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# 1-(2'-Bromobenzyl)-6,7-dihydroxy-N-methyl-tetrahydroisoguinoline and 1,2-Demethyl-nuciferine as Agonists in Human D<sub>2</sub> Dopamine Receptors

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Two isoquinoline derivatives, 1-(2'-bromobenzyl)-6,7-dihydroxy-Nmethyl-tetrahydroisoquinoline (Br-BTHIQ, 1) and 1,2-demethylnuciferine (aporphine, 2), were herein synthesized, and their dopaminergic affinity in cloned human D<sub>2</sub>R, D<sub>3</sub>R, and D<sub>4</sub>R subtypes and their behavior as agonists/antagonists were evaluated. They showed affinity values  $(K_i)$  for hD<sub>2</sub>, hD<sub>3</sub>, and hD<sub>4</sub> DR within the nanomolar



Article

range. The trends in affinity were  $hD_4R \gg hD_3R > hD_2R$  for Br-BTHIQ (1) and  $hD_2R > hD_4R > hD_3R$  for 1,2-demethyl-nuciferine (2). The functional assays of cyclic adenosine monophosphate signaling at human  $D_2R$  showed a partial agonist effect for Br-BTHIQ (1) and full agonist behavior for aporphine (2), with half maximal effective concentration values of 2.95 and 10.2  $\mu$ M, respectively. Therefore, both isoquinolines 1 and 2 have emerged as lead molecules for the synthesis of new therapeutic drugs that ultimately may be useful to prevent schizophrenia and Parkinson's disease, respectively.

 ${f B}$  enzylisoquinoline alkaloids constitute a large structural group of secondary metabolites that are derived biosynthetically from tyrosine.<sup>1</sup> Condensation of dopamine and 4-hydroxyphenylacetaldehyde by norcoclaurine synthase produces (S)-norcoclaurine, which is considered the first 1benzylisoquinoline alkaloid and the common precursor to isoquinoline derivatives, including 1-benzylisoquinolines and aporphines.<sup>2</sup> They are present mainly in Papaveraceae, Menispermaceae, Berberidaceae, and Ranunculaceae, among other plant families.<sup>3</sup> Nelumbo nucifera Gaertn., also called Asian lotus or sacred lotus, belongs to the family Nelumbonaceae. Its leaves and flower buds are an important source of aporphines (e.g., nuciferine and N-methylasimilobine) and 1-benzylisoquinoline alkaloids (e.g., armepavine and N-methylcoclaurine) (Figure 1).<sup>3</sup> These alkaloids have displayed a variety of biological activities, including antioxidant,<sup>4</sup> antimicrobial,<sup>5</sup> antiplatelet,<sup>6</sup> antidiabetic, antihyperlipidemic,<sup>7</sup> and antihypertensive<sup>8</sup> effects. Nuciferine has been described as producing an antipsychotic-like effect in rodents that is attributed, at least in part, to partial agonist activity on dopaminergic receptors (DRs).9 In addition, the interaction with DRs of aporphines and 1-benzylisoquinolines of natural or synthetic origin has been extensively reported.<sup>10</sup> For instance, apomorphine (Figure 1), a semisynthetic derivative from morphine with dopaminergic agonist activity and selectivity for D<sub>2</sub>-like DR, has some use in treating Parkinson's disease.

Dopamine (3,4-dihydroxyphenethylamine) is one of the most important neurotransmitters involved in the control of essential functions, including locomotor activity, cognition, emotion, and memory. This catecholamine exerts its effects by acting on five subtypes of DRs,  $D_1-D_5$ , encoded in humans by genes DRD1-DRD5, respectively. DRs belong to the seven transmembrane G protein-coupled receptor (GPCR) families and are classified into two major classes,  $D_1$ -like DR ( $D_1$  and  $D_5$ ) and  $D_2$ -like DR ( $D_2$ ,  $D_3$ , and  $D_4$ ), based on the ability to regulate cyclic adenosine monophosphate (cAMP) production.<sup>12</sup> The  $D_2R$  subtype has two isoforms,  $D_{2S}$  ( $D_2$  short) and  $D_{2L}$  ( $D_2$  long), which differ in the presence of 29 additional amino acids in the third intracellular loop, whereas  $D_4R$  has many variants.<sup>13,14</sup>  $D_2$ -like DR subtypes share a high degree of sequence homology ( $D_2R$  shares 75 and 53% with  $D_3R$  and  $D_4R$ , respectively), with differences only in their tissue expression pattern, density, and physiological functions.<sup>14</sup> For this reason, despite the crystal structure elucidation of  $D_2 R_1^{15}$  $D_3 R_{\!\!\!\!\!\!\!\!}^{16}$  and  $D_4 \tilde{R}^{17}$  and the greatly improved design of ligands, it is difficult to obtain selective compounds for each receptor subtype. D<sub>1</sub>-like DRs are coupled to G<sub>s</sub> proteins, and they

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Figure 1. Natural and semisynthetic isoquinoline derivatives.

increase intracellular cAMP through adenylate cyclase (AC) activation, which results in the subsequent activation of protein kinase A (PKA). In contrast, D<sub>2</sub>-like DRs are coupled to G<sub>i/o</sub> proteins, and they downregulate cAMP generation through AC inhibition, which leads to diminished PKA activity.<sup>12,14</sup> D<sub>2</sub>-like DRs are implicated in numerous brain functions, including regulation of locomotor activity, cognition, and motivation.<sup>13,14</sup> This subfamily is clinically important as therapeutic targets for antiparkinsonian (agonists) and antipsychotic (antagonists or partial agonists) drugs.<sup>13,14</sup>

In the last 2 decades, our group has reported the synthesis and structure–activity relationship (SAR) studies of isoquinoline derivatives with affinity for  $D_1$ - and  $D_2$ -like DRs in rat striatal membranes.<sup>18–25</sup> These studies were supported by molecular modeling studies, which revealed the importance of the catechol group, secondary/tertiary amine, and hydrophobic substitution pattern in the isoquinoline nucleus to improve the affinity for each DR subfamily (Figure 2).<sup>26–31</sup> In previous studies into rat striatal membranes, it was determined that both 1-(2'-bromobenzyl)-6,7-dihydroxy-N-methyl-THIQ (Br-BTHIQ, 1) and 1,2-demethyl-nuciferine (aporphine, 2) showed high selectivity toward  $D_2$ -like DR.<sup>25</sup> In the present



Figure 2. Structural features of D<sub>2</sub>-like dopaminergic isoquinolines.

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work, Br-BTHIQ (1) and aporphine (2) were synthesized to evaluate (i) their dopaminergic affinity for the cloned human  $D_2R$ ,  $D_3R$ , and  $D_4R$  subtypes and (ii) their potential  $D_2$ -like DR agonist/antagonist behavior. These results should allow further lead compounds to be developed toward useful potential agents in neurological and/or neuropsychiatric disorders.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Chemistry.** The synthesis of 1-(2'-bromobenzyl)-6,7dihydroxy-*N*-methyl-tetrahydroisoquinoline (1) and 1,2-demethyl-nuciferine (2) was carried out as previously reported.<sup>25</sup> The synthetic route is outlined in Schemes 1 and 2. Initially,

Scheme 1. Synthesis of 1-(2'-Bromobenzyl)-6,7-dihydroxy-1,2,3,4-tetrahydro-isoquinoline (Br-BTHIQ, 1)<sup>*a*</sup>



<sup>a</sup>Reaction conditions: (a) 2-BrC<sub>6</sub>H<sub>4</sub>CH<sub>2</sub>COCl, CH<sub>2</sub>Cl<sub>2</sub>, 5% aqueous NaOH, room temperature, 16 h; (b) POCl<sub>3</sub>, CH<sub>3</sub>CN, N<sub>2</sub>, reflux, 1 h; (c) NaBH<sub>4</sub>, CH<sub>3</sub>OH, N<sub>2</sub>, room temperature, 2 h; (d)  $[(CH_3)_3COCO]_2O$ , CH<sub>2</sub>Cl<sub>2</sub>, room temperature, 2 h; (e) LiAlH<sub>4</sub>, tetrahydrofuran (THF), reflux, 4 h; and (f) BBr<sub>3</sub>, CH<sub>2</sub>Cl<sub>2</sub>, N<sub>2</sub>, room temperature, 2 h.

the appropriate  $\beta$ -phenyl acetamide (1a) intermediate was prepared under Schotten-Baumann conditions. Next, Bischler-Napieralski cyclodehydration gave the isoquinoline nucleus bearing an imine function, which was reduced to give the corresponding brominated BTHIQ (1c). In a first approach, a reaction sequence of N-protection followed by carbamate reduction and subsequent O-demethylation gave brominated N-methyl-BTHIQ (1) (Scheme 1). In a second approach, the brominated N-Boc-BTHIQ (1d) intermediate was subjected to a Buchwald-Hartwig cross-coupling reaction toward carbon-carbon bond formation. Therefore, palladiumcatalyzed direct arylation<sup>32</sup> with 2'-(diphenylphosphino)-*N*,*N*'dimethyl-(1,1'-biphenyl)-2-amine (PhDave-Phos) and Pd- $(OAc)_2$  generated a good yield of N-Boc nor-nuciferine (2a). The carbamate-protecting group of compound 2a was reduced to obtain nuciferine (2b), which was O-demethylated with boron tribromide to give 1,2-demethyl-nuciferine (2) (Scheme 2).

Affinity of Isoquinolines 1 and 2 for the Human  $D_2R$ ,  $D_3R$ , and  $D_4R$  Subtypes. The *in vitro* binding affinities of the synthesized isoquinolines, 1-(2'-bromobenzyl)-6,7-dihydroxy-*N*-methyl-tetrahydroisoquinoline (Br-BTHIQ, 1) and 1,2demethyl-nuciferine (aporphine, 2) were evaluated at the cloned human  $D_2R$ ,  $D_3R$ , and  $D_4R$  subtypes. For this purpose, competition radioligand-binding assays were conducted on cell membranes stably expressing the three cloned human receptor

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## Scheme 2. Synthesis of 1,2-Demethyl-nuciferine (Aporphine, 2)<sup>*a*</sup>



<sup>a</sup>Reaction conditions: (a) PhDave-Phos, Pd(OAc)<sub>2</sub>, K<sub>2</sub>CO<sub>3</sub>, DMA, 130 °C, 4 h; (b) LiAlH<sub>4</sub>, THF, reflux, 4 h; and (c) BBr<sub>3</sub>, CH<sub>2</sub>Cl<sub>2</sub>, N<sub>2</sub>, room temperature, 2 h.

	$hD_2R^a$			hD <sub>3</sub> R <sup>a</sup>			hD <sub>4</sub> R <sup>a</sup>		
compound	pK <sub>i</sub>	$K_{\rm i}$ (nM)	percent inhibition at 10 $\mu$ M (%)	pK <sub>i</sub>	$K_{\rm i}$ (nM)	percent inhibition at 10 µM (%)	pK <sub>i</sub>	$\binom{K_{i}}{(nM)}$	percent inhibition at 10 $\mu$ M (%)
Br-BTHIQ $(1)$	$6.54 \pm 0.08$	286	95 ± 1	$6.71 \pm 0.09$	197	$93 \pm 1$	$7.86 \pm 0.05$	13.8	96 ± 1
aporphine (2)	$6.47 \pm 0.03$	340	$91 \pm 1$	$6.08 \pm 0.03$	838	$93 \pm 1$	$6.26 \pm 0.06$	551	$73 \pm 2$
haloperidol	$8.21 \pm 0.04$	6.22	$103 \pm 1$	$8.24 \pm 0.15$	5.16	$101 \pm 1$	ND	ND	ND
clozapine	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND	$7.25 \pm 0.04$	56.9	96 ± 1

<sup>a</sup>Percent inhibition and affinity ( $pK_i$  and  $K_i$ ) values were calculated by displacement of the specific binding of the radioligand [<sup>3</sup>H]-spiperone by isoquinolines 1 and 2 on membranes from CHO-K1 cells stably expressing the cloned human  $D_2$ ,  $D_3$ , and  $D_4$  receptors. Haloperidol was used as a reference compound for the h $D_2R$  and h $D_3R$  assays, and clozapine was used as a reference compound for the h $D_4R$  assay. Data are expressed as the mean  $\pm$  standard error of the mean (SEM) (n = 2). ND = not determined.

subtypes.<sup>33</sup> The data obtained are depicted in Table 1. The competition curves of the isoquinolines for the specific binding of  $[{}^{3}\text{H}]$ -spiperone to human D<sub>2</sub>R, D<sub>3</sub>R, and D<sub>4</sub>R are shown in Figure 3.

First, the displacement of the selective radioligand [<sup>3</sup>H]spiperone binding to  $hD_2R$ ,  $hD_3R$ , or  $hD_4R$  by Br-BTHIQ (1) and aporphine (2) was evaluated at a single concentration of 10  $\mu$ M. Haloperidol for D<sub>2</sub>R and D<sub>2</sub>R and clozapine for D<sub>4</sub>R were used as reference compounds. The results showed that both compounds 1 and 2 displayed a high percentage of inhibition (>70%) of the specific radioligand binding (Table 1) at the three receptor subtypes. Next, the concentration response curves of the two isoquinoline compounds were constructed to determine their affinities (equilibrium dissociation constants,  $K_i$ ) at the different receptors. Both Br-BTHIQ (1) and aporphine (2) were able to fully displace the specific radioligand binding at hD2R, hD3R, and hD4R in a concentration-dependent manner (Figure 3). Br-BTHIQ (1), which contained a flexible appendage of the brominated benzyl moiety, exhibited a high binding affinity, with  $K_i$  values of 286, 197, and 13.8 nM for hD<sub>2</sub>R, hD<sub>3</sub>R, and hD<sub>4</sub>R, respectively, and notable selectivity for  $hD_4$  (Table 1). The semirigid 1,2demethyl-nuciferine (aporphine, 2) also displaced the selective radioligand from its specific binding sites in hD<sub>2</sub>R, hD<sub>3</sub>R, or  $hD_4R$  at nanomolar concentrations ( $K_i = 340, 838, and 551$ nM, respectively), with a slight selectivity toward  $hD_2R$  (Table 1 and Figure 3).

Functional Activity of Isoquinolines 1 and 2 at D<sub>2</sub>R. The behavior of Br-BTHIQ (1) and aporphine (2) as agonists or antagonists at human D<sub>2</sub>R was evaluated using *in vitro* functional assays through cAMP signaling in Chinese hamster ovary (CHO)-K1 cells stably expressing the cloned human D<sub>2</sub>s receptor. At the 10  $\mu$ M concentration, Br-BTHIQ (1) and aporphine (2) inhibited forskolin-stimulated cAMP production to different extents (Table 2), as expected for D<sub>2</sub>R agonists. In

terms of their concentration-response curves, Br-BTHIQ (1) and aporphine (2) exhibited potency within the micromolar range (EC<sub>50</sub> = 2.95 and 10.2  $\mu$ M, respectively) and achieved an agonist efficacy at the highest assayed concentration (100  $\mu$ M) of 48.4 and 92.7% of the maximal response of the  $D_2R$  full agonist quinpirole, respectively (Figure 4A). In view of these results and with the aim of confirming the partial agonist profile of Br-BTHIQ (1), the concentration-response curves of quinpirole (full agonist) and quinpirole in the presence of 10  $\mu$ M Br-BTHIQ (1) were performed (Figure 4B). Br-BTHIQ (1) showed an agonistic effect at low quinpirole concentrations while an antagonistic effect at higher concentrations of the full agonist (100 nM quinpirole). Indeed, a shift of the quinpirole concentration-response curve to the right resulted in a  $\approx$ 35-fold increase in the quinpirole EC<sub>50</sub> values (Figure 4B). This response corresponds to that expected for a full agonist (quinpirole) in the presence of a partial agonist (1-Br-THIQ).

In summary, two isoquinoline derivatives, 1-(2'-bromobenzyl)-6,7-dihydroxy-tetrahydroisoquinoline (1) and 1,2-demethyl-nuciferine (2), were prepared within good yields. Both compounds 1 and 2 displayed affinity for the hD<sub>2</sub>, hD<sub>3</sub>, and hD<sub>4</sub> DR subtypes at nanomolar concentrations. The affinity order of Br-BTHIQ (1) for the human DR subtypes was hD<sub>4</sub>R  $\gg$  hD<sub>3</sub>R > hD<sub>2</sub>R, whereas aporphine (2) showed a hD<sub>2</sub>R > hD<sub>4</sub>R > hD<sub>3</sub>R tendency. Br-BTHIQ (1) displayed a partial agonist effect at D<sub>2</sub>R, whereas 1,2-demethyl-nuciferine (2) behaved as a full agonist. When these results are taken together, both isoquinolines 1 and 2 emerge as potential lead molecules for the synthesis of new useful therapeutic drugs for schizophrenia and Parkinson's disease, respectively.

# EXPERIMENTAL SECTION

General Experimental Procedures. Electron ionization mass spectrometry (EIMS) and high-resolution electron ionization mass spectrometry (HREIMS) were determined by a TripleTOF 5600 LC/



Figure 3. Radioligand displacement curves for isoquinolines 1 and 2 at human  $D_2R$ ,  $D_3R$ , and  $D_4R$  subtypes. The graphs show the results (mean  $\pm$  SEM) of n = 2.

Table 2. Evaluation of Efficacy and Potency of Isoquinolines 1 and 2 as Human  $D_2R$  Agonists in Functional Assays of cAMP Signaling in CHO-K1 Cells Stably Expressing the Receptors

	$hD_2R^a$						
compound	E <sub>max</sub> at 10 μM (%)	E <sub>max</sub> at 100 μM (%)	pEC <sub>50</sub>	EC <sub>50</sub> (nM)			
Br-BTHIQ $(1)$	$31.9 \pm 6.5$	$48.4 \pm 5.3$	$5.53 \pm 0.31$	2951			
aporphine (2)	$50.7 \pm 8.6$	$92.7 \pm 6.5$	$4.99 \pm 0.22$	10233			
quinpirole	$98.8 \pm 0.6$	100	$6.82 \pm 0.12$	150			

<sup>a</sup>Efficacy of isoquinolines 1 and 2 at the indicated concentration was expressed as a percentage of the maximal quinpirole response (%  $E_{max}$ ). Data are the mean ± SEM of n = 3-4 independent experiments performed in triplicate.

MS/MS system (AB SCIEX, Framingham, MA, U.S.A.) with the electron ionization (EI) method in the positive mode. <sup>1</sup>H and <sup>13</sup>C nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR) spectra were recorded with a Bruker AC-300 or AC-500 spectrometer (Bruker Instruments, Darmstadt, Germany) using CDCl<sub>3</sub> ( $\delta$  7.26 for <sup>1</sup>H and  $\delta$  77.0 for <sup>13</sup>C) as the solvent. NMR assignments were performed using distortions enhancement by polarization transfer (DEPT), correlation spectroscopy with a 45° mixing pulse (COSY-45), heteronuclear single-quantum correlation (HSQC), and heteronuclear multiple-bond correlation (HMBC) experiments. All reactions were monitored by analytical thin-layer chromatography (TLC) with silica gel 60 F<sub>254</sub> (Merck, Darmstadt, Germany). Residues were purified by silica gel



**Figure 4.** Functional assays of cAMP signaling at human  $D_2R$ . (A) Concentration-response (inhibition of forskolin-stimulated cAMP production) curves of isoquinolines 1 and 2 and the reference agonist quinpirole in CHO-K1 cells stably expressing the cloned human  $D_2$  receptors. (B) Effect of Br-BTHIQ (1, 10  $\mu$ M) on quinpirole concentration-response curves. The graphs show data (mean  $\pm$  SEM) of n = 3-4 independent experiments performed in triplicate.

column chromatography using silica gel 60 from Merck ( $40-63 \mu m$ ). Solvents were purchased from Scharlab SL (Barcelona, Spain) or Sigma-Aldrich (St. Louis, MO, U.S.A.) and used without further purification, unless otherwise noted. Dry and freshly distilled solvents were used in those reactions carried out under a nitrogen atmosphere.

Synthesis of Isoquinolines 1 and 2. The syntheses and spectroscopic characterization of Br-benzyltetrahydroisoquinoline (1) and 1,2-demethyl-nuciferine (2), including the intermediates 1a-1d, 2a, and 2b, are described below.

 $\beta$ -(3,4-Dimethoxyphenyl)ethyl-(2'-bromophenyl)acetamide (**1a**). 2-Bromo-phenylacetyl chloride (1.2 mL, 8.07 mmol) was added dropwise to a solution of 3,4-dimethoxyphenethylamine (2 g, 11.04 mmol) in CH<sub>2</sub>Cl<sub>2</sub> (15 mL) and 5% aqueous NaOH (2.5 mL) at 0 °C. The reaction was stirred at room temperature overnight and then extracted with  $CH_2Cl_2$  (3 × 10 mL). The combination of the organic phases was washed with brine  $(2 \times 10 \text{ mL})$  and H<sub>2</sub>O  $(2 \times 10 \text{ mL})$ , dried over anhydrous Na2SO4, and evaporated to dryness. The residue was purified by silica gel column chromatography (hexane-EtOAc, 5:5), to afford 2.35 g of amide (1a) as a white powder (77%).  $^{1}$ H NMR (500 MHz,  $CDCl_3$ ):  $\delta$  7.48 (1H, d, J = 7.8 Hz, H-3'), 7.20 (2H, m, H-5', H-6'), 7.05 (1H, m, H-4'), 6.66 (1H, d, J = 8.1 Hz, H-5), 6.56 (1H, d, J = 1.9 Hz, H-2), 6.52 (1H, dd, J = 8.1 and 1.9 Hz, H-6), 5.38 (1H, br s, CONH), 3.78 (3H, s, OCH<sub>3</sub>), 3.76 (3H, s, OCH<sub>3</sub>), 3.60 (2H, s, CH<sub>2</sub>CO), 3.40 (2H, dd, J = 12.8 and 6.9 Hz, CH<sub>2</sub>- $\alpha$ ), 2.64 (2H, t, J = 6.9 Hz, CH<sub>2</sub>- $\beta$ ). <sup>13</sup>C NMR (125 MHz, CDCl<sub>3</sub>):  $\delta$ 169.4 (CO), 149.0 (C-3), 147.6 (C-4), 134.8 (C-1'), 133.0 (CH-3'), 131.6 (CH-6'), 131.1 (C-1), 129.0 (CH-4'), 127.9 (CH-5'), 124.9 (C-2'), 120.5 (CH-6), 111.8 (CH-2), 111.3 (CH-5), 55.9 (OCH<sub>3</sub>), 55.8 (OCH<sub>3</sub>), 44.0 (CH<sub>2</sub>CO), 40.7 (CH<sub>2</sub>- $\alpha$ ), 35.0 (CH<sub>2</sub>- $\beta$ ). Electrospray mass spectrometry (ESMS): m/z 380 [M + H]<sup>+</sup>.

## Journal of Natural Products

1-(2'-Bromobenzyl)-6,5-dimethoxy-1,2,3,4-tetrahydroisoquinoline (1c). A solution of phenylacetamide (1a, 300 mg, 0.82 mmol) in dry CH<sub>3</sub>CN (20 mL) was treated with POCl<sub>3</sub> (0.37 mL, 4.0 mmol) and refluxed for 1 h under a nitrogen atmosphere. The reaction mixture was concentrated to dryness, redissolved in water, and made basic until pH  $\approx$  9. Then, the mixture was extracted with CH<sub>2</sub>Cl<sub>2</sub> (3 × 10 mL), and the combined organic solution was dried over anhydrous Na<sub>2</sub>SO<sub>4</sub> and evaporated to dryness to give imine (1b), which was used without further purification. The residue was dissolved in MeOH (25 mL) and treated with NaBH<sub>4</sub> (86 mg, 2.27 mmol) at room temperature. The reaction mixture was stirred for 2 h. Afterward, H<sub>2</sub>O (5 mL) was added, and the organic solvent was removed under reduced pressure. The aqueous mixture was made basic, extracted with  $CH_2Cl_2$  (3 × 10 mL), dried over  $Na_2SO_4$ , and concentrated. The residue was purified by silica gel column chromatography (toluene-EtOAc-MeOH-Et<sub>3</sub>N, 6:3:1:0.1) to obtain 144 mg of THIQ (1c, 50%) as a yellow oil. <sup>1</sup>H NMR (500 MHz, CDCl<sub>3</sub>):  $\delta$  7.52 (1H, d, I =7.7 Hz, H-3'), 7.20 (2H, m, H-5', H-6'), 7.05 (1H, m, H-4'), 6.65 (1H, s, H-8), 6.53 (1H, s, H-5), 4.20 (1H, dd, J = 9.8 and 3.9 Hz, H-1), 3.79 (3H, s, OCH<sub>3</sub>), 3.74 (3H, s, OCH<sub>3</sub>), 3.28 (1H, dd, J = 13.6 and 6.9 Hz, Ha-a), 3.20 (1H, m, Ha-3), 2.90 (2H, m, Hb-3, Hb-a), 2.68 (2H, t, J = 5.8 Hz, H-4). <sup>13</sup>C NMR (125 MHz, CDCl<sub>3</sub>):  $\delta$  147.5 (C-6), 147.1 (C-7), 138.8 (C-1'), 133.0 (C-3'), 132.0 (CH-6'), 130.5 (C-8a), 128.2 (CH-4'), 127.4 (CH-5'), 127.1 (C-4a), 124.9 (C-2'), 111.7 (CH-5), 109.7 (CH-8), 55.9 (OCH<sub>3</sub>), 55.8 (OCH<sub>3</sub>), 54.9 (CH-1), 43.1 (CH<sub>2</sub>- $\alpha$ ), 39.5 (CH<sub>2</sub>-3), 29.4 (CH<sub>2</sub>-4). ESMS: m/z 362  $[M]^+$ .

1-(2'-Bromobenzyl)-N-tert-butyloxycarbonyl-6,7-dimethoxy-1,2,3,4-tetrahydroisoquinoline (1d). A solution of di-tert-butyl dicarbonate (1.62 g, 7.42 mmol) in CH2Cl2 (10 mL) was added dropwise to a solution of THIQ (1c, 2.23 g, 6.17 mmol) in  $CH_2Cl_2$ (10 mL). After stirring at room temperature for 2 h, the solvent was evaporated under reduced pressure and the residue was purified by silica gel column chromatography (CH<sub>2</sub>Cl<sub>2</sub>-MeOH, 97:3) to obtain 2.76 g of N-Boc-THIQ (1d, 97%) as a brown oil. <sup>1</sup>H NMR (500 MHz, CDCl<sub>3</sub>):  $\delta$  7.58 (1H, dd, J = 7.8 and 1.2 Hz, H-3'), 7.15 (3H, m, H-4', H-5', H-6'), 6.81 (1H, s, H-5), 6.62 (1H, s, H-8), 5.35 (1H, dd, J = 10.7 and 3.9 Hz, H-1), 4.37 (1H, m, Ha-3), 3.86 (6H, s, 2×OCH<sub>3</sub>), 3.28 (2H, m, Hb-3, Ha-α), 3.03 (1H, m, Hb-α), 2.95 (1H, m, Ha-4), 2.67 (1H, m, Hb-4), 1.10 (9H, s, 3×CH<sub>3</sub>). <sup>13</sup>C NMR (125 MHz, CDCl<sub>3</sub>): δ 154.8 (CO), 148.2 (C-7), 147.8 (C-8), 138.5 (C-1'), 132.9 (CH-3'), 132.3 (CH-6'), 129.3 (C-8a), 128.6 (CH-4'), 127.9 (CH-5'), 126.8 (C-4a), 125.7 (C-2'), 110.1 (CH-8), 110.1 (CH-5), 79.8 (OC-tBu), 56.3 (2×OCH<sub>3</sub>), 54.1 (CH-1), 43.1 (CH<sub>2</sub>α), 36.5 (CH<sub>2</sub>-3), 28.5 (CH<sub>2</sub>-4), 27.82 (3×CH<sub>3</sub>). ESMS: m/z 462  $[M]^+$ .

1-(2-Bromobenzyl)-N-methyl-6,7-dimethoxy-1,2,3,4-tetrahydroisoquinoline (1e). A solution of N-Boc-THIQ (1d, 300 mg, 0.65 mmol) in dry THF (6 mL) was carefully treated with LiAlH<sub>4</sub> (98 mg, 2.58 mmol) at 0 °C. The mixture was heated to reflux overnight. Then, the reaction was cooled at 0  $^{\circ}$ C, quenched with water (1 mL) dropwise, followed by 1 M NaOH solution (1 mL), and then stirred at room temperature for 1 h. The suspension was diluted with EtOAc (10 mL) and filtered through Celite. The filtrate was washed with water and brine, dried over anhydrous Na2SO4, and concentrated under reduced pressure to give 85 mg of N-methyl-Br-THIQ (1e, 35%) as a yellow oil, which was used for the next step without further purification. <sup>1</sup>H NMR (300 MHz, CDCl<sub>3</sub>):  $\delta$  7.54 (1H, dd, J = 7.9and 1.3 Hz, H-3'), 7.16 (1H, m, H-5'), 7.14 (1H, m, H-4'), 7.06 (1H, m, H-6'), 6.58 (1H, s, H-8), 5.92 (1H, s, H-5), 3.85 (1H, m, H-1), 3.83 (3H, s, OCH<sub>3</sub>), 3.50 (3H, s, OCH<sub>3</sub>), 3.29 (2H, m, Ha-α, Ha-3), 2.92 (3H, m, Hb-α, Hb-3), 2.55 (2H, m, CH<sub>2</sub>-4), 2.53 (3H, s, NCH<sub>3</sub>). ESMS: m/z 377 [M + H]<sup>+</sup>.

1-(2-Bromobenzyl)-N-methyl-6,7-dihydroxy-1,2,3,4-tetrahydroisoquinoline (1). A solution of N-methyl-Br-THIQ (1e, 50 mg, 0.13 mmol) in dry CH<sub>2</sub>Cl<sub>2</sub> (3 mL) was treated with BBr<sub>3</sub> (38  $\mu$ L, 0.4 mmol) dropwise at -78 °C under a nitrogen atmosphere. Then, the reaction mixture was stirred to room temperature for 2 h. The reaction was cooled at -78 °C to be quenched by the addition of MeOH (0.5 mL) dropwise and then stirred at room temperature for 30 min. The solvent was removed under reduced pressure and purified by silica gel column chromatography (CH<sub>2</sub>Cl<sub>2</sub>–MeOH, 90:1) to obtain 25 mg of catechol-*N*-methyl-Br-THIQ (1, 55%) as a yellow oil. <sup>1</sup>H NMR (300 MHz, CD<sub>3</sub>OD):  $\delta$  7.56 (1H, dd, *J* = 7.8 and 1.3 Hz, H-3'), 7.21 (1H, td, *J* = 7.5 and 1.3 Hz, H-5'), 7.12 (1H, td, *J* = 7.5 and 1.3 Hz, H-4'), 7.01 (1H, dd, *J* = 7.5 and 1.3 Hz, H-6'), 6.53 (1H, s, H-5), 5.86 (1H, s, H-8), 3.92 (1H, m, H-1), 3.31 (2H, m, Ha- $\alpha$ , Ha-3), 2.90 (3H, m, Hb- $\alpha$ , Hb-3), 2.64 (2H, m, CH<sub>2</sub>-4), 2.51 (3H, s, NCH<sub>3</sub>). <sup>13</sup>C NMR (75 MHz, CD<sub>3</sub>OD):  $\delta$  145.4 (C-6), 144.0 (C-7), 139.6 (C-1'), 133.8 (2C, CH-3', CH-6'), 129.3 (CH-4'), 128.4 (CH-5'), 128.0 (C-2'), 125.9 (C-8a), 125.1 (C-4a), 116.1 (CH-5), 116.0 (CH-8), 63.4 (CH-1), 46.6 (CH<sub>2</sub>-3), 42.3 (NCH<sub>3</sub>), 41.1 (CH<sub>2</sub>- $\alpha$ ), 25.2 (CH<sub>2</sub>-4). High-resolution electrospray ionization mass spectrometry (HRESIMS): *m*/*z* 348.0589 [M + H]<sup>+</sup> (calcd for C<sub>17</sub>H<sub>18</sub>BrNO<sub>2</sub>, 348.0594).

tert-Butyloxycarbonyl-nor-nuciferine (2a). A mixture of N-Boc-THIQ (1d, 451 mg, 0.98 mmol), 2-diphenylphosphino-2'-(N,Ndimethylamino)biphenyl (PhDave-Phos, 75 mg, 0.20 mmol), Pd-(OAc)<sub>2</sub> (22 mg, 0.098 mmol), and K<sub>2</sub>CO<sub>3</sub> (412 mg, 2.98 mmol) in N,N-dimethylacetamide (DMA, 5 mL) was heated at 130 °C overnight under a nitrogen atmosphere. Then, the reaction was concentrated under reduced pressure, and the residue was purified by silica gel column chromatography (CH<sub>2</sub>Cl<sub>2</sub>-MeOH, 99.5:0.5) to obtain 310 mg of N-Boc-nor-nuciferine (2a, 83%) as a yellow oil. <sup>1</sup>H NMR (500 MHz, CDCl<sub>3</sub>):  $\delta$  8.42 (1H, d, J = 7.8 Hz, H-11), 7.27 (3H, m, H-8, H-9, H-10), 6.67 (1H, s, H-3), 4.65 (1H, m, H-6a), 4.42 (1H, m, Ha-5), 3.90 (3H, s, OCH<sub>3</sub>-2), 3.67 (3H, s, OCH<sub>3</sub>-1), 2.75 (5H, m, CH<sub>2</sub>-4, CH<sub>2</sub>-7, Hb-5), 1.49 (9H, s, 3×CH<sub>3</sub>). <sup>13</sup>C NMR (125 MHz, CDCl<sub>3</sub>): δ 154.6 (CO), 151.9 (C-2), 145.5 (C-1), 137.0 (C-7a), 131.7 (C-11a), 129.8 (C-4a), 128.4 (CH-11), 128.0 (C-11b), 127.6 (CH-8), 127.5 (CH-10), 126.9 (CH-9), 126.5 (C-11c), 111.4 (CH-3), 79.8 (OC-tBu), 59.9 (OCH<sub>3</sub>), 55.8 (OCH<sub>3</sub>), 51.5 (CH-6a), 38.4 (CH<sub>2</sub>-5), 35.4 (CH<sub>2</sub>-4), 30.4 (CH<sub>2</sub>-7), 28.5 (3×CH<sub>3</sub>). ESMS: m/z 381 [M]<sup>+</sup>

Nuciferine (2b).<sup>34</sup> A solution of N-Boc-nuciferine (2a, 200 mg, 0.52 mmol) in anhydrous THF (15 mL) was carefully treated with LiAlH<sub>4</sub> (102 mg, 2.69 mmol) under a nitrogen atmosphere at 0  $^{\circ}$ C. Afterward, the reaction mixture was heated at reflux for 4 h. The suspension was cooled at 0 °C, and water (1 mL) was added, followed by 1 M NaOH solution (1 mL). The suspension was stirred for additional 1 h at room temperature. The suspension was diluted with EtOAc (10 mL) and filtered through Celite. The filtrate was washed with water and brine, dried over anhydrous Na2SO4, and concentrated under reduced pressure. The residue was purified by silica gel column chromatography (CH<sub>2</sub>Cl<sub>2</sub>-MeOH, 94:6) to afford 120 mg of nuciferine (2b) (78%) as a yellow oil. <sup>1</sup>H NMR (300 MHz, CDCl<sub>3</sub>):  $\delta$  8.36 (1H, dd, J = 8.4 and 1.9 Hz, H-11), 7.25 (3H, m, H-8, H-9, H-10), 6.63 (1H, s, H-3), 3.89 (3H, s, OCH<sub>3</sub>-2), 3.66 (3H, s, OCH<sub>3</sub>-1), 3.10 (4H, m, H-6a, Ha-4, Ha-5, Ha-7), 2.67-2.53 (2H, m, Hb-7, Hb-4), 2.54 (3H, s, NCH<sub>3</sub>), 2.47 (1H, m, Hb-5). <sup>13</sup>C NMR (125 MHz, CDCl<sub>3</sub>): δ 151.9 (C-2), 145.1 (C-1), 136.3 (C-7a), 132.1 (C-11a), 128.5 (C-3a), 128.3 (CH-8), 127.8 (CH-9), 127.7 (C-11c), 127.3 (CH-10), 127.0 (CH-11), 126.8 (C-11b), 111.2 (CH-3), 62.3 (CH-6a), 60.2 (OCH<sub>3</sub>), 55.9 (OCH<sub>3</sub>), 53.3 (CH<sub>2</sub>-5), 44.0 (NCH<sub>3</sub>), 35.2 (CH<sub>2</sub>-7), 29.3 (CH<sub>2</sub>-4). ESMS: m/z 296 [M + H]<sup>+</sup>.

1,2-Demethyl-nuciferine (2). Nuciferine (2b, 0.47 mmol, 130 mg) in dry CH<sub>2</sub>Cl<sub>2</sub> (5 mL) was stirred at -78 °C. Then, 127 μL of BBr<sub>3</sub> (1.32 mmol) was added under a nitrogen atmosphere, and the resulting mixture was stirred for 2 h at room temperature. The reaction was cooled at -78 °C to be quenched by the addition of MeOH (0.5 mL) dropwise and then stirred at room temperature for 30 min. The solvent was evaporated to dryness and purified by silica gel column chromatography (CH<sub>2</sub>Cl<sub>2</sub>–MeOH, 85:15) to afford 115 mg of 1,2-demethyl-nuciferine (2, 98%) as a yellow oil. <sup>1</sup>H NMR (300 MHz, CD<sub>3</sub>OD): δ 8.28 (1H, dd, *J* = 7.8 and 1.3 Hz, H-11), 7.13 (3H, m, H-8, H-9, H-10), 6.46 (1H, s, H-3), 3.04 (4H, m, H-6a, Ha-5, Ha-7, Ha-4), 2.53 (6H, m, Hb-5, Hb-7, Hb-4, NCH<sub>3</sub>). <sup>13</sup>C NMR (75 MHz, CD<sub>3</sub>OD): δ 146.1 (C-1), 143.1 (C-2), 136.1 (C-11a), 134.0 (C-3a), 129.6 (CH-11), 128.7 (CH-8), 127.8 (CH-9), 127.7 (CH-10), 125.9, 123.8, 121.2 (3C, C-7a, C-11b, C-11c), 114.3 (CH-3), 64.0 (CH-6a), 54.5 (CH<sub>2</sub>-5), 43.4 (NCH<sub>3</sub>), 36.3 (CH<sub>2</sub>-7), 28.6 (CH<sub>2</sub>-4). HRESIMS: m/z 268.1325 [M + H]<sup>+</sup> (calcd for C<sub>17</sub>H<sub>17</sub>NO<sub>2</sub>, 268.1332).

**Cell Cultures.** CHO-K1 cells stably expressing human  $D_{2S}R$  were generated in-house as described.<sup>33</sup> In brief, the CHO-K1 parental cell line (Leibniz Institute DSMZ–German Collection of Microorganisms and Cell Cultures GmbH, Braunschweig, Germany) was stably transfected with the pcDNA3.1 vector (Invitrogen, Carlsbad, CA, U.S.A.) containing the cDNA of human  $D_{2S}R$  using the calcium phosphate method and selected in medium containing 400  $\mu$ g/mL Geneticin (G-418). Cells were maintained in Dulbecco's modified Eagle's medium–GlutaMAX-I (Gibco, Thermo Fisher Scientific, Madrid, Spain) supplemented with 10% (v/v) fetal bovine serum (Sigma-Aldrich, Madrid, Spain), 100 units/mL penicillin/0.1 mg/mL streptomycin (Sigma-Aldrich, Madrid, Spain), and 500  $\mu$ g/mL Geneticin G418 (Gibco, Thermo Fisher Scientific, Madrid, Spain).

Radioligand-Binding Assays. Competition radioligand-binding assays for isoquinolines 1 and 2 were conducted in membranes from CHO-K1 cells stably expressing the cloned human D<sub>25</sub>R (isoform D<sub>2</sub> short) or the cloned human  $D_3R$  or  $D_4R$  (isoform  $D_{4,2}$ ) (PerkinElmer, Waltham, MA, U.S.A.), following protocols described previously.<sup>33</sup> In brief, [<sup>3</sup>H]-spiperone was employed as a radioligand, whereas nonspecific binding was assessed in the presence of 10  $\mu$ M sulpiride  $(D_2R)$ , 1  $\mu$ M haloperidol  $(D_3R)$ , or 25  $\mu$ M haloperidol  $(D_4R)$ . Isoquinolines 1 and 2 were evaluated in displacement curves at six different concentrations ranging from 1 nM to 100  $\mu$ M or from 0.1 nM to 10  $\mu$ M. Haloperidol (from 0.1 nM to 10  $\mu$ M) or clozapine (from 1 nM to 100  $\mu$ M) were included in the assays as reference competitor ligands for both hD<sub>2</sub>R and hD<sub>3</sub>R binding (haloperidol) or hD<sub>4</sub>R binding (clozapine). The affinities of isoquinolines expressed as an equilibrium dissociation constant  $(K_i)$  were calculated using Prism 6 software (GraphPad, San Diego, CA, U.S.A.), by fitting the data from competition binding curves to a single binding site competition model using the equations log  $EC_{50} = \log(10^{\log K_i(1 + HotNM/HotKdNM)})$ and  $Y = \text{bottom} + (\text{top} - \text{bottom})/(1 + 10^{X \log EC_{50}})$ , where Y is binding, HotNM is the concentration of radioligand in the assay, HotKdNM is the equilibrium dissociation constant  $(K_d)$  of the radioligand as determined in saturation binding experiments, and X is the log molar concentration of the unlabeled compound.

cAMP Functional Assay at D<sub>2</sub>R. The behavior of isoquinolines 1 and 2 as agonists or antagonists of  $D_2R$  receptors was evaluated in *in* vitro assays of cAMP signaling in the CHO-K1 cell line stably expressing the cloned human D<sub>2S</sub> receptor employed in radioligandbinding assays. Cellular cAMP levels were quantified using the homogeneous time-resolved fluorescence (HTRF)-based cAMP kit cAMP-Gs Dynamic HTRF Kit (Cisbio, Bioassays, Codolet, France) following the protocol of the manufacturer. The possible agonist effect of the compounds was evaluated by their ability to inhibit forskolinstimulated cAMP production either at a single concentration  $(10 \,\mu\text{M})$ and/or in concentration (from 1 nM to 100  $\mu$ M)-response curves. Cells seeded in 384-well plates in stimulation buffer containing 500  $\mu$ M 3-isobutyl-1-methylxanthine (IBMX) were incubated with the test compounds for 10 min at 37 °C. Then, forskolin (10  $\mu$ M) was added, and the incubation was continued for 5 min. After this time, intracellular cAMP levels were quantified. Quinpirole (from 10 pM to 100  $\mu$ M) was included as a control agonist in these assays. When the effects of Br-BTHIQ (1, 10 µM) on quinpirole concentrationresponse curves were investigated, compound 1 and quinpirole were added simultaneously to the cells and the assay proceeded as described above. For assessment of a possible antagonist effect, the test compound was added to the cells 5 min prior to the addition of the reference agonist quinpirole (100 nM) and assays were subsequently carried out as described above. In all cases, basal cAMP levels were determined in control wells in the absence of compound, quinpirole, and forskolin.

# ASSOCIATED CONTENT

### **Supporting Information**

The Supporting Information is available free of charge at https://pubs.acs.org/doi/10.1021/acs.jnatprod.9b00921.

<sup>1</sup>H and <sup>13</sup>C NMR spectra of synthesized compounds (1a-1d, 1, 2a, 2b, and 2) (PDF)

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#### Notes

The authors declare no competing financial interest.

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