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Graphical Abstract



Microwave-mediated synthesis of a cyclic

heptapeptoid through consecutive Ugi Reactions

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Abstract

The combination of consecutive Isocyanide-based Multicomponent Reactions (IMCRs) allowed the synthesis of a cyclic heptapeptoid in a reduced number of steps. Herein, we describe this efficient approach using four consecutive Ugi reactions, being three Ugi four-center, four-component reactions, and one Ugi four-center, three-component reaction. Our strategy involved eight steps of which seven in a row were microwave-assisted with reaction times of 3-5 minutes and yields ranging from 88-98%.

Keywords

Cyclic peptoids, consecutive Ugi reactions, Isocyanide-based Multicomponent Reactions (IMCRs), microwave-mediated reactions, macroheterocycles.

1. Introduction

Natural products are an excellent source of new bioactive molecules [1,2,3]. Cyclic peptides occur naturally and exhibit diverse biological activities, such as antitumor, antibacterial and immunosuppressive, among others, and usually show better biological activities than linear peptides due to conformational rigidity. Examples of cyclic peptide drugs are the natural antibiotic Vancomycin and the neuropeptide Vasopressin. Figure 1 shows some structures of cyclic peptides, including the heptapeptides Cupolamide A that is active against P388 murine leukemia cells ($IC_{50} = 7.5 \mu g/mL$) [4], Axinellin A, which shows antitumor activity against a human bronchopulmonary carcinoma (IC₅₀ = 3.0 μ g/mL) [5], and Argyrin B that is a potent inhibitor of T-cell independent antibody formation [6], along with the octadepsipeptoid Verticilide, a potential insecticide with a different mode of action since it acts by inhibiting the binding of ryanodine to ryanodine receptors (RyR) [7,8]. Other important cyclic heptapeptides from natural origin include Cateritins A and B [9], poly-proline Euryjanicins E-G [10], Reniochalistatins A-E [11] and Stylissatins B-D [12], all of them isolated from marine sponges.



Figure 1. Examples of some bioactive cyclic peptides.

Oligomers of *N*-substituted glycine (peptoids) are versatile mimics of peptides with several advantages such as proteolytic stability and increased cell permeability [13,14]. These mimetics have the ability to link their natural targets in the same way as the natural sequence of peptides [14,15,16]. Cyclic peptoides [17,18,19] show several advantages over their acyclic counterparts such as high conformational stability and resistance to degradation by the action of proteases [20,21]. Furthermore, chirality is removed from the α -carbon atom, so as their H-bonding donor ability [22]. Currently, the Ugi four-component reaction (U-4CR) has proved to be a powerful synthetic strategy for the preparation of a peptoid backbone [23,24,25]. The advantages of this

versatile reaction include the use of commercial or readily available reagents, the avoidance of usually expensive coupling agents for the amide bond formation and the incredible variety of products that can be obtained by simply modifying the structures of the starting materials. Indeed, several works in the literature have shown that the combination of multicomponent reactions produces a plethora of macroheterocycles in a reduced number of steps [26,27,28,29].

In continuing our efforts in using consecutive multicomponent reactions to efficiently obtain novel heterocycles [28,29,30,31,32], herein we describe a concise and efficient strategy for the synthesis of a cyclic heptapeptoid that possesses the core of the molecules represented in Figure 1 with the *N*-pentyl side chains of Verticilide attached to three of its nitrogen atoms. Whereas heptapeptoids have already been described [19,33], to the best of our knowledge, there is only one previous example of a cyclic heptapeptoid in the literature [34]. Furthermore, this is the first example in which four consecutive Ugi reactions were employed in the synthesis of a particular molecule.

The retrosynthetic analysis (Scheme 1) shows that the target cyclic heptapeptoid **1** can be synthesized by three consecutive Ugi four-center, four-component reactions (Ugi-4CR), followed by the respective deprotections/hydrolysis, forming an acyclic intermediate (amino acid **2**) which is then cyclized by an intramolecular Ugi four-center, three-component reaction (Ugi-4C3CR). The use of methyl isocyanoacetate **6** as the isocyanide component is a widely used strategy and allows the obtention of the carboxylic acid component for the subsequent Ugi reactions [35]. Based on previous experience within our research group [26,27,36,37,38], microwave heating was

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used in all steps of the synthesis except for the final cyclization step, which greatly speeded up the methodology as will be further discussed.



Scheme 1. Retrosynthetic analysis for the synthesis of cyclic heptapeptoid 1.

2. Results and Discussions

The synthesis of compound **1** was initiated by an Ugi 4-component reaction (U-4CR) between methyl isocyanoacetate **6**, paraformaldehyde **5**, pentylamine **8** and N-*Cbz*-glycine **7** in methanol (80 °C, 3 min, MW) to obtain peptoid **9** in 88% yield that was subjected to hydrolysis reaction with LiOH (60 °C, 5 min, THF/H₂O, MW) followed by treatment with 2 mol/L NaHSO₄ providing the corresponding acid **4** in 98% yield (Scheme 2). Acid **4** was then employed in another Ugi reaction using paraformaldehyde **5**, pentylamine **8** and methyl

isocyanoacetate **6** in methanol under the same conditions as the first Ugi reaction affording the acyclic tetrapeptoid **10** in 88% yield. Basic hydrolysis as described for compound **9** led to acid **3** in 90% yield.



Scheme 2. Synthesis of acid 3.

Subsequent use of acid **3** in the Ugi reaction with the same components as before (**5**, **6** and **8**) provided the acyclic hexapeptoid **11** in 88% yield (Scheme 3). Ester hydrolysis using lithium hydroxide under microwave irradiation (60 °C, 5 min, 93%) and removal of the *Cbz* protecting group with Pd/C (10%) and

cyclohexene (80 °C, 3 min, MeOH, MW) furnished the corresponding amino acid **12** in 92% yield. Up to this point, the acyclic hexapeptoid **2** was remarkably prepared in seven consecutive MW-mediated steps in a total reaction time of only 27 minutes (purification times not included).

In the last step, **2** was subjected to cyclization via an Ugi four-center, threecomponent reaction (head-to-tail macrocyclization of **2** using normal coupling agents was not the goal of this work, although the yields are usually better) [39,40,41]. Amino acid **2** was added under pseudo-high dilution conditions (in an attempt to avoid oligomerization) to a suspension of paraformaldehyde **5** and butyl isocyanide **12** in methanol to furnish cyclic heptapeptoid **1** in a nonoptimized yield of 12%. The observed low yield in this last step may appear frustrating considering that all other steps were high-yielding but it cannot be considered a surprise. Despite the difficulties we encountered in the purification process, it is known that small linear peptides, especially from three to eight amino acids are tough to cyclize due to oligomerization [42,43]. As usual, the presence of rotamers complicated the spectroscopic analysis of the peptoids. Nevertheless, all compounds were fully and unequivocally characterized by ¹Hand ¹³C-NMR spectra and HRMS.

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Scheme 3. Final steps in the synthesis of the target cyclic heptapeptoid 1.

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, the strategy of consecutive isocyanide-based multicomponent reactions employed herein allowed the fast and efficient obtention of a cyclic heptapeptoid and may be used to access other compounds of this type. It offers several advantages, such as easy access to macroheterocycles, simple synthetic procedures, and high atom-economy, which coupled with microwave irradiation is even more powerful allowing a fast synthesis of more complex molecules. Furthermore, it may also allow the obtention of larger cyclic peptoids by increasing the number of consecutive Ugi reactions.

4. Experimental Section

4.1. General remarks

NMR spectra were recorded on a Varian Mercury Plus 300 spectrometer at 300 MHz for ¹H and 75.46 MHz for ¹³C in the presence of TMS as an internal standard. High-resolution ESI mass spectra were obtained on a Micro TOF-Bruker Daltonics instrument. Reactions were performed on a CEM Co., Discover microwave reactor using sealed vessels, dynamic program, temperature detection by internal fiber optic probe, simultaneous cooling, and media stirring. TLC plates were revealed by treatment with a 10% solution of phosphomolybdic acid in ethanol, followed by heating. Commercially available reagents and solvents were analytical grade or were purified by standard procedures prior to use.

4.2. Methyl N-(((benzyloxy)carbonyl)glycyl)-N-pentylglycylglycinate (9)

A sealed 10 mL glass tube containing a mixture of pentylamine (**8**, 0.044 g, 0.50 mmol), methanol (0.25 mL), anhydrous sodium sulfate (0.150 g), paraformaldehyde (**5**, 0.015 g, 0.50 mmol), *Cbz*-glycine (**7**, 0.052 g, 0.25 mmol) and methyl isocyanoacetate (**6**, 0.023 mL, 0.25 mmol) was introduced in the cavity of a microwave reactor (CEM Co., Discover) and irradiated at 80 °C for 3 min (ramp time: 98 s) under magnetic stirring. The residue was filtered, concentrated in vacuum and purified by column chromatography (CH₂Cl₂ \rightarrow 1% MeOH/CH₂Cl₂) to yield peptoid **7** (0.090 g, 0.22 mmol, 88%) as a viscous yellow oil.

R_f (4% MeOH/CH₂Cl₂)= 0.30

¹H NMR (300 MHz, CDCl₃, presence of rotamers): δ 7.37-7.29 (m, 5H, Ar), 6.89 (br t, *J* = 5.2 Hz, 1H), 5.82 (br t, *J* = 4.7 Hz, 1H), 5.12 and 5.09 (2s, 2H), 4.10 (d,

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J = 4.7 Hz, 2H), 4.05 (s, 2H), 3.98 (d, J = 5.3 Hz, 2H), 3.72 (s, 3H), 3.41 and 3.31 (2t, J = 7.6 and 7.9 Hz, 2H), 1.66-1.48 (m, 2H), 1.37-1.22 (m, 4H), 0.90 (t, J = 6.7 Hz, 3H).

¹³C NMR (75.46 MHz, CDCl₃, presence of rotamers): δ 170.1, 169.2, 168.9, 156.3, 136.2, 128.4, 128.1, 127.9, 66.9, 52.3, 50.1, 48.7, 42.3, 40.9, 28.7, 27.9, 22.3, 13.9.

HRMS (ESI): m/z: calc. for $[M+H]^+ C_{20}H_{30}N_3O_6$: 408.2135; found: 408.2127.

4.3. N-(((Benzyloxy)carbonyl)glycyl)-N-pentylglycylglycine (9)

A sealed 10 mL glass tube containing a solution of peptoid **7** (0.442 mmol, 0.180 g) in THF/H₂O (2:1, 6.6 mL) and LiOH (1.1 mmol, 0.026 g) at room temperature was introduced in the cavity of a microwave reactor (CEM Co., Discover) and irradiated at 60 °C for 5 min under magnetic stirring. The reaction mixture was then acidified with a 2 M solution of NaHSO₄ to pH 2 and extracted twice with ethyl acetate (2 x 30 mL). The organic phase was dried over sodium sulfate, filtered and concentrated to yield acid **9** (0.432 mmol, 0.170 g, 98%), which was used without further purification.

¹H NMR (300 MHz, CD₃OD, presence of rotamers): δ 7.47-7.26 (m, 5H), 5.09 (s, 2H), 4.12-3.90 (m, 6H), 3.39-3.34 (m, 2H), 1.67-1.46 (m, 2H), 1.37-1.19 (m, 4H), 0.95-0.87 (m, 3H).

¹³C NMR (75.46 MHz, CD₃OD, presence of rotamers): δ 173.0, 171.7, 171.2, 159.0, 138.0, 129.5, 129.0, 128.8, 67.8, 50.8, 49.5, 43.3, 41.8, 30.1, 28.9, 23.4, 14.4.

HRMS (ESI): m/z: calc. for $[M+Na]^+ C_{19}H_{27}N_3O_6Na$: 416.1798; found: 416.1810.

4.4. Methyl N-N-(((benzyloxy)carbonyl)glycyl)-N-pentylglycylglycylglycyl-Npentylglycylglycinate (**10**)

A sealed 10 mL glass tube containing a mixture of pentylamine (**8**, 0.052 g, 0.60 mmol), methanol (0.30 mL), anhydrous sodium sulfate (0.180 g), paraformaldehyde (**5**, 0.018 g, 0.60 mmol), acid (**9**, 0.118 g, 0.30 mmol) and methyl isocyanoacetate (**6**, 0.027 mL, 0.30 mmol) was introduced in the cavity of a microwave reactor (CEM Co., Discover) and irradiated at 80 °C for 3 min (ramp time: 103 s) under magnetic stirring. The residue was filtered, concentrated in vacuum and purified by column chromatography (CH₂Cl₂ \rightarrow 3% MeOH/CH₂Cl₂) to yield peptoid **10** (0.157 g, 0.266 mmol, 88%) as a viscous yellow oil.

R_f (8% MeOH/CH₂Cl₂)= 0.25

¹H NMR (300 MHz, CDCl₃, presence of rotamers): δ 7.36-7.24 (m, 5H), 7.13 (br t, *J* = 5.3 Hz, 1H), 5.93 (br t, *J* = 4.5 Hz, 1H), 5.11 and 5.08 (2s, 2H), 4.14-3.96 (m, 10H), 3.70 (s, 3H), 3.42-3.24 (m, 4H), 1.64-1.45 (m, 4H), 1.37-1.19 (m, 8H), 0.92-0.85 (m, 6H).

¹³C NMR (75.46 MHz, CDCl₃, presence of rotamers): δ 170.2, 169.1, 168.9, 168.7, 168.3, 156.3, 136.3, 128.4, 128.0, 127.9, 66.8, 52.2, 49.9, 49.7, 49.6, 48.6, 47.8, 42.4, 40.9, 28.9, 28.7, 27.9, 27.9 (2C), 26.9, 26.8, 22.3, 13.9.

HRMS (ESI): m/z: calc. for $[M+Na]^+ C_{29}H_{45}N_5O_8Na$: 614.3166; found: 614.3166.

4.5. N-N-(((Benzyloxy)carbonyl)glycyl)-N-pentylglycylglycyl-Npentylglycylglycine (**3**)

A sealed 10 mL glass tube containing a solution of peptoid **10** (0.282 mmol, 0.167 g) in THF/H₂O (2:1, 4.2 mL) and LiOH (0.71 mmol, 0.017 g) at room temperature was introduced in the cavity of a microwave reactor (CEM Co., Discover) and irradiated at 60 °C for 5 min under magnetic stirring. The reaction mixture was then acidified with a 2 M solution of NaHSO₄ to pH 2 and extracted twice with ethyl acetate (4 x 30 mL). The organic phase was dried over sodium sulfate, filtered and concentrated to yield acid **3** (0.255 mmol, 0.147 g, 90%), which was used without further purification.

HRMS (ESI): m/z: calc. for $[M+Na]^+ C_{28}H_{43}N_5O_8Na$: 600.3009; found: 600.3010.

4.6. Methyl N-N-N-(((benzyloxy)carbonyl)glycyl)-N-pentylglycylglycyl-Npentylglycylglycyl-N-pentylglycylglycinate (**12**)

A sealed 10 mL glass tube containing a mixture of pentylamine (**8**, 0.044 g, 0.50 mmol), methanol (1.50 mL), anhydrous sodium sulfate (0.151 g), paraformaldehyde (**5**, 0.015 g, 0.50 mmol), acid (**3**, 0.145 g, 0.25 mmol) and methyl isocyanoacetate (**6**, 0.023 mL, 0.25 mmol) was introduced in the cavity of a microwave reactor (CEM Co., Discover) and irradiated at 80 °C for 3 min (ramp time: 59 s) under magnetic stirring. The residue was filtered, concentrated in vacuum and purified by column chromatography (CH₂Cl₂ \rightarrow 4% MeOH/CH₂Cl₂) to yield peptoid **12** (0.172 g, 0.222 mmol, 88%) as a viscous brown oil.

Rf (5% MeOH/CH₂Cl₂)= 0.20

¹H NMR (300 MHz, CDCl₃, presence of rotamers): δ 7.49 (br s, 1H), 7.43-7.28 (m, 6H), 6.04 and 5.96 (br 2s, 1H), 5.11 and 5.09 (2s, 2H), 4.18-3.95 (m, 14H), 3.70 (s, 3H), 3.43-3.24 (m, 6H), 1.66-1.39 (m, 6H), 1.37-1.21 (m, 12H), 0.92-0.85 (m, 9H).

¹³C NMR (75.46 MHz, CDCl₃, presence of rotamers): δ 169.2, 169.1 (2C), 169.0 (2C), 168.7 (2C), 156.4, 136.3, 128.4, 128.0, 127.9, 66.8, 52.2, 49.8, 49.6 (2C), 48.6, 48.5, 42.4, 41.1, 40.9, 28.9, 28.7, 27.9, 22.3 (2C), 13.9.

HRMS (ESI): m/z: calc. for $[M+Na]^+$ C₃₈H₆₁N₇O₁₀Na: 798.4378; found: 798.4369.

4.7. N-N-N-Glycyl-N-pentylglycylglycyl-N-pentylglycylglycyl-Npentylglycylglycine (2)

A sealed 10 mL glass tube containing a solution of peptoid **12** (0.222 mmol, 0.172 g) in THF/H₂O (2:1, 3.3 mL) and LiOH (0.55 mmol, 0.013 g) at room temperature was introduced in the cavity of a microwave reactor (CEM Co., Discover) and irradiated at 60 °C for 5 min under magnetic stirring. The reaction mixture was then acidified with a 2 M solution of NaHSO₄ to pH 2 and extracted twice with ethyl acetate (4 x 30 mL). The organic phase was dried over sodium sulfate, filtered and concentrated to yield acid **13** (0.206 mmol, 0.157 g, 93%), which was used without further purification. A sealed 10 mL glass tube containing a solution of acid **13** (0.126 mmol, 0.096 g) in methanol, cyclohexene (1:1. 3.2 mL) and 10% Pd-C (0.0096 g) was introduced in the cavity of a microwave reactor (CEM Co., Discover) and irradiated at 80 °C for 3 min (ramp time: 125 s, 150 W) under magnetic stirring. After filtration under Celite®, the solvent was concentrated, and amino acid **2** (0.116 mmol, 0.073 g) was

obtained in 92% yield and was used in the subsequent reaction without prior purification.

HRMS (ESI): m/z: calc. for [M+Na]⁺ C₂₉H₅₃N₇O₈Na: 650.3853; found: 650.3872.

4.8. N-Butyl-2-(2,5,8,11,14,17,20-heptaoxo-7,13,19-tripentyl-1,4,7,10,13,16,19-heptaazacyclohenicosan-1-yl)acetamide (1)

A solution of the amino acid **2** (0.143 mmol, 0.090 g) in 60 mL of methanol at room temperature was added via a syringe pump to a solution of paraformaldehyde (**5**, 0.143 mmol, 0.004 g), anhydrous sodium sulfate (2.25 g), butyl isocyanide (**14**, 0.572 mmol, 0.060 mL) in methanol (200 mL) at a rate of 0.6 mL/h (addition time: 100 h). After the addition was complete (~ 4 days), the reaction mixture was stirred for further 24 h, filtered and concentrated under vacuum. The cyclic heptapeptoid **1** (0.071 mmol, 0.051 g) was purified by preparative TLC plate (CH₂Cl₂/MeOH 5% [2x]) to furnish the pure product (0.008 mmol, 0.006 g) in 12% yield.

¹H NMR (300 MHz, CDCl₃, presence of rotamers): δ 7.94 (br s, 2H), 4.23-3.63 (m, 16H), 3.41-3.15 (m, 8H), 1.73-1.41 (m, 8H), 1.39-1.18 (m, 14H), 0.96-0.77 (m, 12H).

HRMS (ESI): m/z: calc. for $[M+Na]^+ C_{35}H_{62}N_8O_8Na$: 745.4588; found: 745.4593.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

Detailed experimental procedures, NMR and mass spectra of all compounds.

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