH<sub>2</sub>OH, r.t.

ecules, the van der Waals molecular surface area is in the range 452–587 Å<sup>2</sup>,<sup>29</sup> and the CMR value, which is a measure of the van der Waals attractive forces that act in drug-receptor interactions<sup>30</sup> is in the range 74–107; this is to be expected from the common structural skeleton of these compounds. The active molecules have ClogD, %PSA and CMR average values of 2.5±0.76, 14.5±1.3 and 91.6±12.9, respectively. The polar surface area parameter (PSA), which correlates the presence of polar atoms with membrane permeability and therefore gives an indication of drug transport properties,<sup>31</sup> has been reported to have an optimal value of 70 < PSA < 120 Å<sup>2</sup> for a non-CNS orally absorbable drug,<sup>32</sup> and of interest is that the compounds active against *E. coli* all lie at the lower end of this range, with the exception of diester **18b**. The use of this approach, guided by bioactive natural product structures, is likely to be valuable for the characterisation of chemical space<sup>33</sup> and may provide a useful start point for the identification of novel chemotypes for fragment-based drug design, especially where target identity or structure is not known.<sup>34</sup>

We have recently demonstrated the low intrinsic antibacterial activity of simple pyroglutamates<sup>12</sup> and tetramates,<sup>11</sup> but that modest manipulation of the skeletal functionality<sup>10,35</sup> or homologation to longer chain side-units<sup>36</sup> can restore activity. It may be that similar adjustment of the tricyclic skeletons synthesised in this work will be required before antibacterial bioactivity is observed; however, it is noted that no antibacterial activity of isatisine **1** *per se*, as opposed to the plant extracts, has been reported,<sup>13</sup> and it is possible that the reported antibacterial plant extract activity may not result from this compound alone.

**Supporting Information** for this article is available online at <http://www.thieme-connect.com/ejournals/toc/synlett>.

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- (18) The diffraction data for **7b** and **15a** were collected at 150 K<sup>37</sup> using an Enraf-Nonius KCCD diffractometer.<sup>38</sup> Structures were solved using SIR92,<sup>39</sup> and refined using the CRYSTALS software suite<sup>40</sup> as per the supplementary information (CIF file). The Flack *x* parameter<sup>41</sup> for **7b** refined to  $-0.2(8)$ , however analysis of the Bijvoet pairs gave a Hooft *y* parameter<sup>42</sup> of 0.0(3) giving a 99.2% probability that the structure is of the correct handedness (assuming full enantiopurity).<sup>43</sup> In the absence of a strong anomalous signal, the Friedel pairs were merged for the final refinement. The Flack *x* parameter for **15a** refined to  $-0.02(3)$ . Crystallographic data (excluding structure factors) have been deposited with the Cambridge Crystallographic Data Centre [CCDC 800835 (**7b**), CCDC 800836 (**15a**)] and copies of these data can be obtained via [www.ccdc.cam.ac.uk/data\\_request/cif](http://www.ccdc.cam.ac.uk/data_request/cif).
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