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Letter

Catalytic Asymmetric Hydroacyloxylation/Ring-Opening Reaction of Ynamides, Acids, and Aziridines

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ABSTRACT: A highly enantioselective three-component reaction of ynamides with carboxylic acids and 2,2'-diester aziridines has been realized by using a chiral N,N'-dioxide/Ho(OTf)₃ complex as a Lewis acid catalyst. The process includes the formation of an α -acyloxyenamide intermediate through the addition of carboxylic acids to ynamides and the following enantioselective nucleophilic addition to *in-situ*-generated azomethine ylides induced by the chiral catalyst. A range of amino acyloxyenamides are delivered in moderate to good yields with good ee values. In addition, a possible catalytic cycle with a transition model is proposed to elucidate the reaction mechanism.

ulticomponent reactions are attractive for their rapid generation of molecules with broad chemical diversity and molecular complexity from three or more materials in a highly efficient, economic, and environmentally friendly one-pot manner.¹ One difficulty that lies in the catalytic asymmetric multicomponent one-pot reactions is the competitive interaction among reactants as well as the catalyst.² Because of the activation by the nitrogen atom, the $C \equiv C$ bond in the ynamides is strongly polarized and shows a good differentiation between the two carbon atoms.^{3,4} Recently, Cui's group reported BF₃promoted multicomponent reactions (MCRs) of ynamides, organic acids with aldehydes,^{5a} imines,^{5b} and ortho-quinone methides, ⁵ giving racemic β -acyloxyamide, β -amino amide, and diarylpropanamide products. These MCRs relied on acyloxyenamide intermediates derived from ynamides and carboxylic acids (Scheme 1, path ii). Our group realized the first catalytic asymmetric three-component cascade reaction of ynamides and

Scheme 1. Three-Component Reactions of Ynamides, Aziridines, and Acids



ortho-hydroxybenzyl alcohols by developing a chiral $N,\!N'$ -dioxide/Sc(III) complex catalytic system. 6

On the contrary, aziridines are widely used synthetic precursors for synthesizing chiral nitrogenous compounds. Because 2,2'-diester (D-A type) aziridines can undergo C-C bond cleavage to generate azomethine ylides⁸ in the presence of a Lewis acid under mild conditions,⁹ we assessed that 2,2'diester aziridines could also be employed as an electrophile to capture the acyloxyenamide intermediates formed by the hydroacyloxylation of ynamides with carboxylic acids (Scheme 1, paths ii and v). The possible challenge arises from the high reactivity of azomethine ylides because they might be readily hydrolyzed in the presence of carboxylic acids and engaged in a two-component reaction with ynamides or carboxylic acids (Scheme 1, paths i and iii). Although difficulties might exist, the resulting chiral amino acyloxyenamides are multifunctional and have a potential use in drug syntheses.¹⁰ Herein we developed a chiral $N_{,N'}$ -dioxide/Ho(OTf)₃ complex catalytic system for the asymmetric three-component hydroacyloxylation/ring opening of ynesulfonamides, carboxylic acids, and 2,2'-diester aziridines, generating chiral amino acyloxyenamides in one pot (Scheme 1, path iv).¹

Received: February 22, 2021 Published: March 26, 2021



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Initially, the 2,2'-diester aziridine **1b**, *para*-nitrobenzoic acid **2a**, and *N*-Ts ynamide **3a** were employed to explore the reaction conditions (Table 1). The L₃-PiPr₃/Sc(III)/LiNTf₂ catalyst,

Table 1. Optimization of the Reaction Conditions^a



^{*a*}Unless otherwise noted, all reactions were carried out with ligand/ metal salt/LiNTf₂ (1:1:1.5, 10 mol %), **1b** (0.10 mmol), **2a** (1.0 equiv), **3a** (1.0 equiv), and 4 Å molecule sieve (50 mg) in solvent (1.0 mL) under a N₂ atmosphere at 35 °C for 24 h. ^{*b*}Isolated yield. ^{*c*}Determined by chiral HPLC analysis. ^{*d*}**1b** (1.5 equiv), 4 Å molecule sieves (130 mg), and CHCl₃ (2.0 mL) were used. ^{*e*}**1d** (1.5 equiv), 4 Å molecule sieves (130 mg), and CHCl₃ (2.0 mL) were used. ^{*f*}Ligand/ metal salt 1:1.1.

which was efficient in the three-component reaction of *ortho*hydroxybenzyl alcohols with ynamides and carboxylic acid,⁶ is inoperative in this reaction (entry 1). Next, various metal salts were screened by complexing with L_3 -**PiPr**₂ (entries 2 and 3). The rare-earth metal complex of Ho(OTf)₃ could provide the desired product 4b in 28% yield with 57% ee (entry 3). The low yield was caused by the hydrolysis of aziridine 1b and the generation of the byproduct 3-pyrroline 5, which was produced by the [3 + 2] cycloaddition of aziridine 1b and ynamide 3a (Scheme 1, path i and eq 1). Then, an examination of the steric



hindrance of the ligands was conducted, and a significant influence on the enantioselectivity was exhibited. L_3 -PiEt₂ with a decreased steric hindrance improved the ee value to 74%, but the yield decreased (Table 1, entry 4). L_3 -PiEt₂Br with a bromo atom at the para position of phenyl ring further improved the ee to 82% ee with the yield remaining low (entry 5). When the reaction was carried out in CHCl₃, the yield could be increased to 34%, and the enantioselectivity increased to 90% ee (entry 6).

To reduce the impact of the erosion of diester aziridine under Lewis acidic conditions, the amount of 1b was increased to 1.5 equiv, and the amount of 4 Å molecular sieve, which can slow down the hydrolysis of azomethine ylides, was increased from 50 to 130 mg, and thus the desired 4b was obtained in 51% yield with 95% ee (entry 7). Moreover, the yield could be increased to 74% with the ee value reduced to 86% (entry 8) when Nmethanesulfonyl protecting diester aziridine 1d was used as the substrate, probably because the N-methanesulfonyl protecting group enhances the stability of the azomethine ylides formed in situ from 2,2'-diester aziridines. It was surprising that a small excessive amount of metal salt (L_3 -PiEt₂Br/Ho(OTf)₃ = 1/1.1) could further increase the reactivity with maintained enantioselectivity (entry 9, 86% yield, 87% ee). Under the current reaction conditions, the two-component [3 + 2] cycloaddition product 5d could be isolated with $\sim 10\%$ yield. However, when 2,2'-diester aziridine 1c and ynamide 3a were mixed under optimized conditions, [3 + 2] cycloaddition occurred and delivered the tetra-substituted 3-pyrroline 5c in 50% yield without enantioselectivity (eq 1). In addition, we surveyed other ligands. Superior Box and BINOL did not give any enantioselectivity (entries 10-12).

Next, we turned our attention to the substrate generality under optimal reaction conditions. First, diester aziridines 1a– 1m were investigated. As shown in Scheme 2, 1a–1d with an *N*-



"All reactions were carried out with $L_3\PiEt_2Br/Ho(OTf)_3/LiNTf_2$ (1:1.1:1.5, 10 mol %), 1 (1.5 equiv), 2a (0.10 mmol), 3a (1.0 equiv), and 4 Å molecule sieve (130 mg) in CHCl₃ (2.0 mL) under a N_2 atmosphere at 35 °C for 24 h.

methylsulfonyl protecting group or *N*-phenylsulfonyl protecting group could afford the corresponding products 4a-4d in moderate yields with good ee values (53–86% yield, 87–94% ee). 1d–1i bearing different substituent groups, such as Me–, F–, Cl–, Br–, and phenyl–, on the para position of the Ar¹ ring could be transformed to the corresponding products 4d-4i in moderate to good yields with good ee values (43–86% yield, 87–94% ee). When 2-naphthyl-substituted diester aziridine 1j

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was applied, the product 4j could be obtained in 81% yield with 62% ee. Moreover, aziridines 1k–1m with dipropyl, diisopropyl, or dibutyl esters were also tolerated in this three-component process and furnished the corresponding products 4k-4m in moderate yields with good ee values. Aziridines with strong electron-donating groups in Ar¹ were not suitable. The reaction mixtures were complex, and only trace amounts of the desired products could be detected. The reason might be that the corresponding azomethine ylides are unstable. The absolute configuration of the product **4b** was determined to be (S) by Xray single-crystal analysis. To show the synthetic utility of the methodology, a gram-scale synthesis of 4b was performed. Under the optimized reaction conditions, 1b (3.75 mmol), 2a (2.50 mmol), and 3a (2.50 mmol) reacted smoothly, affording 1.22 g of the product 4b in 60% yield with 90% ee. (See the details in the Supporting Information (SI).)

Subsequently, the carboxylic acids 2 and ynamides 3 were varied. As shown in Scheme 3, carboxylic acids 2b-2d with

Scheme 3. Substrate Scope of Carboxylic Acids and Ynamides.^{*a*}



"All reactions were carried out with L_3 -PiEt₂Br/Ho(OTf)₃/LiNTf₂ (1:1.1:1.5, 10 mol %), 4 Å molecule sieve (130 mg), 1d (1.5 equiv), 2 (0.10 mmol), and 3 (1.0 equiv) in CHCl₃ (2.0 mL) under a N₂ atmosphere at 35 °C for 24 h.

O₂N, F₃C, or NC groups at the meta or para position of the phenyl ring furnished this three-component reaction well and provided the corresponding products 4n-4p in 57–67% yield with 80-82% ee. Next, a range of nitrobenzoic acids 2e-2h substituted by halogen atoms at the three- or four-position of the phenyl ring were investigated, and the corresponding products 4q-4t were obtained in 37–48% yields with 64–80% ee. 2,4,6-Trichlorobenzoic acid 2i produced product 4u in 57% yield with 48% ee. Benzoic acids with electron-donating groups caused the reaction mixture to be complex, which might be because the α -

acyloxyenamide intermediates are unstable (eq 2 vs eq 3). The stability of intermediate 6 under L_3 -PiEt₂Br/Ho(OTf)₃



conditions was conducted in $CHCl_3$, and nearly no decomposition occurred. Nevertheless, under the same conditions, the electron-donating-group-substituted enamide 7 partially decomposed. To get insight into the more mechanistic implications, the reaction between enamide 6 and 2,2'-diester aziridine 1d was carried out under the optimal conditions (eq 4), and the product 4d was delivered in 45% yield with 87% ee, which means that the acyloxyenamide intermediate should be the actual intermediate.



Different ynamides were also surveyed under the optimized conditions. Ynamides bearing different *N*-alkyl groups (such as allyl, 3-butenyl, or benzyl groups) performed well under the optimized reaction conditions, delivering the corresponding products 4v-4x in moderate yields with good ee values (57–58% yields, 78–88% ee). Ynamide 3e with *N*-methanesulfonyl group was also suitable, and the desired product 4y was obtained in 51% yield with 86% ee. The absolute configurations of the products 4a-4y were also determined to be (*S*) by comparing the circular dichroism spectra with that of 4b. (See the details in the SI).

On the basis of the experimental phenomena, the determination of the absolute configuration of the products, and our previous works,⁶ a plausible catalytic cycle with a transition-state model is proposed. As shown in Scheme 4, the tetradentate L_3 -PiEt₂Br coordinates to Ho(OTf)₃, forming the

Scheme 4. Proposed Reaction Mechanism



https://doi.org/10.1021/acs.orglett.1c00631 Org. Lett. 2021, 23, 2954–2958 L_3 -PiEt₂Br/Ho(III) complex. Meanwhile, the azomethine ylide intermediate A is generated through the cleavage of the carboncarbon bond in aziridines 1d under the assistance of LiNTf₂. Because of the strong bidentate coordination of two ester groups to the metal center, the chiral L_2 -PiEt₂Br/Ho(III) complex can readily catch the azomethine ylide to form intermediate B. The coordination is also supported by the high-resolution electrospray ionization mass spectrometry (ESI-HRMS) analysis of the mixture of L₃-PiEt₂Br, Ho(OTf)₃, and 1d, as the characteristic signal of $[L_3-PiEt_2Br-Ho^{3+}-2(OTf^{-})-1d]^+ m/z = 1568.1588$ (m/z calcd 1568.1606) was found. The Re face of azomethine ylide intermediate **B** is strongly shielded by the neighboring 2,6diethyl-4-bromo group of the ligand L₃-PiEt₂Br. As a result, the N-Ts iminium carbon of intermediate B is attacked by the acyloxyenamide 6 from B's Si face, delivering the intermediate C. Finally, the intermediate C undergoes a 1,4-proton shift and furnishes the desired product (S)-4d.

In summary, the catalytic asymmetric three-component cascade hydroacyloxylation/ring-opening reaction of aziridines with ynamides and carboxylic acids has been realized by using a chiral $N_{,}N'$ -dioxide/Ho(OTf)₃ complex as the chiral Lewis acid catalyst. This protocol provides a facile and efficient access to chiral amino acyloxyenamides under mild reaction conditions. Moreover, a plausible catalytic cycle has been proposed to explain the reaction mechanism. Further development of asymmetric multicomponent reactions (AMCRs) is ongoing in our group.

ASSOCIATED CONTENT

1 Supporting Information

The Supporting Information is available free of charge at https://pubs.acs.org/doi/10.1021/acs.orglett.1c00631.

Experimental procedures, full spectroscopic data for all new compounds, and copies of ${}^{1}H$, ${}^{13}C{}^{1}H$, and ${}^{19}F{}^{1}H$ NMR and HPLC spectra (PDF)

Accession Codes

CCDC 2021534 and 2060367 contain the supplementary crystallographic data for this paper. These data can be obtained free of charge via www.ccdc.cam.ac.uk/data_request/cif, or by emailing data_request@ccdc.cam.ac.uk, or by contacting The Cambridge Crystallographic Data Centre, 12 Union Road, Cambridge CB2 1EZ, UK; fax: +44 1223 336033.

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Notes

The authors declare no competing financial interest.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We appreciate the financial support from the National Natural Science Foundation of China (nos. 21890723 and 21871188).

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